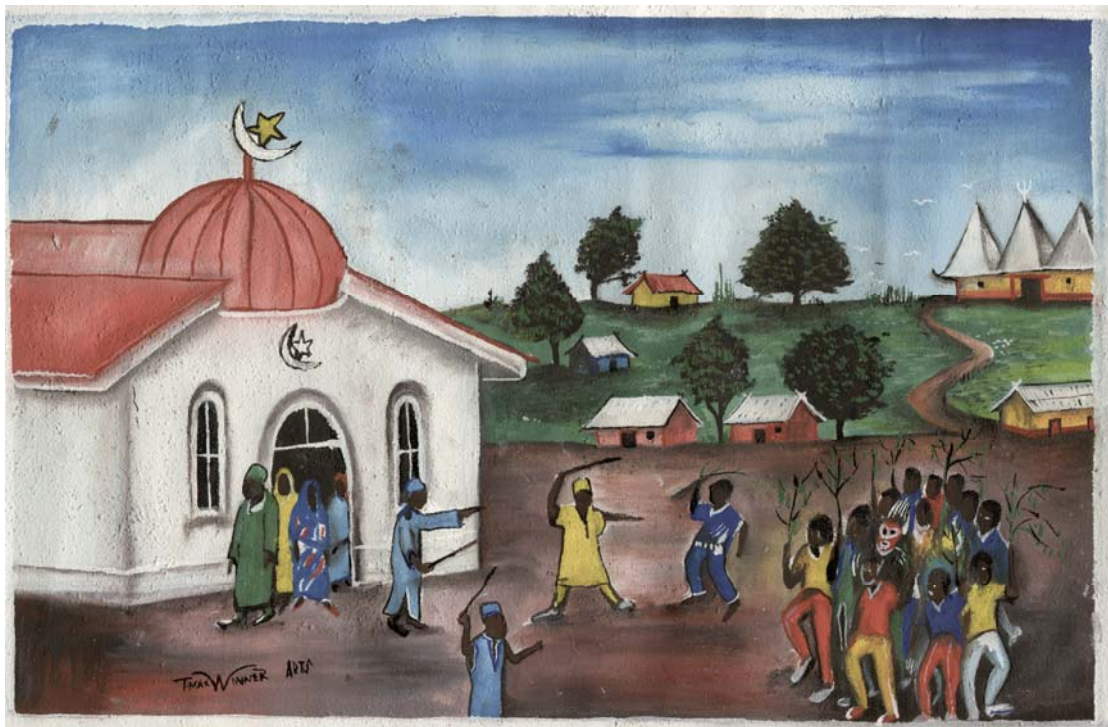


Getting along in the Grassfields: interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon

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interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon**

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*For my grandmother,
Cathy Pelican-Dosch (1911-2005)*

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DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Im Zentrum meiner Studie steht die Frage nach den Faktoren, welche das Zusammenleben verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen in einem kulturell und ethnisch heterogenen Umfeld positiv oder negativ beeinflussen. Dieser Fragestellung gehe ich im Kontext einer Kleinstadt in Nordwestkamerun (auch bekannt als das Kameruner Grasland) nach, in der ich zwischen August 2000 und Januar 2002 vierzehn Monate Feldforschung durchgeführt habe.

In meiner Arbeit befasse ich mich mit drei Bevölkerungsgruppen (Grasländer, Hausa und Mbororo) und untersuche ihre Identitätskonstrukte und Interaktionsmuster. Weiterhin beschäftige ich mich mit der Rolle des kamerunischen Staates und der britischen Kolonialverwaltung in der Gestaltung interethnischer Beziehungen. Während ich in der Analyse ethnischer Identitäten nahezu 100 Jahre Koexistenz im Kameruner Grasland berücksichtige, konzentriere ich mich in der Untersuchung lokaler Konfliktstrategien auf die 1990er Jahre und die Jahrtausendwende, die von den Auswirkungen der politischen und ökonomischen Liberalisierung Kameruns geprägt waren.

Ich habe meine Studie mit ‚Getting along in the Grassfields‘ oder ‚Zurechtkommen im Kameruner Grasland‘ betitelt. Dieser Titel verweist auf zwei wichtige Dimensionen des ethnischen Zusammenlebens, nämlich das eigene Überleben zu sichern und sich in das lokale politische und soziale Gefüge einzugliedern, d.h. mit Nachbargruppen und staatlichen Strukturen zurechtkommen. Divergierende Interessen und gelegentliche, kleinere Konflikte sind ebenfalls Teil interethnischer Beziehungen und werden von der lokalen Bevölkerung als relativ normal wahrgenommen. Im Kontext der politischen Veränderungen der 1990er Jahre kam es jedoch zu schwerwiegenden Auseinandersetzungen, die das Zusammenleben von Grasländern, Mbororo und Hausa infrage stellten. In meiner Studie fokussiere ich auf solche kritischen Momente, untersuche aber auch Mechanismen, die zur sozialen Integration der Bevölkerungsgruppen beitragen.

Zentrale Themen meiner Forschung sind:

- die Rolle von Ethnizität im lokalen Selbstverständnis sowie in der Wahrnehmung lokaler Konflikte
- das Wechselspiel zwischen rivalisierenden Gruppeninteressen, staatlicher Vermittlung und Strukturen politischer Repräsentation

- die Bedeutung sozio-ökonomischer Überlappingsbeziehungen (*cross-cutting ties*) für das ethnische Zusammenleben
- lokale Konfliktlösungsstrategien im Rahmen pluralistischer Rechtssysteme und globaler Minderheiten- und Menschenrechtsdiskurse
- die gegenwärtige Relevanz ‚okkultur Ökonomien‘ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a) im intra- und interethnischen Alltag.

Der analytische Rahmen meiner Studie setzt sich aus Theorien zu Ethnizität sowie zu Integration und Konflikt zusammen. In Anlehnung an Frederik Barth (1998 [1969]) verstehe ich Ethnizität als eine sozial konstruierte, kollektive Identität, die historisch und politisch eingebettet ist und sich insbesondere an Gruppengrenzen artikuliert. In meiner Arbeit verfolge ich daher eine historische Herangehensweise und untersuche Veränderungen im ethnischen Selbstverständnis der Grasländer, Mbororo und Hausa im Kontext von Migration und Sesshaftwerdung sowie dem Zusammentreffen mit anderen Bevölkerungsgruppen und der Kolonialregierung. In diesem Zusammenhang beschäftige ich mich auch kritisch mit der Frage, inwieweit ethnische Identitäten als Produkte der Kolonialzeit zu verstehen sind, beziehungsweise welche Rolle koloniale Klassifikationen im heutigen Alltag spielen.

In Bezug auf Theorien zu Integration und Konflikt nutze ich die Ansätze von Günther Schlee zu ‚Integration durch Differenz‘ (2000a) und zu Überlappingsbeziehungen (1997, 2000, 2004) sowie die Konfliktmodelle von Georg Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) und der *Manchester School*. Schlee (2001a, 2003a, 2003c) weist darauf hin, dass Integration weder mit Gleichheit noch Konflikt mit Differenz gleichzusetzen sind. Differenz kann ebenso ein Modus der Integration sein, wie Beispiele wirtschaftlicher Komplementarität belegen. Zugleich zeigt Schlee (1997, 2000, 2004) anhand verschiedener Fallstudien, dass auch *cross-cutting ties* – entgegen der Annahme von Gluckman (1973 [1966]) – keine Garantie für soziale Kohäsion bieten. Die beiden von Schlee vertretenen Ansätze sind insbesondere relevant für meine Untersuchung sozialer und ökonomischer Beziehungen zwischen Mitgliedern verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen (interethnische Ehen, Freundschaften und Bauern-Hirten Beziehungen). In meiner Analyse lokaler Konfliktstrategien stütze ich mich auf Elwerts (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) Modell, das Konflikte in einem analytischen Feld von vier Polen unterschiedlicher Handlungsmodi verortet. Die vier Konfliktaustragungsformen sind Krieg, Zerstörung,

Meidung und Verfahren, die sich durch mehr oder weniger Gewalt und stärkere oder schwächere soziale Einbettung auszeichnen. Weitere relevante Ansätze sind die von Victor Turner (1967, 1995 [1957]) entwickelten Konzepte des sozialen Dramas (*social drama*), das auf die Prozesshaftigkeit von Konflikten verweist, sowie der Multivokalität von Symbolen. Einige Ergebnisse meiner Auseinandersetzung mit diesen Theorien sind weiter unten ausgeführt.

In methodischer Hinsicht unterscheidet sich meine Studie von früheren Arbeiten zu Ethnizität dahingehend, dass sie sich nicht nur auf eine Gruppe konzentriert, sondern drei ethnische Gruppen in gleichem Umfang berücksichtigt. In diesem Zusammenhang habe ich mich an den Arbeiten von Philip Burnham (1996) zu Nordkamerun und von Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1998) zu Mauritius orientiert, die mich auch inhaltlich zu Vergleichen anregten.

In Bezug auf meine Feldforschung ist anzumerken, dass ich mit einem Team von fünf MitarbeiterInnen unterschiedlicher ethnischer Herkunft zusammenarbeitete, die wesentlich zu den Fragestellungen und Forschungsergebnissen beitrugen. Neben qualitativen und quantitativen Methoden verwendeten wir Ansätze aus der visuellen und Theaterethnologie, die zusätzliche Daten hervorbrachten und das lokale Verständnis für meine Forschung förderten.

Während sich meine Studie in das Feld der Ethnizitäts- und Konfliktforschung einordnet, trägt sie auch zur Grasland-, FulBe- und Hausa-Forschung bei. In die Graslandforschung bringt sie neue thematische und regionale Perspektiven ein, da sich die Kleinstadt Misaje sowohl als koloniales Produkt als auch durch ihren multiethnischen und kosmopolitischen Charakter von ‚traditionellen‘ Graslanddörfern abhebt. Mein Beitrag zur FulBe-Forschung erschließt sich aus den Untersuchungen zu den Mbororo, die zur ethnischen Kategorie der FulBe gehören. So belegt das Beispiel der Mbororo im Kameruner Grasland, dass es keine allgemein anwendbaren Kriterien zur Bestimmung des ‚FulBetums‘ gibt und es daher – wie bereits von Diallo, Guichard und Schlee (2000) hervorgehoben – unumgänglich ist, FulBe-Gruppen in ihren regionalen Kontexten und in Beziehung zu ihren Nachbargruppen zu untersuchen. Mein Beitrag zur Hausa-Forschung zeichnet sich durch eine Gender-Perspektive aus, zumal die vorliegende Studie die bestehende Literatur mit der Perspektive von Hausa-Frauen auf ihre Gemeinschaft und Geschichte im Kameruner Grasland ergänzt.

Ausgewählte Ergebnisse

Misaje, der Hauptort meiner Untersuchungen, befindet sich im anglophonen Teil Kameruns und ist das Verwaltungszentrum des gleichnamigen Distrikts. Die Kleinstadt zählt ungefähr 7000 Einwohner; weitere ca. 4000 leben im Umland. Der Grossteil der Bevölkerung setzt sich aus Mitgliedern lokaler Graslandgruppen zusammen, die sich seit mehreren Jahrhunderten hier angesiedelt haben und vorwiegend vom Feldbau leben. Die zweitgrößte Bevölkerungsgruppe sind Mbororo, die zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts in das Kameruner Grasland einwanderten und sich mit ihren Rindern abseits von bäuerlichen Siedlungen in den Weidegebieten niedergelassen haben. Eine dritte Bevölkerungsgruppe – präsent in einigen dörflichen und städtischen Zentren, einschließlich Misaje – stellen die Hausa dar. Sie können als eine ethnisch heterogene Kategorie aufgefasst werden, die sowohl die Nachkommen aus Nordnigeria stammender Fernhandelsleute als auch städtische FulBe aus Nordkamerun und Nigeria sowie zum Islam konvertierte Grasländer einschließt. Mbororo und Hausa sind Muslime und bilden gemeinsam eine religiöse Minderheit gegenüber den Graslandgruppen, deren Mitglieder größtenteils Anhänger christlicher und/oder lokal-afrikanischer Glaubensgemeinschaften sind. Daneben gibt es weitere Bevölkerungsminderheiten, die sich in der Kleinstadt Misaje und im Umland angesiedelt haben, wie z.B. Arbeitsmigranten aus anderen Regionen des Kameruner Graslands. Die Besonderheiten ihrer Situation werden in dieser Studie nur bedingt berücksichtigt, da sie ethnisch und kulturell der Gruppe der Grasländer zugerechnet werden können.

Wie ich in meiner Arbeit zeige, ist das ethnische Selbstverständnis der untersuchten Gruppen historisch gewachsen und hat sich im Rahmen von Migration, Sesshaftwerdung, dem Zusammentreffen mit anderen Bevölkerungsgruppen und der Kolonialregierung sowie im Kontext der ökonomischen und politischen Entwicklungen der letzten Jahrzehnte wesentlich verändert. Zugleich wird deutlich, dass die drei Bevölkerungsgruppen ihre Identität in grundlegend unterschiedlicher Weise definieren. Während die Grasländer ein inklusives Ethnizitätsmodell praktizieren, in dem Zugehörigkeit im weitesten Sinn auf Territorialität basiert, ist das Selbstverständnis der Mbororo weitaus exklusiver und betont Deszendenz. Hausa-Ethnizität ist dagegen vage definiert und akzentuiert muslimische Identität als Hauptkriterium der Zugehörigkeit. Unter Anwendung etischer Modelle aus der

Ethnologie lassen sich die Identitätskonzepte der Grasländer als interaktionalistisch, der Mbororo als primordialistisch und der Hausa als konstruktivistisch beschreiben.

Die unterschiedlichen emischen Konzeptionen von Ethnizität wirken sich auf die Interaktion zwischen Mitgliedern der drei Gruppen aus, da sie mit abweichenden kulturellen Logiken einhergehen. Weiterhin unterscheiden sich die drei Bevölkerungsgruppen in ihren Strategien der politischen Repräsentation gegenüber dem Staat und internationalen Organisationen. Aus einem regionalen Vergleich mit Nordkamerun (Burnham 1996) und Südnigeria (Cohen 1969) geht jedoch hervor, dass die stärkere Politisierung der Grasländer und Mbororo im Vergleich zu den Hausa nicht als Folge ihrer unterschiedlichen Ethnizitätskonzepte interpretiert werden kann, sondern durch historische, politische und demographische Faktoren bedingt ist. Im Kameruner Grasland sind hierfür insbesondere Divergenzen in der Größe und dem wirtschaftlichen Einfluss der Bevölkerungsgruppen von Bedeutung sowie ihre unterschiedliche Behandlung im Rahmen der kolonialen und postkolonialen Politik als auch das Vorhandensein bzw. Fehlen einer international vernetzten Bildungselite.

Ein wichtiger Akteur in der Definition und Betonung von Ethnizität ist der kamerunische Staat. Wie Peter Geschiere (2001a) und zahlreiche andere Autoren herausgestellt haben, war Kameruns Demokratisierung begleitet von einer zunehmenden Ethnisierung der Politik, welche sich unter anderem im Aufkommen ethnischer Eliteorganisationen niederschlug. In diesem Zusammenhang muss auch die Dimension internationaler Entwicklungspolitik und globaler Rechtsdiskurse in die Analyse einbezogen werden, zumal Kameruns politische und ökonomische Liberalisierung auf internationalen Druck erfolgte und die Verfassungsänderungen von 1996 globale Diskurse zu Minderheits- und kulturellen Rechten widerspiegeln.

In ähnlicher Weise sind die Strategien lokaler Akteure von der Aneignung nationaler und internationaler Diskurse geprägt. So bedienen sich die Grasländer der Idiome der Autochthonie bzw. Anteriorität (‚das Recht der Erstgekommenen‘), um ihren Forderungen Gewicht zu verleihen, während sie die Mbororo und Hausa als ‚Fremde‘ und ‚Spätergekommene‘ bezeichnen (siehe auch Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000, 2001, Lentz 2005). Im Gegensatz dazu berufen sich die Mbororo auf nationale und internationale Diskurse zum Schutz von Minderheiten und erheben Anspruch auf den Status einer indigenen Bevölkerungsgruppe.

Sowohl Grasländer als auch Mbororo haben sich in ethnischen Eliteorganisationen formiert. Die Mbororo sind jedoch auf nationaler Ebene erfolgreicher, was unter

anderem auf ihre Vernetzung mit internationalen Organisationen sowie ihre beträchtliche Gruppengröße im nationalen Kontext zurückzuführen ist.

Neben der aktuellen Politik muss auch ihr kolonialer Vorläufer in Betracht gezogen werden. Hier ist zu betonen, dass die britische Kolonialregierung dazu beitrug, das Verhältnis zwischen Grasländern und Mbororo als geprägt von ökonomischen Interessensgegensätzen zu definieren. Zugleich wurde das politische Selbstbewusstsein beider Gruppen wechselseitig gefördert, zumal die britische Verwaltung zwischen den Optionen schwankte, den Mbororo direkte politische Vertretung zu gewähren bzw. sie lokalen Graslandgruppen unterzuordnen.

Im Rahmen meines thematischen Schwerpunkts zu Integration und Konflikt untersuche ich verschiedene Momente des ethnischen Zusammenlebens.

So kann das Kameruner Grasland als ein Beispiel für Schlee's (2001a) Theorie der ‚Integration durch Differenz‘ gelten. Grasländer, Mbororo und Hausa unterscheiden sich in vielerlei Hinsicht: Sie haben unterschiedliche Konzeptionen von Ethnizität, gehören verschiedenen Religionsrichtungen an, haben abweichende politische Strukturen und haben sich in unterschiedlichen wirtschaftlichen Bereichen spezialisiert. Der Faktor der ökonomischen Komplementarität ist besonders relevant und wird von lokalen Akteuren als wesentliche Grundlage ihrer Koexistenz betont. Im Lauf der letzten fünfzig Jahre hat jedoch die zunehmende Interaktion zwischen Mitgliedern der verschiedenen Bevölkerungsgruppen zu einer graduellen Abnahme kultureller, wirtschaftlicher und politischer Differenzen beigetragen. In der Folge haben sich neue Rivalitäten um wirtschaftliche und politische Ressourcen herausgebildet. Auch im religiösen Bereich zeigt sich ein Schwinden der Differenz; z.B. sind einige Grasländer zum Islam übergetreten und seit kurzem werden auch Muslime der Teilhabe an okkulten Ökonomien verdächtigt.

Als eine Folge alltäglicher Interaktion sind Überlappingsbeziehungen zwischen Grasländern, Mbororo und Hausa entstanden, die sich in gemeinsamen wirtschaftlichen Interessen sowie interethnischen Heiraten und Freundschaften widerspiegeln. Solche *cross-cutting ties* wirken sich im interethnischen Alltag integrativ aus, verlieren jedoch im Kontext wirtschaftlicher und politischer Auseinandersetzungen an Einfluss. Weiterhin bestätigt meine Studie Schlees (1997, 2000, 2004) Hypothese, dass die Bedeutung von Überlappingsbeziehungen darin

liegt, wie sie von Akteuren genutzt werden, und dass sie eine rasche Wiederaufnahme sozialer Beziehungen nach Beendigung eines möglichen Konfliktes begünstigen.

In meiner Untersuchung ethnischer Konflikte konzentriere ich mich auf zwei größere Auseinandersetzungen, die sich 1997 bzw. 2001 im Misaje-Distrikt ereigneten und in deren Verlauf sich die lokale Bevölkerung in ethnische bzw. kulturelle Einheiten polarisierte. Weiterhin untersuche ich kleinere, immer wiederkehrende Konflikte, wie z.B. Auseinandersetzungen, die aus Flurschäden, Viehdiebstahl oder Hexereianschuldigungen resultieren.

Die lokale Bevölkerung im Kameruner Grasland tendiert dazu, Konflikte als Auseinandersetzungen zwischen ethnischen Gruppen wahrzunehmen, obwohl ihre Ursache meist in ökonomischen und politischen Rivalitäten liegt. So ist z.B. das Verhältnis zwischen Grasländern und Mbororo überschattet von Diskursen zu Bauern-Hirten Konflikten, die sich aus etablierten ethnischen Stereotypen speisen. Ein weiteres illustratives Beispiel ist der Konflikt von 1997, der sich im Kontext der Einsetzungsfeierlichkeiten des lokalen Graslandskönigs ereignete und das Zusammenleben von Grasländern und Muslimen infrage stellte. Ausgangspunkt der Auseinandersetzung waren abweichende religiöse Normvorstellungen, die sich trotz Bemühungen um eine Kompromisslösung nicht vereinbaren ließen. In der Folge nahm der Konflikt eine politische Dimension an, in der beide Gruppen die religiöse und politische Autorität der jeweils anderen anfochten. Dies gipfelte in einer symbolischen Gegenüberstellung, die – als sie drohte, gewaltsame Ausmaße anzunehmen – durch das Eingreifen des Distriktverwalters beendet wurde. Die Besonderheit dieses Konflikts liegt in seinem konfrontativen und subversiven Charakter, den ich dem politischen Kontext der 1990er Jahre und der damals hohen Gewaltbereitschaft zuschreibe. Während zu einem früheren Zeitpunkt religiöse, kulturelle und oft auch politische Differenzen durch gegenseitiges Meidungsverhalten aufgelöst wurden, waren in diesem Fall beide Gruppen bereit, ihre Ansprüche falls nötig gewaltsam durchzusetzen.

Im Gegensatz dazu haben sich zu Beginn der Jahrtausendwende alternative Strategien der Konfliktlösung durchgesetzt, die sich an internationalen Rechtsdiskursen orientieren. Dies belege ich am Beispiel einer Kontroverse, die sich während meines Aufenthaltes im Sommer 2001 ereignete und vor allem die lokale Graslandgruppe der Bessa und die Mbororo betraf. Es handelte sich um einen Konflikt, der aus einem Mordfall erwuchs jedoch auf politischen Rivalitäten und

Streitigkeiten um Land basierte. Der Mordverdacht fiel auf ein einflussreiches Mbororo-Individuum, dessen vermeintliches Fehlverhalten von der Bessa-Elitevereinigung zum Anlass generalisierter Sanktionen gegen die Mbororo-Gemeinschaft genommen wurde. Anders als im oben beschriebenen Konflikt von 1997 kam es hier weder zu symbolischen noch gewaltsamen Auseinandersetzungen, sondern es wurden rituelle Maßnahmen sowie staatlich-rechtliche Verfahren bevorzugt.

Unter Anwendung des Konfliktmodells von Georg Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) lässt sich diese Entwicklung der letzten fünfzehn Jahre von eher konfrontativen zu politisch-rechtlichen Konfliktstrategien als eine Verlagerung von ‚Zerstörung‘ zu ‚Verfahren‘ interpretieren. Eine detaillierte Analyse der beiden Konflikte von 1997 and 2001 zeigt jedoch, dass Akteure dazu tendieren, gleichzeitig sowie nachfolgend eine Vielfalt verschiedener Strategien anzuwenden. Es ist daher hilfreich, Elwerts eher statisches Modell der vier Konfliktaushandlungsformen mit dem prozesshaften Ansatz der *Manchester School*, insbesondere dem Konzept des *social drama* von Viktor Turner (1967) zu verbinden. Weiterhin stützen meine Untersuchungen Elwerts These, zwischen abgeschlossenem und anhängigem Verfahren zu unterscheiden. Abgeschlossene Verfahren zeichnen sich unter anderem durch das Aussetzen von Machtdifferenzialen aus sowie durch bindende Handlungskonsequenzen. Anhängige Verfahren hingegen sind ohne Konsequenzen und führen nicht zu Konfliktlösung sondern zu dessen Perpetuierung. Diese Situation trifft weitgehend auf staatlich-rechtliche Verfahren in Kamerun zu, die von mangelnden staatlichen Mitteln und Korruption überschattet sind. Es stellt sich daher die Frage, inwieweit die neue Tendenz zu bürgerrechtlich orientierten Verfahrensmethoden langfristig dazu beiträgt, das Zusammenleben der Bevölkerungsgruppen im Kameruner Grasland positiv zu gestalten.

Abschließend wende ich mich Diskursen zu okkulten Ökonomien zu, die in weiten Teilen Kameruns verbreitet sind (siehe z.B. Geschiere 1997a) und in Misaje besonders in den 1990er Jahren an Bedeutung gewonnen haben. Der Begriff ‚okkulte Ökonomien‘ wurde von Jean and John Comaroff (1999a) geprägt und bezeichnet das Einsetzen magischer Mittel für materielle Ziele. In Misaje gibt es zahlreiche Diskurse, die erklären, wie Individuen zu Tode und andere zu Reichtum gekommen sind. Viele dieser Diskurse werden mit unterschiedlichen Bevölkerungsgruppen assoziiert, so

dass man von einer scheinbaren Ethnisierung okkulten Ökonomien sprechen kann. Tatsächlich basiert diese Zuschreibung jedoch nicht auf vermeintlich ethnischen Charakteristika sondern auf wirtschaftlichen und historischen Bedingungen.

Weiterhin sind Diskurse zu okkulten Ökonomien ein Bereich in dem sowohl Integrations- als auch Abgrenzungsstrategien aufeinandertreffen. Während die Mbororo und Hausa aus Sicht der Grasländer lange von okkulten Machenschaften ausgenommen waren, wurden sie in den letzten Jahren ebenfalls in die Kategorie möglicher Täter aufgenommen. Mbororo und Hausa dagegen distanzieren sich von der Hexerei der Grasländer und berufen sich auf ihren muslimischen Glauben sowie die Fähigkeiten ihrer religiösen Fachleute.

Schließlich spielen okkulte Ökonomien bzw. die Suche nach effektiven Methoden ihrer Eingrenzung auch in das Gebiet des Rechtspluralismus. Hier haben sich ‚traditionelle‘ sowie staatlich-legale Verfahrensmethoden etabliert, die von der lokalen Bevölkerung als unterschiedlich effizient wahrgenommen werden, und die in ungleichem Masse sozial eingebettet sind. Weiterhin haben sich Ende der 1990er Jahre als Reaktion auf gewaltsame Übergriffe auf Hexereverdächtige auch regionale, christlich orientierte Menschenrechtsorganisationen an der Debatte um die Kontrolle okkulten Ökonomien beteiligt, sodass lokale, nationale und globale Rechtsdiskurse und religiöse Moraldiskurse zusammenkamen.

Kapitelübersicht

Die Studie setzt sich aus elf Kapiteln zusammen. Kapitel 1 und 2 führen in die Thematik ein und stellen die Untersuchungsregion vor. Kapitel 3 und 10 befassen sich mit akuten Konfliktsituationen und stecken den zeitlichen Rahmen der Studie ab. Kapitel 4, 5 und 7 behandeln die historische Etablierung der drei Untersuchungsgruppen sowie die Entwicklung ihrer Identitätskonzepte. Kapitel 6, 8 und 9 beschäftigen sich mit relevanten Aspekten inter- und intra-ethnischer Beziehungen. Kapitel 11 schließt die Studie mit einer Zusammenfassung ab.

Im ersten Kapitel erläutere ich die zentrale Fragestellung, diskutiere relevante theoretische Ansätze zu Ethnizität sowie zu Integration und Konflikt und beschreibe meine Feldforschungsmethoden. Das anschließende zweite Kapitel gibt eine kurze Übersicht über die politische Geschichte Kameruns mit Fokus auf das Kameruner Grasland und führt Misaje sowie den Misaje-Distrikt ein, indem Siedlungsgeschichte,

Verwaltungsstrukturen und ethnische Zusammensetzung beschrieben werden. Kapitel 3 untersucht den Konflikt, der sich 1997 im Rahmen der Einsetzungsfeierlichkeiten des lokalen Graslandskönigs ereignete, in seiner symbolischen und praktischen Dimension und analysiert lokale Konfliktstrategien. Das vierte Kapitel rekonstruiert die Geschichte der lokalen Graslandgruppe der Nchaney auf der Grundlage oraler Traditionen und kolonialer Berichte und zeigt Veränderungen im Nchaney-Selbstverständnis auf. Gleichermaßen beschreibe ich im fünften Kapitel die historische Entwicklung der Mbororo im Kameruner Grasland, insbesondere ihre Etablierung im Misaje-Distrikt, und diskutiere rezente Strategien politischer Repräsentation. Kapitel 6 befasst sich mit wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Beziehungen zwischen Grasländern und Mbororo und untersucht lokale Diskurse zu Bauern-Hirten Konflikten und zu Rinderdiebstahl. In Kapitel 7 erörtere ich die historische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung der Hausa im Kameruner Grasland und suche nach den Gründen für ihre fehlende politische Mobilisierung während der 1990er Jahre. Kapitel 8 beschäftigt sich mit Prozessen des Identitätswechsels (*identity switching*) sowie sozio-ökonomischen Überlappungsbeziehungen. Untersucht werden insbesondere Fälle religiöser Konversion von Grasländern zum Islam, interethnische Ehen sowie Freundschaften zwischen Mbororo und Grasländern. Im neunten Kapitel analysiere ich Diskurse zu okkulten Ökonomien und ihre Bedeutungen für intra- und interethnische Beziehungen. Kapitel 10 ist ebenfalls der Thematik lokaler Konfliktstrategien gewidmet, fokussiert jedoch auf die frühen 2000er Jahre und analysiert den Konflikt, der sich aus einem ungeklärten Mordfall in der Misaje-Region ergab. Im elften und letzten Kapitel fasse ich die Argumente zu Ethnizität sowie zu Integration und Konflikt zusammen und setze sie in Beziehung zu den Ergebnissen vergleichbarer Studien, insbesondere den Arbeiten von Philip Burnham (1996) zu Nordkamerun und von Dereje Feyissa (2003) zur Gambela-Region in Äthiopien.

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon. It explores both the performative and discursive sides of ethnicity, and takes a historical and gender-sensitive approach. The focus is on members of three ethnic groups, namely Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, their performances and discourses of difference, and their activities across ethnic boundaries. A fourth actor is the Cameroonian state, represented by its policies and officials. Particular attention is paid to the 1990s and early 2000s, a period shaped by the country's political liberalisation and the impact of international agents and global rights discourses.

Collective self-perceptions and their historical transformations is a central subject of this study. It examines the correlation of emic and etic models of ethnicity, and argues that all three groups have different but coexisting conceptions of their ethnic identity, which provide the socio-cultural frameworks for their interaction with each other and the state. Moreover, differences in group size, economic power, and involvement in international networks account for divergent strategies of political representation among the three groups.

In its analysis of interethnic relations, this study centres on confrontational events that were stimulated by economic or political rivalry. The data is mainly derived from retrospective accounts and local drama performances. As the thesis' findings indicate, state and group representatives play a crucial role in the mediation of conflict, and at times are its inadvertent cause. Moreover, national political instability and international involvement have exacerbated the existing conflict potential.

Despite occasional confrontations, members of the three population groups also entertain complementary and friendly relations. Here, the dissertation focuses on economic relations, in particular the effects of economic diversification on inter-group relations and ethnic self-understanding. In looking at social and religious relations, the thesis considers religious conversion, intermarriage, interethnic friendship, and discourses on witchcraft and occult economies. It argues that, although these processes contribute to the groups' integration into a transethnic regional community, they cannot prevent the perception and expression of conflict in ethnic terms.

Finally, the dissertation explores individual and group strategies to ensure access to vital resources in the context of Cameroon's legally pluralistic framework and of global discourses of human, minority, and civil rights. Here it becomes obvious that

privatisation and recourse to legal procedures increasingly replace interpersonal arrangements based on mutual agreement and voluntary compliance. The long-term effects of the described transformations on the groups' coexistence are still to be observed.

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This work is dedicated to my grandmother Cathy Pelican-Dosch who, throughout my life, has been a source of inspiration. Sadly, she died before its completion, at the age of 94. The study is also dedicated to the many friends in Cameroon who have not been able to achieve such a considerable age but whose memory remains vivid, not least in this work.

NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

As I am dealing with a multi-ethnic and multilingual setting, local terms are drawn from a variety of languages. These include Fulfulde, the language of the Mbororo and FulBe; Hausa, the language of the Hausa; Grassfields languages, in particular Bum (language of the Bum), Kom (language of the Bikom), Lamnso (language of the Bansa), Limbum (language of the Wimbun), Ncane (language of the Nchaney), and Nsari (language of the Bessa); and Pidgin English, the *lingua franca* of Anglophone Cameroon. Furthermore, terms are drawn from Arabic, French, and local languages spoken in southern, western, and coastal Cameroon.

In terms of orthography, I have tried to combine correct linguistic principles with pragmatic modifications to facilitate the reading. In the transcription and translation of Fulfulde terms I rely on the comprehensive work of Dominique Noye (1989) *Dictionnaire Foulfouldé-Français: dialecte Peul du Diamaré Nord-Cameroun*, since the Fulfulde dialects spoken in the Grassfields are very similar to those in northern Cameroon. In addition, I use the dictionary of Henry Tourneux and Yaya Dairou (1999) *Vocabulaire peul du monde rural: Maroua-Garoua (Cameroun)*. In transcribing and translating Hausa terms I draw on the dictionaries of Nicholas Awde (1996) *Hausa-English, English Hausa Dictionary* and Irmtraud Herms (1987) *Wörterbuch Hausa-Deutsch*. With regard to Grassfields languages and Pidgin English I use my own orthography. The terms are written in such a way that the average English speaking reader will pronounce them approximately as they should sound.

The following basic rules apply:

- ' after a word or in a word indicates a glottal stop, as in *addu'a*
- B indicates an implosive 'b', as in FulBe
- D indicates an implosive 'd', as in *arDo*

1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the coexistence and interrelatedness of individuals and groups of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in northwest Cameroon, an area also known as the Western Grassfields. It addresses themes that in current anthropological discourse are labelled as integration and conflict, and as ethnicity or interethnic relations. More generally, it deals with questions of people's being in the world and sharing their world with others.

I have entitled the study 'Getting along in the Grassfields' as a reflection of the many challenges that people in northwest Cameroon face in managing cultural and religious difference and economic and political rivalries, as well as in responding to shifting national political and global imperatives.

'Getting along' in its twofold meaning, i.e. managing one's life and getting along with others, also mirrors interlocutors' perspectives on living in a multi-ethnic and multicultural environment. Living in peace and making ends meet are for many their primary goals which they pursue via cooperation across ethnic boundaries where it is useful, and by accepting others' difference as long as it is not to their own detriment. Minor disputes and competing interests are understood as normal features of social coexistence.

Occasionally a conflict may threaten to escalate, to polarise groups and to disrupt the social fabric of the Grassfields. In my writing I focus on such critical events and on ambivalent sides of inter-group relations, as they constitute the more revealing material on the conditions and strategies that support social stability in an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous environment. Furthermore, my analysis centres on the 1990s and the early 2000s, a period shaped by national political transformations and the impact of international agents and global discourses. Over the past fifteen years, local modes of conflict management and self-representation to the state have changed, and it is my objective to describe and analyse these alterations.

My interest in the Grassfields goes back to the early 1990s when I first came to Cameroon to teach in a secondary school. My stay took place in a period of political instability and civil unrest, set off by the introduction of a multi-party system and subsequent democratisation processes. During my two years in Bali-Nyonga, a village

in the Western Grassfields, I made friends with members of all major population groups, including Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa.

In 1996 I returned to northwest Cameroon in preparation for my masters' thesis. Motivated by contacts with a Mbororo non-governmental organisation that promoted women's development, I studied transformations in the socio-economic situation of Mbororo women. I spent eight months with Mbororo families in various locations, among them Misaje, a small town in the northern part of the Western Grassfields.

In 2000 I returned to Cameroon for my PhD fieldwork. I intended to study the integration of Mbororo into local Grassfields communities, focusing on their interrelatedness with neighbouring population groups and their responses to recent changes in national political and legal frameworks. I chose Misaje as my primary fieldsite and, between August 2000 and January 2002, spent a total of fourteen months in Cameroon.

Misaje is rather atypical compared to the general image of a Grassfields community. It is not a 'traditional village' with an established history, but was founded in the colonial period. It also differs from the 'average' Grassfields village in the extent of its ethnic heterogeneity and the strength of its Muslim community. Located close to the Nigerian border and along the regional highway, Misaje is a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan place, in which I as a European researcher was just one stranger among others.

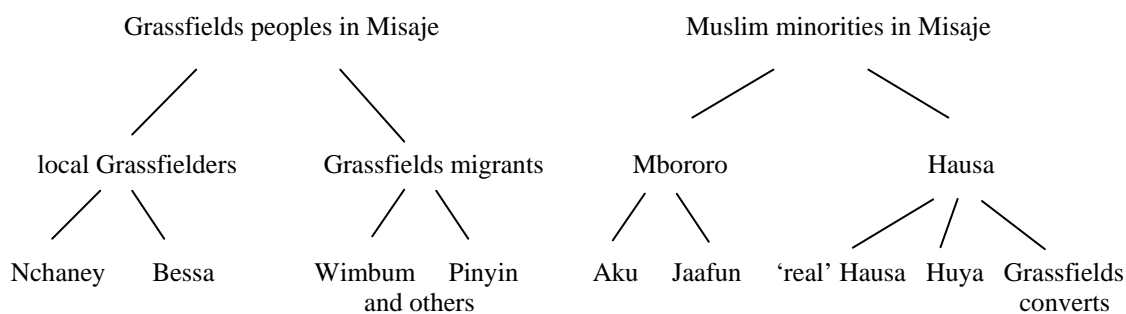
During my previous fieldwork, I had established good contacts with Mbororo and local Grassfielders who facilitated my integration in the Misaje community. I opted for renting a house in the Muslim quarter which allowed me to host guests of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I actively involved assistants, friends, and informants in the project, whose contributions had significant impacts on my research questions and findings. With their help I was able to broaden my initial focus on the Mbororo perspective to include the views of local Grassfielders and Hausa on interethnic relations, and to produce a sound ethnography of Misaje in its ethnic and cultural diversity. By drawing my attention to current issues such as land disputes, cattle theft, and occult aggression, I was reminded of the interrelatedness of intra- and interethnic tensions, and of the crucial role of the state and its representatives in conflict management. Conversations with interlocutors and friends made clear that the ethnic perspective is only one among many, and that gender and age differences as well as

economic and social diversification are also valid factors in shaping social relations in Misaje.

It is certain that my presence as an anthropologist, and not least my line of inquiry and interpretation, lent weight to an ethnic perspective at the expense of alternative perspectives on social relations. Yet undeniably, ethnic awareness and the recognition of cultural difference are critical factors in shaping individual and group identities and interaction in northwest Cameroon. Ethnic and cultural identities are conveyed and performed in everyday life via language, dress code, demeanour, housing, habitus, religious practices, economic practices, and many other indicators that easily escape an outsiders' attention. They are considered an integral part of one's personhood; individuals who renounce or conceal their ethnic and cultural identity are extremely rare and considered deviant.

People in Misaje identify themselves along an array of ethnic and cultural categories which I, as part of my anthropological endeavour, have organised in the following diagram. This diagram is a working model; its purpose is to provide the reader with an overview of the ethnic and cultural categories relevant for this study. It does not represent the many alternative ways in which informants group themselves and others. Alternative models will be introduced in subsequent chapters.

Diagram 1.1: Author's working model of ethnic and cultural categories relevant for this study



The two main cultural categories represented in Misaje and northwest Cameroon in general are Grassfields peoples who constitute the majority, and Muslim minorities whose presence dates back less than 100 years.

Among the Grassfields peoples in Misaje we distinguish between local Grassfields groups who act as *de facto* landlords by virtue of their anteriority, and migrants from

neighbouring and distant Grassfields chiefdoms. The local Grassfields groups inhabiting Misaje and its surrounding area are Nchaney and Bessa. Two Grassfields migrant groups figuring prominently in Misaje village life, and to whom I occasionally refer in the text, are Wimbum and Pinyin. Other migrants are grouped collectively into migrants from the Bamenda area and migrants from neighbouring chiefdoms.

Two Muslim minority groups present in Misaje and most parts of northwest Cameroon are Mbororo and Hausa. The Mbororo belong to the ethnic category of FulBe whose members are dispersed over the Sahel and Savannah belt from West to East Africa. The term Mbororo refers specifically to (agro-)pastoral FulBe. The Mbororo in the Western Grassfields distinguish two sub-ethnic or socio-cultural units, identifying themselves as Jaafun or Aku. Both sub-groups are represented in the Misaje region. They live with their cattle herds out of town 'in the bush', i.e. in their pasture area.

The Hausa in the northwest Cameroon constitute a heterogeneous ethnic category that generally refers to Muslim village/town dwellers. The Hausa community in Misaje includes both descendants of Hausa from northern Nigeria; Huya (or Town FulBe) from northern Cameroon and Nigeria who share their ethnic origin and language with the Mbororo, and local Grassfields converts.

In my analysis of inter-group relations I try as much as possible to simplify this complicated ethnic arrangement by arguing either on the level of cultural units (i.e. Grassfields groups versus Muslim groups) or by distinguishing between ethnic categories with the ethnonyms Nchaney, Bessa, Mbororo, and Hausa figuring most prominently. Occasionally, however, it becomes essential to explore sub-ethnic distinctions.

By portraying the Western Grassfields as a multicultural area, and by pursuing an integrative approach, i.e. dealing with several ethnic groups and their interrelatedness, I differ from most anthropological studies on northwest Cameroon that tend to focus on a single ethnic group. A similar approach has been followed, among others, by Burnham (1996) for northern Cameroon, Eriksen (1998) for Mauritius, Feyissa (2003) for the Gambela region in Ethiopia, and by Mutie (2003) for southern Kenya. Their studies have been inspiring and have helped to strengthen comparative dimensions.

In my ethnography I draw on a substantial corpus of anthropological, historical, and political studies on the Western Grassfields.¹ Most significant for my explorations, are the works of N. Awasom (1984), Boutrais (1995/96), Chilver and Kaberry (1967), and Warnier (1985). Their studies are characterised by a decidedly historical approach which also impacted on my research. Furthermore, I draw on the writings of Geschiere (1997), Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003), and Nyamnjoh (2005a). Their focus is more on the political side of social relations, and directed my attention to national politics and “occult economies” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is theories of ethnicity, and integration and conflict. Beyond this general framework I engage with a number of middle-range theories that relate to specific subjects explored in the context of interethnic relations and identity politics in the Grassfields. In the following I will outline my understanding of ethnicity, interethnic relations, integration and conflict, and discuss some of the works that have shaped my analysis. I will not elaborate at length on the middle-range theories, but leave this to subsequent chapters where they will be introduced in the context of my research data.

Ethnicity or ethnicities are here understood very broadly as instances of identity and difference (Schlee 2001a: 30, 2002: 8) or, in Jenkins’ (2005) terms, sameness and difference. Drawing on the interactionalist approach of Barth (1998 [1969]), I see ethnicity as essentially relational and processual.

Barth is often seen as the leading figure of modern theories of ethnicity. In his frequently cited introduction to ‘Ethnic groups and boundaries’ (1998 [1969]) he suggests focusing on group boundaries as the primary locus of defining ethnic identities and difference. Furthermore, he interprets ethnicity as a specific form of social identity, constructed under particular historical and political circumstances, and based on self-ascriptions and ascriptions by others. In his later contribution Barth (1994) recommends modelling processes of ethnic identification on three interpenetrating levels, namely the micro level of individual action and experience,

¹ At this point, I can indicate only a limited selection of authors and their main oeuvres. Further references will be included in subsequent chapters.

the median level of entrepreneurship, leadership, and rhetoric, and the macro level of state policies.

In line with Barth's propositions I will describe the emergence and transformation of ethnic identities in the Western Grassfields by focusing on each groups' encounters with ethnic 'others' as well as with colonial and post-colonial governments. As far as possible, I will integrate all three levels of identification in my analysis, and pay special attention to gendered perceptions of ethnicity and interethnic relations. In examining state policies, I will also address the question of the degree to which ethnicities in the Grassfields are colonial constructs; a proposition stated most pronouncedly by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Amselle (1998, 1999). Their approach has been taken further by Kuper (2003) who suggests reading recent policies of the United Nations to classify selected groups as 'indigenous peoples' with specific cultural rights as leading to the creation of 'neo-colonial' categories and identities. The interplay of global discourses, national policies, and local strategies of identification and representation is a theme that will be explored throughout the subsequent chapters.

Another view on ethnicity significant for my study is the instrumentalist approach of Abner Cohen (1969, 1974). In his work on (im)migrant Hausa communities in southern Nigeria (1969) he shows that in the multi-ethnic and urban environment of Ibadan ethnicity plays a vital role; probably much more than in the Hausa homeland. Here Hausa identity constitutes an important political and economic capital and the key condition to individuals' participation in trading activities. Furthermore, definitions of Hausa identity differ at home and in the diaspora. Among Hausa (im)migrants in Ibadan, internal status differences are largely ignored and ethnic boundaries are kept flexible and permeable. It is on the basis of these and related findings that Cohen (1969, 1974) understands ethnicity as essentially political and instrumental. A similar approach has been promoted by Elwert (1997, 2002a) who introduced the concept of identity switching. Switching refers to two phenomena, namely groups changing their frames of reference of identification, and individuals choosing and changing their identities situationally. However, there are limits to situational switching, as newly assumed identities have to be justified and made plausible within existing frames of reference (Schlee 2000: 78, 2004: 148). A second relevant concept in Elwert's actor-oriented theory is the notion of polytaxis (Elwert 1997: 257-258, 2002a: 39-41, see also Schlee & Werner 1996). It denotes a latent

multiplicity of identities, as individuals and groups may belong to different reference groups simultaneously. In this context situational switching, such as ethnic conversion, may be a common strategy, particularly among groups with open structures and flexible boundaries, which applies to most African ethnic structures (Elwert 1997: 258, 2002a: 40).

Cohen's findings are instructive for my analysis of ethnicity and strategies of inclusion and exclusion among Hausa and Mbororo, as both communities are immigrant and minority groups in the Western Grassfields. Regarding boundary management and individual switching, I will engage mainly with the contributions of Burnham (1972, 1996) and Schultz (1979, 1984) who studied religious and ethnic conversion in northern Cameroon.

Furthermore, in considering ethnicities in the Grassfields I take a historical approach as promoted, among others, by Comaroff (1995) and Lentz (1998). Both authors convincingly argue that a single, abstract theory of ethnicity is impracticable, as processes leading to the creation of ethnicities are historically and regionally specific. As Lentz (1998: 34, 627) further elaborates, a historical perspective on ethnicity helps to avoid the fruitless controversy between primordialist and constructionist approaches, and shows that ethnic identities are neither fixed nor wholly invented. Lentz is not alone in her criticism of the primordialist versus constructionist debate (e.g. Fardon 1996, Schilder & van Binsbergen 1993, Schlee & Werner 1996); yet her study on the construction of ethnicity in northwest Ghana exemplifies the benefits of a diachronic perspective.

Concerning my methodology, it is important to note that I treat ethnic groups and identities as ideal types in Weber's sense (Weber 1969 [1949]²; see also Burger 1976: 115-179). I am aware of the difficulties entailed in deriving ideal types from ethnographic material. Hence, when I write of 'the Nchaney', 'the Bessa', 'the Mbororo' or 'the Hausa', it signifies an abstraction for the sake of comparison of ideal types. It should not be mistaken as a naïve interpretation of the Misaje community as being composed of distinct ethnic groups, but of individuals whose identities are practical constructs (cf. Bourdieu 1990: 68-69) and modelled in interaction with each other.

² The English version is based on the German original 'Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre', first published in 1922.

Against the background of my understanding of ethnicity as essentially relational, it is evident that my focus is as much on interethnic relations as it is on ethnic identities. As interethnic relations I term all relations between members of different ethnic groups, be they of social, economic, political or religious nature. Moreover, these relations are seen as embedded in and shaped by the interplay of integration and conflict.

Drawing on Schlee (2001b: 43, 2003a: 78), I define integration as a process whereby individuals or groups become part of an overarching unit or systemic connection. Conflict, on the other hand, I conceive in Elwert's (2001: 2542) terms as "an action based upon the perception of partially incompatible interests or intentions between two or more persons"; an action that does not necessarily involve violence.

In popular understanding, integration and conflict are perceived as two opposite poles of social relations. Integration is often associated with sameness or coherence, while conflict is associated with difference. As Schlee (2001a, 2003a, 2003c, 2006) and other anthropologists have argued, this view is far too simple. There are many ways for individuals and groups to be integrated into overarching units, be it via assimilation to a dominant culture, the coexistence of distinct groups, or via antagonistic relations (see e.g. Bowman 2002, Elwert 1997, Eriksen 1998, Horstmann & Schlee 2001, Mutie 2003). Furthermore, as many recent and past conflicts have proven, a low level of difference does not guarantee peaceful coexistence (Schlee 2001a: 23).

Similarly, conflict cannot be seen as an entirely negative force. Following Simmel (1964 [1955])³ and Gluckman (1973 [1966]), conflict is part and parcel of social relations. Actors are embedded in a web of individual and group allegiances which, on the one hand, promote minor confrontations while, on the other, they reduce the potential of violent conflict. Furthermore, such minor confrontations are seen as contributing to social cohesion. As Gluckman (1963a: 110-136) suggests, the political conflicts he studied among Zulu and Barotse in southern Africa resulted in rebellion rather than revolution, and the reproduction of the political system.

Current anthropological conflict theory builds on these findings, but takes a more differentiated approach, distinguishing different types of conflicts with different impacts on social relations. Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005), for example, orders the

³ The English version is based on the German original 'Soziologie', first published in 1906.

multitude of concepts used to describe conflict in a field of four poles which include destruction, warring, procedure, and avoidance. These are characterised by the criteria of more or less violence, and stronger or weaker embedding. As embedding he defines

the ensemble of moral values, proper norms, and institutional arrangements which set limits to a specific type of action and make simultaneously the outcome of these actions calculable (Elwert 2001: 2543, see also Alber 2005: 2-6).

In his model it is rather the degree of embedding in social action than violence that determines the integrative or dissociative propensity of conflict.

Gluckman's and Elwert's conflict theories are instrumental in analysing local approaches to conflict management as studied in my research. In my explorations I will employ the term conflict with reference to various issues, including a near-violent altercation over cultural difference and political rivalry, farmer-herder conflicts, witchcraft accusations, and land disputes. No analytical distinction will be made between conflict, confrontation, altercation, argument, quarrel, and dispute; these terms will be used more or less interchangeably.

In my analyses of actual conflict situations I will also use performance theory and legal anthropological concepts. Within performance theory I will focus on the politics of cultural performance, which is also the title of an edited volume by Parkin et al. (1996). In line with Parkin (1996: xix) I treat cultural performance "as a methodological metaphor for exploring issues of conflict and contradiction in wider society". I herein draw on the Manchester School, in particular the concepts of the social drama and the multivocality of symbols developed by Turner (1967, 1995 [1957]). Furthermore, in analysing the significance of ritual contest as compared to physical combat, I will use Schnepel's (1998) study on ritual performances of power and authority in Orissa, India. Within legal anthropology my focus is on the concept of legal pluralism as outlined by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1981, 1997, 2001). Their approach of considering plural normative orders as well as actors' choices among and within these orders is relevant for my analysis of procedural strategies of conflict management explored more recently in the Western Grassfields.

While much attention is paid to conflict and conflict resolution in my study, I am equally interested in processes and mechanisms of integration. Here I engage mainly with Gluckman's (1973 [1966]) theory of the integrative propensity of cross-cutting ties. He introduced the notion of cross-cutting ties to denote allegiances that unite

individuals across 'tribal' or social units. Drawing examples from Evans-Pritchards' (1976 [1940]) study on the Nuer, he came to the conclusion that cross-cutting ties contribute to social cohesion, because they inhibit violent conflict and the destruction of the wider social order (Gluckman 1973 [1966]: 1-26). Gluckman's thesis of the de-escalating propensity of cross-cutting ties was criticised by later scholars whose studies produced different results (cf. Schlee 1997). In his study of war and bloodshed within Tauade society in Papua New Guinea, Hallpike (1977) came to the conclusion that cross-cutting ties do not necessarily contribute to social cohesion, but may serve as channels of vengeance and evasion (Hallpike 1977: 136). Schlee (1984, 1989) studied clan relations among pastoral groups in northern Kenya. In his reading there is no correlation between the existence of cross-cutting ties and the prevention or escalation of conflict. However, he found that interethnic clan relations help to overcome the consequences of violent conflict (Schlee 1997, 2000, 2004).

As these divergent findings show, cross-cutting ties in themselves have no active effect. Nonetheless, used as raw material for political rhetoric, they may endorse either social cohesion or violent conflict (Schlee 2000: 73, 2004: 114). The role of cross-cutting ties for interethnic relations in the Grassfields is a theme that runs through the study, and will be addressed with regard to economic allegiances, as well as religious and social ties resulting from conversion to Islam, intermarriage, and interethnic friendship.

A third concept besides integration and conflict is social coexistence. I herewith refer to the 'getting along' of ethnically and culturally distinct groups, a state characterised by mutual recognition and limited social interaction. Similarly, Mutie (2003; see also Schlee 2003b: 128-129, 2003c: 57-61) uses coexistence as a key concept in his analysis of interethnic relations between Kamba and Maasai in Kenya. As he explains, coexistence is a term hardly applied in social sciences. He defines it as "constituting interactions that are not only peaceful and complementary but also antagonistic, where conflict is an integral part of the interactive process" (Mutie 2003: 286). In his reading interethnic coexistence is an uneasy relationship that includes both the preservation of differences and the negotiation of compromises and concessions (Mutie 2003: 286-302, see also Schlee 2003b: 129, 2003c: 59). In the Western Grassfields coexistence as an uneasy relationship applies mainly to economic relations between population groups. For example, farmer-herder relations have long

been characterised by the interplay of complementarity and competition, a theme I will explore in a later chapter.

In my analysis I do not prioritise coexistence over integration and conflict, but consider all three as part of a continuum in which interethnic relations are embedded. Furthermore, I understand interethnic relations as a bundle of multiple social, religious, economic, and political relations which may differ in their character. Groups may thus ignore religious and cultural differences and entertain friendly social relations, while living in an uneasy economic coexistence, and being involved in rivalry and altercation in the political domain. At the same time, the multiple strands of interethnic relations are closely interlinked. A serious conflict may thus overshadow all sections of interethnic relations and affect the groups' integration into the overarching regional or national system. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that interethnic relations, as much as ethnic identities, are the result of complex and on-going social processes. Consequently, our descriptions and analyses capture only specific moments or periods in time.

Research methodology

This study is based on fourteen months ethnographic fieldwork carried out between August 2000 and January 2002. Furthermore, it is the result of extensive discussions with supervisors, colleagues, and friends as a PhD student at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (2000 to 2002, 2004 to 2006), and a Marie Curie fellow at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kent (2003). As we all know, intellectual inputs by others are an indispensable source of inspiration and help to identify crucial questions guiding our explorations. I was fortunate to benefit from this opportunity both while being in the field and in the writing-up phase. A significant feature of my research methodology was the active involvement of members of local communities who, in their many roles as collaborators, research assistants, interlocutors, informants, or friends greatly contributed to my research.

One of my first collaborators was my friend and host Nji Patrick, a Bessa man who grew up in Misaje and subsequently moved to Bamenda where he operates a tailoring workshop. Patrick suggested using his late mother's house in Misaje as the basis for my research. As he explained, it was located conveniently in the town centre and the Muslim neighbourhood, and also roomy enough to receive guests of different

and cultural backgrounds, while offering private space for my *book work* (Pidgin English for ‘studies’). I agreed with his proposal and it turned out an effective arrangement. Not only did I have a continuous stream of Mbororo, Hausa, and Grassfields visitors, but I was also able to use my house as a venue for alternative research activities, such as performing role-plays, screening and discussing research footage, and conducting interviews in privacy. Patrick’s hospitality extended to his house in Bamenda, where I was a regular guest when taking a break from intense fieldwork to reflect current achievements and prepare subsequent activities. Patrick has remained a vital collaborator in my research; he still supplies me with information and facilitates my on-going communication with informants and friends in Misaje.

Much support and input to my study came from my research team. From the start, I intended to work with assistants, preferably educated members of the different population groups of Misaje. As a young white woman I would not be able to approach members of all social and ethnic groups in the appropriate ways and hence needed the guidance of individuals familiar with local norms and practices. Furthermore, with Misaje being a multi-ethnic and thus multilingual locale, I needed the help of assistants to facilitate my communication. The languages commonly spoken in Misaje include local Grassfields languages (Ncane and Nsari), Fulfulde, Hausa, Pidgin English (the *lingua franca* in Anglophone Cameroon) and English. Most individuals are fluent in two or more of these languages. My own proficiency, besides a number of European languages, is limited to Fulfulde, Pidgin English, and English. While I was able to hold most conversations in one of these languages, I occasionally had to rely on assistants and friends to overhear or translate conversations in Hausa or local Grassfields languages. I started off with one research assistant and, with time, more individuals joined in. Eventually, I was assisted by a group of young and middle-aged men and women who contributed their own ideas and initiatives, and thus made the research an interactive endeavour and, even more so, to be fun.

The key members of my research team were Haruna Kadiri, Ngeh Jonathan, Talatu Yusufa, Bebi Halima, and Bah Jerome. Other members joined in temporarily to accomplish specific projects. Haruna Kadiri is one of the few Mbororo in the Misaje area who went to primary and partly secondary school. Due to his father’s untimely death, he had to return to his family without completing his education. He subsequently became acquainted with Ballotiral, a regional NGO working with the

Mbororo community. Haruna was my primary field assistant. He temporarily lived with me in Misaje and helped improve my language skills in Fulfulde. He facilitated interviews with Mbororo and Hausa informants, and assisted in interview transcription. He soon developed an interest and talent in video-recording and took over most of the filming. My second research assistant was Ngeh Jonathan, the younger brother of my host Patrick. Jonathan had grown up in Misaje and attended secondary school in Bamenda. At the time of my research, he was a student of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Buea in southwest Cameroon. He assisted me during his holidays, facilitating interviews with local Grassfields informants, and researching specific questions independently. Furthermore, he established contacts with Bessa migrants living in the South West Province. Jonathan continued his inquiries after I left Cameroon. In summer 2002 and 2003 he returned to Misaje to update and complement the existing research data. He has read and commented on earlier drafts of this study, and by now is a PhD student in Sweden. In addition to my two research assistants, I was supported by Talatu Yusufa and Bebi Halima, two Hausa women living in Misaje. At the time of working with me, both were single mothers and made their living from selling food items. They were active community members and well-informed of local gossip and events. Talatu and Bebi supported my research by keeping us updated of current happenings, facilitating contacts with Hausa informants and, last but not least, by assisting in household tasks. Another vital member of my research team was Bah Jerome, an Nchaney man living in Misaje. Jerome had previously been working with a regional NGO on the improvement of local farming and grazing techniques, and entertained good relations with members of the Grassfields, Mbororo, and Hausa communities. He virtually was our man Friday, keeping us informed of local events and assisting the team in various tasks.

Many more individuals contributed stimulating input to my research, among them the staff of Ballotiral, a non-governmental organisation that runs projects on female literacy and legal counselling among Mbororo in the Grassfields. I benefited from their collaboration in many ways. They shared their experiences of working with local Mbororo communities and the administration, invited me to take part in some of their projects, and provided infrastructural support in terms of transport and technical cooperation. Most significantly, I benefited from their practice of 'Theatre for

Development' by drawing on their performances as a source of information and by incorporating role-playing in my own methodological toolkit.

The methods applied during my research included a number of standard methods, such as participant observation, semi-structured and life history interviews, village and compound surveys, kinship inquiries, and archival research. Furthermore, I used approaches drawn from visual and theatre anthropology, namely photographic analysis, video documentation, and role-playing.

In the initial phase of my research I concentrated on observing ethnic and cultural identities and inter-group relations as communicated and performed in public spaces. The weekly market, the Friday prayers, and the cattle market offered good opportunities to study the coming together of members of different population groups in Misaje. Furthermore, my assistants and I attended public spectacles, such as national holiday celebrations, the induction of the incoming Divisional Officer, annual meetings of regional and ethnic elite associations, and so forth. In addition, we participated in an array of cultural and social events, including annual Grassfields dances, Christmas celebrations, the Muslim feasts of the ram and the end of *ramadan* (Muslim month of fasting), as well as child naming ceremonies, Islamic graduation ceremonies, weddings, and burials. Our primary aim in attending these events was to observe the interaction and communication between individuals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as their dealings with state agents. It was also a way of familiarising myself with the groups under study and creating contacts with individuals who were to become vital informants, interlocutors, and collaborators. We decided to document many of these events audio-visually to enable further analysis and subsequent feedback. Upon returning from the field, I edited part of the video footage in collaboration with my colleague Judith Orland and composed a short documentary entitled 'Getting along in the Grassfields: aspects of village life in Misaje (North West Cameroon)', which is accessible via the virtual archive of the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (<http://corpora.eth.mpg.de/>).

In the second stage of my fieldwork I concentrated on people's perception and portrayal of their ethnic and cultural identities and inter-group relations, thus shifting my focus from the performative to the discursive dimension. It goes without saying that much information was gained from informal conversations and local gossip. In

addition, my research team and I interviewed roughly 130 informants, among them local Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa to almost the same degree (between 33 and 36 interlocutors), as well as Grassfields migrants (11), and state agents and NGO workers (13). Our interview techniques comprised individual and group interviews, life history and semi-structured interviews, and focused discussions. The topics addressed included the history of each group's establishment in the Misaje area, their economic and social relations, vital conflicts between individuals and groups, national and local politics, the groups' relationships with the administration, and the activities of local self-help groups and regional and ethnic elite associations. In addition to interviewing informants, I intended to initiate feedback processes by confronting interlocutors with the transcripts of their interviews. Due to technical and time constraints, this plan could not be realised during the fieldwork period. At a later stage, however, I sent earlier drafts of the chapters on Nchaney, Mbororo, and Hausa history and identity to Misaje to be circulated and discussed with local informants. Thanks to the mediating efforts of Ngeh Jonathan, Jeidoh Duni, Buba Madaki, and Nji Patrick, I received critical feedback which I integrated into the study.

Further sources of information were compound and village surveys, kinship inquiries, and archival research. Most challenging for my research team was my request to draw a map of Misaje Town, in which they indicated all compounds and the ethnic background of the respective household heads. They accomplished the task efficiently, and their village survey formed the basis for my analysis of the town's ethnic composition presented in the subsequent chapter. The kinship information we collected was relatively limited and turned out less relevant for my analysis. Archival research was conducted in national, regional, and local archives in Cameroon, and to a lesser degree in Britain and Switzerland.⁴ My primary intention was to collect information on state policies regulating inter-group relations, both with regard to the colonial and post-colonial period, as well as quantitative data on group sizes and farmer-herder conflicts. In addition, I was fortunate to access reports on a regional

⁴ In preparation of the research, I visited the Archives of mission 21 / Basel Mission where I selected a wide range of photographs taken by missionaries in the early 20th century of Mbororo and Hausa in the Grassfields. I intended using the photographs in my inquiries on group histories and social change. Informants, however, were more interested in the identity of the individuals depicted which, unfortunately, we could not reconstruct due to the scarcity of available information. This would have been an interesting subject, but went beyond the scope of my research. Eventually, I decided to incorporate some of the photographs in the group histories presented in subsequent chapters.

meeting on the social impact of witchcraft that was held in 1999. These documents were made available to me by Akuma Joseph, a friend and human rights activist, and have been included in my analysis of discourses on occult economies.

In addition to these standard methods of ethnographic research, I applied approaches drawn from visual and theatre anthropology. As mentioned above, my research team and I documented a wide variety of social, cultural, and administrative events on video. Furthermore, we made a little documentary on the Misaje market day. Next, we founded a local drama group and produced four role-plays on the following themes: the relevance of Islamic education, the encounter of ‘traditional’ beliefs and Western education, the discrepancy of African and Anglo-European ideals of marriage, and the conundrum of anthropological research. The members of our drama group were young men and women of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including my research team and their acquaintances. The themes emerged situationally and were partly linked to my research. Each play’s realisation took a day or two and was the product of the performers’ creativity. With the exception of one, the plays were not performed for a public audience but videotaped. I have edited and sub-titled the video-footage of some of the role-plays for analytical and illustrative purposes. Two brief clips – of the Ballotiral role-play on farmer-herder conflict (2:46min.) and of the role-play performed by the Mbororo women’s group of Chako on milk sales (4:27min., see appendix E) – are accessible via the virtual archive of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (<http://corpora.eth.mpg.de/>).

Some eight months into the fieldwork, I co-organised a screening of my edited video footage for the general public in Misaje. The event took place over three days and attracted a large audience, including members of all population groups and the local administration. A detailed description is included in the appendix of this study, entitled ‘Misaje Film Festival report’. Among the most fascinating aspects of the event were the many responses from the audience which reflected a general learning effect with regard to role-playing and film production, but also seeing Misaje and its population through the eyes of the anthropologist, i.e. focusing on cultural differences that were previously taken for granted.⁵ Above all, the Misaje Film Festival generated

⁵ The last section of the documentary film ‘Getting along in the Grassfields: aspects of village life in Misaje (North West Cameroon)’ is dedicated to the Misaje Film Festival and illustrates the local population’s responses to the screenings and my research.

a better understanding of the nature and aim of ethnographic fieldwork and vitally stimulated the collaboration of local community members.

Role-playing was integrated in my fieldwork in several ways. As noted above, the initial stimulus came from the regional NGO Ballotiral whose staff used ‘Theatre for Development’ in their work with local population groups and the administration. In 2001, for example, they performed a role-play on farmer-herder conflicts which I will take as a starting point for my analysis of corresponding local discourses. Furthermore, the Ballotiral staff used role-playing in their work with women’s groups. As a result, Mbororo and Hausa women in the Misaje area were acquainted with the medium and performed little role-plays on their own initiative, illustrating conflicts over milk sales, processes of acculturation due to intermarriage, social change regarding marriage arrangements among Mbororo, and Hausa women’s marital predicaments. Unfortunately, I am unable to include these role-plays in my description of interethnic relations in the Grassfields, as their explanation requires more space than available.⁶ Nonetheless, they have advanced my understanding of inter-group relations, and the findings derived from them are integrated in my analysis.

As the description of my research methods suggests, I returned from the field with a plethora of research data. Inevitably, in writing up the study I was confronted with the task of selecting and prioritising material in accordance with the themes and arguments I wanted to explore.

I decided to base my analysis to a large extent on the narrative data, mainly because of academic conventions that prioritise written text and provide limited space for the deployment of audio-visual and role-playing material. Nonetheless, where suitable and feasible, I have included role-plays, photographs, and video footage in my explorations to add additional dimensions and to complement the written text. Furthermore, I make a point in considering both the performative and discursive sides of ethnicity and interethnic relations, also in analysing the narrative material.

⁶ As the examples of Fabian (1990) and Hobart (2002) show, a comprehensive analysis of a drama performance requires substantial explorations, not only regarding the content of the play but also the background and intention of its performers, the circumstances and occasion of its presentation, and the rehearsal process. A seemingly ‘simple’ performance thus generates a complex analysis that may not comply with the main objective of the study.

In the subsequent text I will use varying methods of representation, depending on the character of the data and the objectives of the respective chapters. One of my primary approaches is the extended case method that was introduced by the Manchester School. It was applied primarily in studying acute conflict situations, and with the aim of analysing social processes over an extended period of time (cf. Buroway 1998, Mitchell 1983, Rössler 2003, van Velsen 1967). I will apply the extended case method in describing and analysing two conflict situations that occurred in 1997 and 2001 respectively, thereby illustrating changing approaches to political representation and ethnic coexistence. Other subjects cannot be deployed by focusing on a single case study and are better approached from multiple angles. For example, my explorations on economic relations between Grassfielders and Mbororo draw on a variety of sources, including statistical data on farmer-herder conflicts, the above-mentioned role-play performed by the Ballotiral staff, and an administrative meeting on cattle theft.

A second point of clarification concerns the representation of individual and collective narratives derived from conversations and interviews. Here I draw on the approach developed by Malkki (1995) in her study on Burundian refugees in Tanzania. Malkki (1995: 56-58) distinguishes two types of narratives; on the one hand, formulaic historical accounts that suggest the idea of a collective voice and are characterised by the repetition of general themes; on the other, individual accounts that reflect distinct experiences and diverging views. Malkki proposes to represent the two types of narratives in different ways. She introduces narrative panels that are constructed on the basis of informants' overlapping accounts to represent a collective perspective. Individual accounts, on the other hand, are represented by simple quotations from interviews. In the context of my study the distinction of individual statements and standardised narratives is particularly relevant with regard to the historical reconstruction of the conflict that occurred in 1997 and of the groups' establishment in the Misaje area. I will use both narrative panels and simple quotations as representative devices. Conversely, in my explorations on religious conversion, intermarriage and interethnic friendship, and on occult economies, I favour a multivocal approach, using simple quotations to represent individual perspectives.

In general, interlocutors will be named, while in sensitive cases they will be anonymised. Furthermore, all quotes from interviews have been translated into English and only key terms are indicated in their original language.

Structure of the study

Chapter 2 provides the national political and the regional background. Chapters 3 and 10 focus on the themes of integration and conflict explored throughout the study. Chapters 4, 5, and 7 deal with the groups' historical establishment and their conceptions of ethnicity. Chapters 6, 8, and 9 focus on current issues relevant for inter- and intraethnic relations. The conclusion summarises the findings.

Chapter 2 introduces the Cameroon Grassfields in its historical and national political dimensions. Furthermore, it describes the historical development and demographic composition of my primary fieldsite Misaje Town.

Chapter 3 opens with the case study of a critical altercation that occurred in 1997 during the investiture ceremonies of the local Grassfields chief, and polarised the Grassfields and Muslim populations of Misaje. The chapter analyses the conflict in its socio-political context and symbolic dimensions, and draws insights on local strategies of conflict management pertinent in the 1990s.

Chapter 4 recounts the emergence and expansion of the Nchaney chiefdom on the basis of local and colonial accounts. It outlines historical transformations in the Nchaney conception of their ethnic identity in response to confrontations with other population groups and the colonial and post-colonial government. The Nchaney here typify Grassfields groups in general with whom they share similarities in their historical development and self-understanding.

Chapter 5 describes the establishment of Mbororo in the Western Grassfields, specifically in the Misaje area. It focuses on alterations in their self-understanding in the course of their migration and subsequent sedentarisation. It also sheds light on the recent politicisation of Mbororo identity in response to Cameroon's political liberalisation and global rights discourses.

Chapter 6 focuses on the complementary and competitive potentials of economic relations between Nchaney and Mbororo. It describes the effects of economic diversification on intra- and interethnic relations and addresses two issues of public contention, namely farmer-herder problems and cattle theft.

Chapter 7 addresses Hausa history and identity in a gendered perspective. It portrays the development of the Hausa community and their close socio-economic relationship with Mbororo in the Misaje area. It describes shifts in Hausa self-identification in response to socio-economic changes and deals with instrumentalist interpretations of Hausa identity.

Chapter 8 focuses on religious conversion, intermarriage, and interethnic friendship. It portrays individual perspectives on managing multiple identities and liabilities, and examines the circumstances under which ensuing cross-cutting ties may be used to support or undermine social cohesion in Misaje.

Chapter 9 engages with another aspect of the groups' religious coexistence, namely the role of discourses on occult economies in intra- and interethnic relations. It considers a variety of notions of occult practices and tackles the question of their apparent ethnicisation. Furthermore, it studies the strategies of local authorities, NGO activists, and state agents towards containing perceived occult aggression.

Chapter 10 opens with the case study of a murder that happened in 2001 and involved members of the Bessa and Mbororo communities. The case brings together issues of occult aggression and conflicting land claims. The chapter analyses the prosecutor's and defendant's arguments and their deployment of an ethnic perspective. It illustrates current approaches to conflict resolution, and considers individuals' and groups' strategies of managing a plural legal system.

Chapter 11 draws together the findings of the study with regard to ethnicity, and integration and conflict. It discusses emic conceptions of ethnicity, their impact on interethnic relations, and their capacity for political mobilisation. Furthermore, it outlines the role of the state and international organisations in shaping interethnic relations. Finally, it deals with changing strategies of integration and conflict management, and relates them to corresponding concepts in anthropological theory.

2 NATIONAL POLITICAL BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The focus of this study is on the late 1990s and early 2000s, a period shaped by the effects of Cameroon's democratic transition and the appropriation of global discourses on the national, regional, and local level.

The early and mid-1990s were characterised by political upheavals and social unrest which also impacted on inter-group relations. As I will describe in chapters 3 and 9, individuals and groups were inclined to confrontation and violence as preferred strategies of conflict resolution. By the early 2000s the socio-political climate had changed, and Cameroonians opted for less confrontational and more procedural strategies in promoting their individual and collective interests (see chapter 10). Describing and analysing this transition is at the heart of this study. In order to be able to explain the shift in strategies, it is necessary to delineate the factors that promoted the adoption of relatively violent strategies in the 1990s, which is the aim of this chapter.

It is important to emphasise that the ways in which conflicts tended to be resolved during the 1990s are not representative of earlier times. The 1990s were an exceptional period in Cameroon's history, similar to the late 1950s and early 1960s that witnessed the country's struggle for independence and the temporary upsurge of socio-political turmoil and rebellion (cf. Ardener 1962, 1967: 302-309, Boutrais 1995/96: 143-152, Njeuma 1995). In securing their needs, Cameroonians later resorted to alternative strategies that were shaped by the national political and constitutional frameworks eventually established in the early 1970s. Similarly, in the late 1990s Cameroonians adopted novel strategies of negotiating individual and group interests, capitalising on constitutional changes, international connections, and global discourses.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the national political background to this study and to familiarise the reader with the Misaje area, the primary research site.

While in my research I concentrated on developments on the local level, it is crucial to view current inter-group relations as embedded in their historical context and in national and international politics. The political history of Cameroon outlined in this chapter provides the necessary background to all subsequent explorations, and

will frequently be alluded to. My focus is on the historical emergence of cultural and ethno-regional units of identification and their deployment in the context of Cameroon's political liberalisation in the 1990s. While my historical description is largely based on literature analysis, it reflects my own experiences of living in Cameroon during the early 1990s.

In the second part of the chapter I will introduce my research site Misaje in its geographical, administrative, and historical dimensions. Furthermore, I will describe the ethnic composition of Misaje Town on the basis of a village survey conducted by my research team. This will serve as a heuristic device to illustrate the ethnic and cultural complexity of the fieldsite, while the historical emergence of the respective ethnic categories will be discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 7.

2.1 Political history of Cameroon

In order to understand the multiplicity of ethnic, regional, cultural, religious, linguistic, political, socio-economic, and other labels that individuals in the research area use to identify themselves and others, it is important to embed them in the country's historical and political trajectories. The following historical sketch will provide an idea of the identifications and divisions that have emerged or have been introduced over time and are still relevant today. My geographical focus lies on the northwestern part of Cameroon which is known as the Western Grassfields and largely corresponds to the current administrative unit of the North West Province (map 2.1).

2.1.1 Brief political history of Cameroon until 1990

The first Europeans to reach the coast of Cameroon were Portuguese in the 15th century. Their appellation *Rio de Camaroes*, meaning Prawn River, for the Wouri Estuary gave the country its current name (Ardener 1962: 341).

In the 18th and 19th century Cameroon was characterised by patterned population movements, trade relations, and the southward expansion of Islam (Nkwi & Warnier 1982: 12-78, Warnier 1985). In 1884 the German colonial power established the German protectorate *Kamerun* and put a halt to population movements and inter-group warfare.



Map 2.1: Administrative structure of Cameroon

In 1889 the German explorer Eugen Zintgraff undertook the first excursion to the western hinterlands, which became known as *Grasland* in German or Grassfields in English due to its high altitude and grassy terrain (Chilver 1966, Nkwi 1987: 11-13).

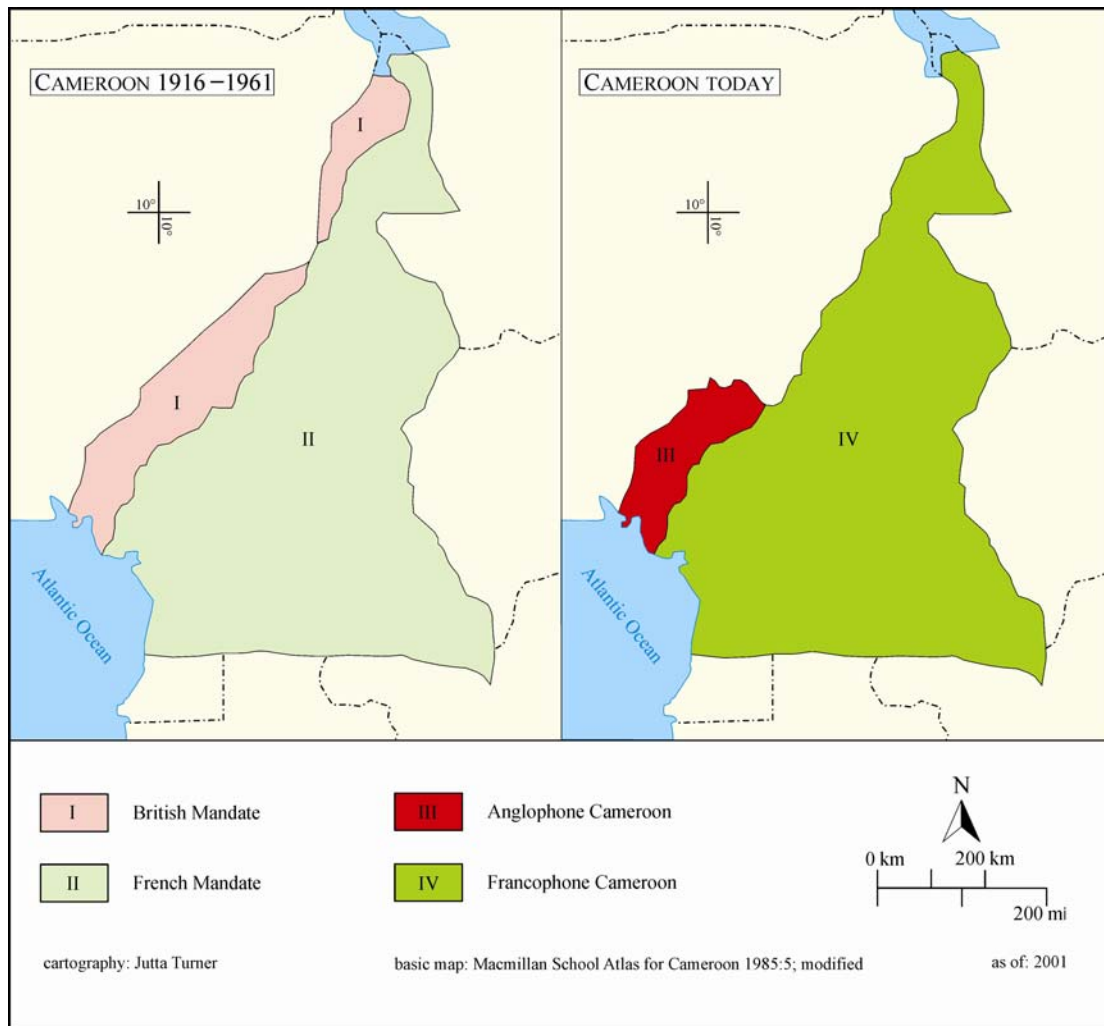
In 1919 the German protectorate *Kamerun* was split and placed under the mandate of the French and British colonial powers. While the larger part (432,000 km²) went to France, the western region (88,000 km²)⁷ came under British mandate and was annexed to the British colony of Nigeria (Haaf & Fondö 1992: 2) (map 2.2). The French mandate was called *Cameroun*, the British became known as the Southern and Northern Cameroons (cf. Ardener 1962: 341). This political division also affected the Grassfields. While the eastern part was located in the French administered zone, the Western Grassfields came under British control.

The Grassfields formed both a geographical and cultural unit. Their population groups shared similar socio-political institutions and economic activities that distinguished them from their Muslim neighbours in the north, and from the segmentary forest and coastal peoples in the east and south of Cameroon. Until today, the Grassfields are renowned for their chiefdoms, masquerades, linguistic diversity, and agricultural production. In the early 20th century, however, the eastern and western parts of the Grassfields underwent diverging historical trajectories. The Bamoun, the largest chiefdom located in the Eastern Grassfields, collectively converted to Islam under the leadership of their paramount chief Njoya (Wazaki 1992: 331). Moreover, with the transition from the German to the French and British colonial mandate, the Western and Eastern Grassfields were exposed to differing systems of administration and the introduction of different official languages. In accordance with the French system of centralised administration, the population of the Eastern Grassfields were grouped in two ethnic categories, namely Bamoun and Bamiléké. The term Bamiléké had been introduced in the German colonial period and was maintained by the French as an ethnonym for the many polities in the southern half of the Eastern Grassfields (cf. Hirsch 1987: 28-29, Tardits 1960: 9-10). French was established as the official language and complemented the many local languages and dialects. The British applied a system of indirect rule in their mandate territory, administering the population through native authority areas (Chiabi 1989). They

⁷ This number refers to both the Southern and Northern Cameroons. Since parts of the former Northern Cameroons joined Nigeria after independence, contemporary Anglophone Cameroon is considerably smaller (approx. 42,000 km²) (Ardener 1967: 285).

grouped the polities of the Western Grassfields along the criteria of shared migration history, and linguistic and cultural similarities into five ethnic categories, namely Aghem, Bali, Mbembe, Tikar, and Widekum (Chilver & Kaberry 1967, Kaberry 1968 [1952]: 2). While they introduced English as the official language, Pidgin English became the *lingua franca*, which had been the language of the intercontinental slave trade and was popular in the coastal areas (Ardener 1987: 297, Le Vine 1964: 18).

In 1960 French Cameroon attained independence and Ahmadou Ahidjo, a political ally of the French and a member of the FulBe ethnic group of northern Cameroon, was made president of the Republic of Cameroon. The British mandate continued until 1961 and ended in a plebiscite organised by the United Nations in which the population of British Cameroon was given the option to choose between integration with the Federation of Nigeria and reunification with Cameroon. While the northern region opted for integration with Nigeria, the southern part voted for joining the Republic of Cameroon (map 2.2). The country was turned into a Federal Republic with distinct administrative and legal frameworks in the Anglophone and Francophone parts (Ardener 1962, 1967, Chem-Langhee 1995, Njeuma 1995, Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 22-50).



Map 2.2: Transition from colonial to post-colonial Cameroon

Ahidjo's vision of Cameroon was not one of a federal but unitary state in which emphasis was laid on nation-building and the cultivation of a single national identity (Bayart 2002 [1978], Takougang & Krieger 1998: 47-58). In 1972 Ahidjo abolished Cameroon's federal constitution and renamed the country the United Republic of Cameroon. He administratively divided the Anglophone part, creating the South West and North West Provinces, while Francophone Cameroon comprised five administrative units. In promoting an ideology of national unity, Ahidjo pursued a strategy of ethnic and regional balance and recruited representatives of all areas and population groups into his political elite (Kofele-Kale 1986, Mehler 1993: 81-82, Y. Monga 2000: 725-726). Local organisations of an ethnic, regional or confessional nature were branded as politically dangerous and actively suppressed. Ahidjo was also opposed to the idea of a multi-party system and transformed Cameroon into a single-

party state. In 1966 he established the Cameroon National Union (CNU) as the country's sole and ruling party with himself as president.

Ahidjo's rule has been characterised as oppressive, authoritarian, and hegemonic (e.g. Bayart 1984 [1979], 2002 [1978], Joseph 2002a [1978]: 39-40, Médard 1977: 40-42). By co-opting potential political opponents and by the use of severe repression, he established a regime in which open criticism was inadmissible. In the 1970s focus was laid on Cameroon's economic development, namely its agricultural and industrial production, and the exploitation of oil reserves discovered in the western and coastal areas. Cameroon advanced to an economically and politically stable country, acclaimed and supported by its European allies, particularly France (Joseph 2002a [1978], 2002b [1978], Konings 1996: 244). Concurrently, Cameroon's political elite was increasingly tempted to exploit its privileged position and to partake in "the politics of the belly" (Bayart 1993).

In 1982 Ahidjo resigned from the post of president and was succeeded by Paul Biya, his close collaborator and a member of the Beti ethnic group of southern Cameroon. Biya largely sustained Ahidjo's ideal of a unitary state, but promised a more tolerant and democratic regime (Mehler 1993, Takougang & Krieger 1998: 63-113). The early years of Biya's rule were characterised by his efforts to dissociate himself from his predecessor. As an expression of his vision of a democratic society, he renamed the state party the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and assigned it the motto 'Union, Progress and Democracy'. In 1984 he changed the name of Cameroon from the United Republic to the Republic of Cameroon. He increased the number of provinces from seven to ten (two Anglophone and eight Francophone provinces) and considerably expanded the country's political and administrative apparatus (Jua 1991). Similar to his predecessor, Biya stressed national unity over regional, ethnic or religious factionalism. However, by promoting the enrolment of southern Cameroonians, mostly members of his own ethnic group, he encouraged ethnic favouritism and resentment (Azevedo 1995: 269, Mehler 1993: 83-84, Takougang 1993: 95-96, Takougang & Krieger 1998: 93-97).

Biya's regime significantly benefited from Cameroon's economic boom of the 1980s, led by the discovery of oil in the coastal areas in 1977. His political shortcomings eventually became evident when, by the end of the 1980s, Cameroon, like many African countries, faced a severe economic crisis. Factors leading to the crisis included the drastic drop in world market prices for oil and cash crops, the

blatant misappropriation of government funds by civil servants, and the overwhelming investment of Cameroonian capital in foreign countries (Jua 1991, Takougang & Krieger 1998: 97-102, van de Walle 1994). In 1988 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed a Structural Adjustment Programme on Cameroon that, among other things, included drastic cuts in the state budget, the restructuring of the administrative and banking systems, and the privatisation of parastatal corporations. Two years later, the international community of donors proclaimed political liberalisation as an additional prerequisite for future aid to Africa (Konings 1996, Takougang & Krieger 1998: 103). In response to substantial internal and external pressure, Cameroon eventually embarked on a democratisation process in 1990, which brought about significant changes in the political, economic, and social sphere both on the national and local level.

In the course of Cameroon's history, a number of regional and cultural identities emerged, some of which have retained their significance or have been revived in the past years. The identifications relevant for interlocutors in the research area include Grassfields, Anglophone, and North Westerner identity. While Grassfields identity is rooted in the pre-colonial period and based on shared cultural, socio-political, and economic traits, Anglophone identity is founded on the shared heritage of the British colonial past. North Westerner identity emerged as a result of Cameroon's post-colonial administrative structure and Ahidjo's policy of ethnic and regional balance.

All three identities gained pertinence in the context of Cameroon's democratisation, and have been promoted by various political entrepreneurs. In the following I will describe the major political developments of the 1990s, and discuss the deployment of regional and ethnic identities in national and international politics.

2.1.2 Politics in the 1990s

The 1990s were an eventful and challenging period for many Cameroonians. They experienced the introduction of democratic freedoms and, at the same time, the intensification of social insecurity and economic hardship.

The country's political liberalisation included a number of aspects, such as the rise of party-politics and the proliferation of the private press in the early 1990s (Nyamnjoh 2005a, Takougang 1994). The subsequent years were characterised by the

“politics of belonging” (Geschiere & Gugler 1998, Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998) that fostered the emergence of regional and ethnic elite associations as political pressure groups. By the late 1990s Cameroon’s political transition was completed, and the country was internationally recognised as a multi-party democracy. For many Cameroonians, however, the country’s political transition has been a disappointment, and the initial enthusiasm has been replaced by disillusionment and cynicism (e.g. Nyamnjoh 1999, 2002a).

A second feature of Cameroon’s democratisation process was the heightened degree of militancy and violence both on the side of the population and the government. Political events frequently became unruly and were forcefully counteracted by the government, resulting in the deaths of dozens of civilians and hundreds of irregular detentions (Krieger 1994: 605). In addition, the country’s economy dwindled. While civil servants were confronted with rigorous reductions to their salaries and irregular payments, the devaluation of the franc CFA (*Communauté Financière Africaine*) in 1994 vitally affected all strata of society (Konings 1996, C. Monga 1995).⁸ Opportunism, corruption, and criminal activities flourished in this climate of political mayhem and economic hardship. By the time of my research in the early 2000s, Cameroonians were still confronted with the same socio-economic difficulties. However, their willingness to resolve conflicts through violence had significantly reduced, and alternative strategies, such as political lobbying or litigation, were more readily explored (see chapter 10).

In the following I will describe the political events of the early 1990s in relative detail with the aim of providing the reader with a fair understanding of the socio-political tensions of that period. Secondly, I will illustrate the ensuing politics of belonging by focusing on three ethno-regional movements that emerged in the mid-1990s and – with their claims to exclusive political representation – contributed to the intensification of conflict and competition between population groups. As we will see in subsequent chapters, similar trends are observable in the research area where local population groups increasingly compete over access to natural and state resources via their ethnic elite associations.

⁸ The franc CFA is pegged to the French franc and is used in fourteen African countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comores, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. Different bills are used in the two zones of western and central Africa.

2.1.2.1 Party-politics in Cameroon: events of the early years

International discourses of democratisation and human rights were first taken up in Douala at the beginning of the year 1990, when the lawyer Yondo Black created a non-partisan group to promote the creation of a multi-party system in Cameroon. The state reacted by banning the group and arresting its members on the grounds of holding clandestine meetings and inciting revolt. The court trial received much public attention and stimulated further demands for democratic freedoms in Cameroon (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 103-105). In March 1990 John Fru Ndi, a book store owner in Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province, requested the local government authorities to recognise the foundation of a new political party named the Social Democratic Front (SDF). As the authorities failed to respond to his request, approximately 20,000 SDF militants rallied in protest and officially launched the party in May 1990. The government sent in troops that violently dispersed the meeting and killed six participants. As a result of this incident, John Fru Ndi advanced to a popular resistance leader, and the North West Province became known as the key area of political opposition (Krieger 1994: 608-609). Subsequently, more than 30 opposition parties were founded throughout Cameroon. Concurrently, a multitude of independent newspapers emerged, which spread the news of the latest political developments and criticised the regime (Nyamnjoh 2005a, Takougang & Krieger 1998: 117-123). For example, the acronym CPDM for Cameroon People's Democratic Movement was reinterpreted as *Chop People Dem Moni* (Pidgin English), meaning the party that eats people's money, while SDF came to stand for *Suffer Don Finish* (Pidgin English), the end of suffering. In reaction to overwhelming internal and international pressure, in December 1990 Biya eventually introduced the so-called liberty laws, legalising the formation of political parties, voluntary associations, and press pluralism (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 109-110).

The year 1990 was only the beginning of the struggle over Cameroon's democratisation. In April 1991 a peaceful student demonstration at the University of Yaoundé was forcefully dispersed and six students were killed (Konings 2002). While the government denied any fatalities, the independent press publicised the shocking news. In June 1991 the opposition parties jointly demanded the institution of a sovereign national conference. In a public speech Biya noted that the national conference had no purpose for Cameroon. In response, the opposition called the

population to civil disobedience and initiated a general strike known as 'Operation Ghost Town' (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 126-131). From July to December 1991 all public and private transport and all business activities along the North-South axis from Bamenda to Douala were suspended and confined to weekends. In order to deprive the state of its revenues, tax payments were abandoned and Douala's international port was closed down. Furthermore, the Centre Province, including the national capital Yaoundé, was cut off from its regular food supply from the four southern and western provinces that constitute the country's main food producers. The centre of civil disobedience was Bamenda where thousands of militants attended three rallies weekly. The major opposition parties that supported the strike were the SDF with its stronghold in the North West and South West Provinces, the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU) led by Adamou Ndam Njoya and popular in the West Province, and the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP) prominent in the country's Muslim north and headed by Bello Bouba Maigari. The opposition jointly demanded the reduction of presidential powers, the decentralisation of the national administration, more accountability and transparency of public services, and the acknowledgement and protection of human rights (Krieger 1994: 612). The government's response to the political upheavals was severe repression and the downplaying of the crisis in public. Eventually, Biya negotiated with the opposition to replace the demand for a national conference with legislative elections, and to end the strike. Although the SDF refused to sign the agreement, the strike was finally called off in December 1991.

The year 1992 was characterised by legislative and presidential elections accompanied by heated party-political struggles. The promised legislative elections took place in March 1992, and the ruling party as well as three opposition parties gained representation in the parliament. However, 35 out of 69 registered parties (including the SDF and CDU) boycotted the elections, arguing that Biya failed to implement fair electoral procedures (Krieger 1994: 613-614, Nyamnjoh 2005a: 113, Takougang & Krieger 1998: 142-146). Presidential elections were scheduled for October 1992. This time, the SDF participated in the elections and hopes were raised for their candidate John Fru Ndi. However, official results published in the state newspaper 'Cameroon Tribune' indicated 39% for Paul Biya, 36% for John Fru Ndi, 19% for Bello Bouba Maigari, and 4% for Amadou Ndam Njoya. International election observers stated serious faults with the electoral process which made it

impossible to determine the actual winner (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 149). The elections were followed by political unrest in the SDF-dominated areas. The regime reacted by imposing a severe press ban and a state of emergency on the North West Province that lasted from October to December 1992. Fru Ndi and his close followers were put under arrest in his compound in Bamenda. They enjoyed the support of large parts of the population, among them a group of militant elderly women known as *takumbeng*, who defended the opposition leader from state security forces by the symbolic force of their bare breasts (cf. S.Y. Awasom 2002, Goheen 2001, Hartwig 2005a: 246-261, 2005b).⁹ The state of emergency gave rise to numerous human rights abuses, including four deaths and close to two hundred irregular prison detentions (Takougang & Krieger: 151). While the US, Germany, and the EU threatened to abandon their aid programmes and demanded a clear advancement in the democratic process, France supported the Biya regime throughout the period of political turmoil (Konings 1996, Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 79).

The outcome of the presidential elections of 1992 had a daunting impact on the political spirit of large parts of the population. Many individuals were frustrated with party-politics, and moved their focus from national politics to day-to-day problems and the effects of the country's economic decline. The political parties continued their struggle for the country's democratisation, though on a lesser scale than in the early 1990s. The opposition became increasingly fragmented. The SDF maintained its national position as the primary opposition party, but gradually lost popularity in the Francophone areas. John Fru Ndi remained an icon of Cameroon's political opposition and successfully established diplomatic relations with the US, Britain, and France, which enhanced his status vis-à-vis the Biya government (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 99-101). In 1997 and 2002 a second and third round of legislative elections were held, alongside presidential elections in 1997 and 2004. Although the opposition raised concerns about the transparency and fairness of the electoral process, no violent encounters occurred. In both presidential elections Biya emerged as the winning candidate. According to the official results of 2004, he received 75%

⁹ *Takumbeng* is an equivalent to the better known *anlu*, a women's socio-political institution of protest that exists in many Grassfields groups. Its original function is to castigate crimes directed against women (see e.g. Hartwig 2005a: 107-120). In the national political arena, Grassfields women have used *anlu* and *takumbeng* to corroborate their party-political sympathies. In the late 1950s, for example, the women of Kom practiced *anlu* in confronting the British administration and supporting reunification with Francophone Cameroon (cf. Chilver 1989, Konde 1990, Ottiger 1994: 113-146, Ritzenthaler 1960, Westermann 1992).

of the votes, while Fru Ndi ended up with 17%, and Adamou Ndam Njoya with 5% (Jeune Afrique 2004: 70-71). Similarly, in the legislative elections of 2002 the CPDM won 150 of 180 seats in parliament (The Herald 03/07/02).

2.1.2.2 The politics of belonging: the rise of ethnic and regional elite associations

Simultaneous with the waning of party-politics from 1993 onwards, new forums of political lobbying gained relevance, namely ethnic and regional elite associations. When Biya provided the legal space for political parties, he also legalised the formation of voluntary, non-partisan associations (Law 90/053 of 19 December 1990). Soon, a multitude of ‘socio-cultural and development associations’ emerged that largely had an ethnic or regional focus and were initiated by elite members of the respective communities.¹⁰ Although these associations were supposed to be non-partisan, they often included a political agenda.

The popularity of ethnic and regional elite associations was primarily the result of the politics of belonging that accompanied the country’s political liberalisation (Bayart et al. 2001, Geschiere 2001a, Geschiere & Gugler 1998, Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000, 2003, Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998, Socpa 2002). The introduction of the multi-party system raised significant problems regarding criteria of electoral entitlement and eligibility (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000: 432). Taking into account the high degree of internal mobility and labour migration, which characterised Cameroon’s economy since the pre-colonial period (Ardener et al. 1960, Konings 2001, Warnier 1985), a number of conflicting interpretations of citizenship and belonging emerged. The interpretation endorsed by the government and enshrined in the revised constitution of 1996 defined belonging in terms of ‘roots’ and ‘origins’ (Geschiere 2001a). Political priority was given to ‘autochthones’ and ‘indigenous minorities’, meaning members of local ethnic groups. ‘Strangers’ or ‘allochthones’ were instructed to vote or stand as candidates in their home area, as they were thought to represent primarily the interests of their group of origin.¹¹ The local population,

¹⁰ An alternative term for this type of voluntary associations is ‘home town associations’ (e.g. Eyoh 1999: 291). I prefer the term ethnic and regional elite associations as it is analytically more precise, and because not all associations define themselves on the basis of a home village or home town. Local notions of ‘elite’ as well as the historical emergence of elite associations in Cameroon will be discussed in chapter 3.

¹¹ The distinction between ‘autochthones’ and ‘allochthones’ draws on similar notions introduced in the colonial period, namely the distinction between ‘natives’ and ‘strangers’ in the British administered area which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

particularly of the southern and coastal areas, welcomed this electoral system, since they experienced the economic and political influence of migrants as a threat to their sovereignty (Konings 2001). In this context, regional and ethnic elite associations increasingly turned into political pressure groups, representing the interests and claims of their respective group to the government and its resources (Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998).

I will briefly outline three ethno-regional movements that attracted national and international attention, and that illustrate the utilisation of regional and ethnic identities characteristic of the politics of belonging. My focus is on Anglophone Cameroon and shifting emphases on Anglophone, Grassfields, and North Westerner identities.

Anglophone movement

The Anglophone movement started in the early 1990s with the registration of a number of voluntary associations that claimed to promote the distinct interests and identity of Anglophone Cameroonians. The label Anglophone was used to refer to the shared language and political culture of the population of the current North West and South West Provinces rooted in its shared experience of British colonial administration (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 216-218). The SDF initially identified itself with the Anglophone cause; but as the party gained support in other parts of the country, it increasingly claimed to represent national rather than regional interests (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 79-82).

In 1993 the first all-Anglophone conference was held in Buea in the South West Province, which was attended by approximately 5,000 participants. They revived the post-independence debate on the constitutional status of Anglophone Cameroon, and began to draft a new federal constitution.¹² In 1994 the second all-Anglophone conference took place in Bamenda and led to the creation of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) which advanced to the acting body of the Anglophone movement. In the same year Biya created a Constitutional Consultative Committee. To the frustration and anger of many Anglophones, he appointed no representatives of the SCNC. In response, the SCNC changed its strategy; it no longer demanded a

¹² Eyoh (1998a, 1998b) provides an overview of the different federal constitutional variants that were discussed among Anglophones.

federal solution but the independence of Anglophone Cameroon (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 219-220). In 1995 SCNC proponents effectively organised a signature referendum in the South West and North West Provinces and presented their concern to international organisations, including the United Nations and the Commonwealth. Their mission was only partially successful. While the international community acknowledged the existence of an 'Anglophone problem' and encouraged the Biya regime to enter meaningful negotiations, they did not endorse secessionist ambitions (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 94-101).

Biya responded to the Anglophone movement with disregard and repression, and capitalised on existing internal divides (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 224-229, 2003: 108-138). He took advantage of rivalries over national political representation between South Westerners and North Westerners, and appointed South Westerners into leading positions previously occupied by their northwestern counterparts. Similarly, he exploited party-political differences by promising political posts to CPDM supporters. Finally, while disacknowledging federal or secessionist approaches, he offered negotiations with proponents of a limited decentralisation. With his strategy of divide and rule, Biya further substantiated internal divisions with the effect that the Anglophone movement gradually lost its unity and strength (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000). When in 1999 the SCNC proclaimed the independence of Southern Cameroon and in 2001 formed a provisional administration, it received only limited approval from the Anglophone population. However, the struggle for the recognition of Anglophone identity is ongoing and has gradually shifted from the political to the virtual and artistic domain (Jua & Konings 2004).

Grand Sawa movement

The term Sawa initially was used by the indigenous population of Douala to refer to themselves as 'coastal people' in distinction to the 'people of the hinterlands'. The ethnonym later was extended to embrace culturally related ethnic groups in the coastal areas of the Littoral and South West Provinces. The Grand Sawa movement was founded in the mid-1990s as an alignment of the elites of the coastal peoples of the two neighbouring provinces. Its aim was to counteract the perceived political and economic domination by resident migrants from the North West and West Provinces (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 118, Y. Monga 2000: 733).

The movement started off in Douala in response to the municipal elections of 1996. Most Sawa elite members were in support of the ruling party and were concerned about the success of the SDF candidates, which they attributed to the strong presence of Grassfields migrants in the coastal areas. They filed a petition with the government, demanding the protection of the indigenous population from political domination by 'strangers'. This demand corresponded to changes in the new constitution instituted in the same year. Biya responded in favour of their demand, which provided him with an opportunity to defy the opposition. He appointed local elite members into government positions who, in return, lobbied among their ethnic fellows in favour of the ruling party (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000: 431-432, Konings 2001: 187-188).

The Grand Sawa movement did not only have a considerable impact on party-politics in the coastal areas, but also intersected with the Anglophone movement. As it capitalised on the cultural-regional divide of coastal peoples versus Grassfields peoples, it united Anglophones and Francophones on both sides and thus thwarted Anglophone unity (Konings 2000: 187-188; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 118-119).

Eleventh Province movement

A third movement that gained pertinence in the mid-1990s was the Association of the Elites of the Eleventh Province. Like the Anglophone movement and the Grand Sawa movement, the Eleventh Province movement was concerned with issues of belonging and the representation of its members to the state.

The Eleventh Province movement was founded by descendents of Francophone immigrants who settled in the Anglophone South West Province during the colonial and post-colonial period. In the context of the politics of belonging and the increasing stress on 'roots' and 'origins', these Anglophones of Francophone descent were confronted with their exclusion from both the Anglophone and Francophone community. This became manifest when the South West Elite Association restricted its membership to citizens belonging to one of the region's 'autochthonous' ethnic groups, thereby excluding second and third generation immigrants. In response, the excluded elite members founded an association which they enigmatically called 'the Eleventh Province'. They herewith intended to indicate that Cameroon, with its ten provinces, had no political space for individuals whose identity could not solely be

defined in terms of their 'roots' and 'origins'. In a frequently cited interview in 'The Herald', a Cameroonian independent, pro-opposition newspaper, the association's president, Professor Beltus Bejanga, appealed to the government to stop the discrimination of Cameroonian nationals on the basis of distinguishing between 'autochthones' and 'strangers' (Bayart et al. 2001: 184, Geschiere & Gugler 1998: 313-314, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000: 436-437).¹³ His appeal went unheard by the Biya government which endorsed and exploited these distinctions, enshrining them in the Cameroonian constitution.

All three movements responded to and were embedded in the politics of belonging promoted by the current regime. Here it is important to take a closer look at the constitutional changes introduced in 1996, as they formed and still form the basis for claims and counterclaims by regional and ethnic elite associations on the national, regional, and local level.

2.1.2.3 Constitutional changes of 1996

In response to discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights promoted by the United Nations, international donor organisations, and numerous non-governmental associations (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000: 429, 2003: 9-12, Hellman 2003: 9-12, Kuper 2003), the Biya regime introduced the following clause in the preamble of the Cameroonian constitution:

The State shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law. (preamble 96-6, Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon 1996)

This clause replaced a section in the preamble of the previous constitution of 1972 that emphasised national unity as the country's primary aim, and stated the right of every Cameroonian citizen to settle in any place and move freely regardless of his/her origin (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000: 429).

The constitutional changes of 1996 shifted the stress from national identity to regional and ethnic identities, and thus contributed to an ethnicisation of politics. Furthermore, the formulation used in the new section of the preamble is vague and

¹³ Further information on the Eleventh Province movement is provided by Konings (2001: 185), and Y. Monga (2000: 734).

allows for various interpretations and conflicting claims. While in international discourses of the United Nations or the World Bank notions of ‘indigenes’ and ‘minorities’ refer to hunter-gatherer or pastoral populations, they are not defined clearly in the Cameroonian constitution (Bayart et al. 2001: 186, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000: 429). Here, these labels can be claimed by various population groups. The acknowledgement of their status as an indigenous minority, however, seems to depend primarily on the bargaining power of their elite associations, which may include the provision of pro-government votes, as in the case of the Grand Sawa movement, or the backing of international organisations, as attained by the Mbororo association MBOSCUDA discussed in chapter 5. On the other hand, not all groups have been successful in claiming minority status, particularly if their elite’s party-political orientation conflicts with the regime’s preferences, such as in the case of the Anglophone movement.

The constitutional changes of 1996, alongside international discourses on human, minority, and civil rights, have remained pertinent in shaping local strategies of political representation to the state and its resources in Cameroon. Other factors influencing inter-group relations today include the ongoing crisis of Cameroon’s national economy and the widespread practice of corruption or “criminalisation of the state” (Bayart et al. 1999) (see chapter 10).

2.2 The research area

I now turn from the national and international level to the local level, and introduce my fieldsite Misaje in its geographical, economic, administrative, and historical dimensions.

The toponym Misaje stands for both the administrative unit of the Misaje Sub-Division and its headquarter Misaje Town. In my research I focused on the southern half of the Misaje Sub-Division which includes Misaje Town and its surroundings, and henceforth will be referred to as the Misaje area. Since the Misaje area is part of the Western Grassfields and serves as a sample location for studying interethnic relations and identity politics in this part of the country, I will first portray the Western Grassfields in terms of their cultural characteristics and ethnic composition. Secondly, I will discuss geographical features and the administrative structure of the

North West Province. Finally, I will introduce Misaje Town and its surrounding area as the primary locus of my research.

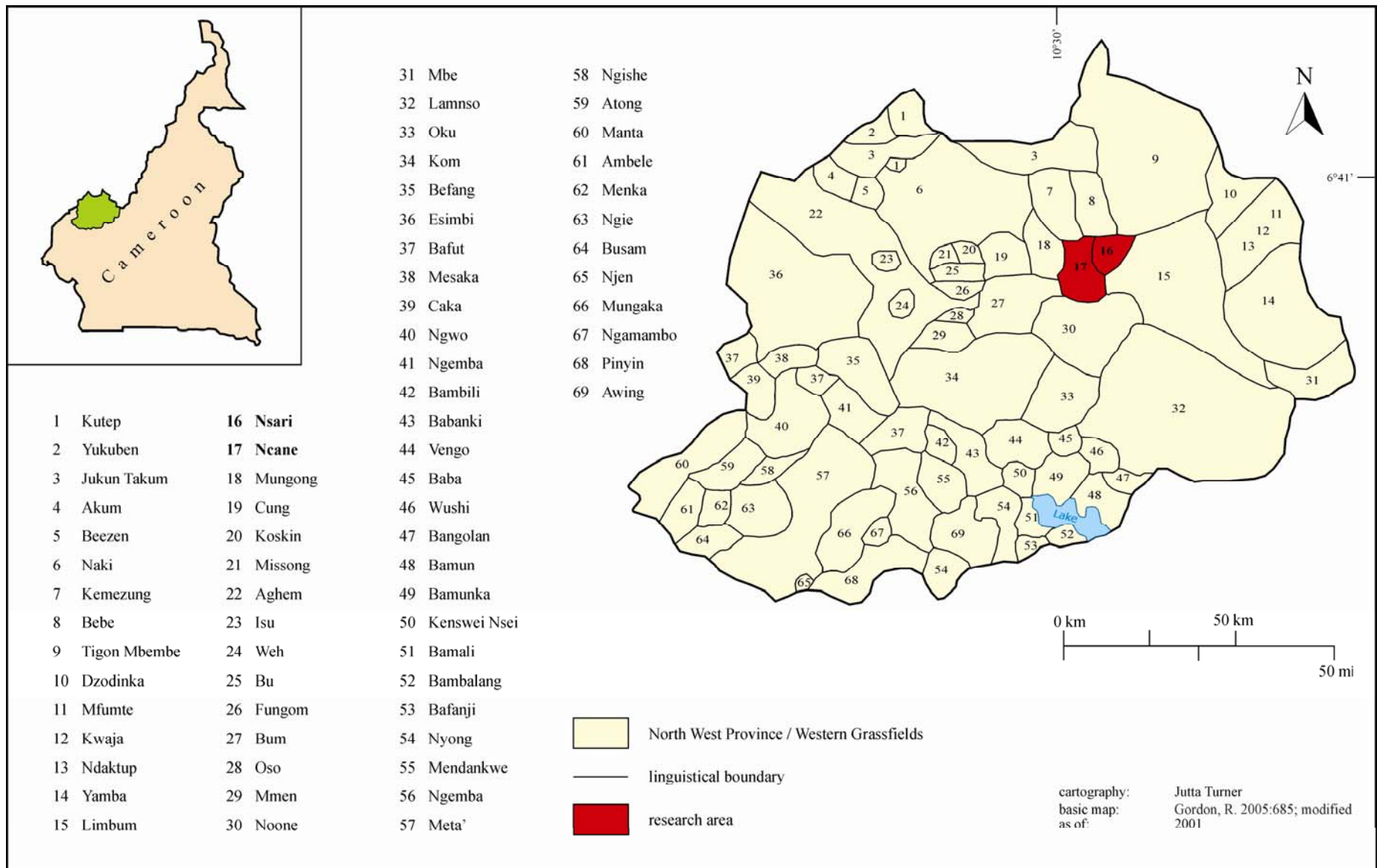
The data on which the following explorations rest are of qualitative and quantitative nature. They are derived from a multitude of sources, including literature and archival research, interviews with local informants on the history of Misaje Town, and a village survey conducted by my research team to illustrate the ethnic composition and spatial organisation of Misaje Town. While the quantitative data derived from government statistics and the village survey should be assessed critically, as they may include a certain degree of imprecision, they still provide us with a valid idea of the relational dimensions of the population groups in the research area.

2.2.1 Cultural features and ethnic composition of the Western Grassfields

As explained above, Grassfields groups form a cultural unit. They are organised in more or less hierarchical chiefdoms and confederations with a variety of political institutions. The largest and most prominent chiefdoms in the Western Grassfields are Bafut, Bali-Nyonga, Kom, Mankon, Nkwen, and Nso. There are also many smaller polities, among them the Nchaney and Bessa, who are the ‘indigenous’ or local population groups of the Misaje area.

A second commonality shared by the peoples of the Western Grassfields is ancestral beliefs that play a significant role in the groups’ self-understanding and socio-political organisation (see chapter 4). Furthermore, the majority of Grassfielders are farmers. Crops grown in the research area include a variety of cereals, tubers, plantains, pulses, gourds, greens, vegetables, fruits, sugar cane, kola nuts, oil palms, and coffee (Kaberry 1968 [1952]: 20-21). Animal husbandry of chicken, goats, sheep, and pigs is a popular complementary activity (Warnier 1985: 35-53). A few individuals also engage in cattle husbandry (see chapter 6).

Another characteristic of the Cameroon Grassfields is its linguistic diversity. In the whole of Cameroon more than 280 language and dialect groups have been identified (Gordon 2005: 56-74). The highest concentration is in the Western Grassfields with roughly seventy language and dialect groups (map 2.3). Most Grassfields languages are only partially mutually comprehensible, and their speakers are generally multilingual.



Map 2.3: Language and dialect groups of the Western Grassfields

Grassfields languages formerly were classified as Semi-Bantu (Johnston 1922). By now, this classification is outdated and they have been identified as members of the Niger-Congo *phylum*, therein the Benue-Congo family and the Southern Bantoid branch (Greenberg 1963: 6-41). The languages spoken in the Misaje area, namely Ncane (language of the Nchaney)¹⁴ and Nsari (language of the Bessa), are part of the Eastern Beoid cluster (Brye & Brye 2001, Hamm 2002) (see diagram 2.1).¹⁵

There exists a variety of ethnic classifications of Grassfields groups on the basis of historical, socio-political, and linguistic differences. Most commonly the population of the Western Grassfields are grouped into Tikar, Widekum, Mbembe, Bali, and Aghem. Introduced in the colonial period, this classification counts the peoples of the Misaje area as members of the Mbembe ethnic category (Kaberry 1968 [1952]: 3). In this study I do not adopt the colonial system of ethnic classification but consider all polities as distinct Grassfields groups and ethnic units. However, the relevance of the colonial categories for contemporary ethnic identification and self-understanding will be discussed in chapter 4.

The Cameroon Grassfields are generally characterised by a high degree of individual mobility and internal migration. In the pre-colonial period mobility was promoted by inter-chiefdom relations and individuals' participation in a complex system of short and long-distance trade (Nkwi 1987, Warnier 1985). During the colonial and post-colonial period, labour migration to coastal plantations and urban centres in the country's south became common practice (Ardener et al. 1960, Warnier 1993a: 41-65). The effects of these forms of migration are noticeable throughout the Grassfields. In the Misaje area migrants from different parts of the Grassfields constitute a significant part of the population, while many locals have gone to work in the urban and coastal areas.

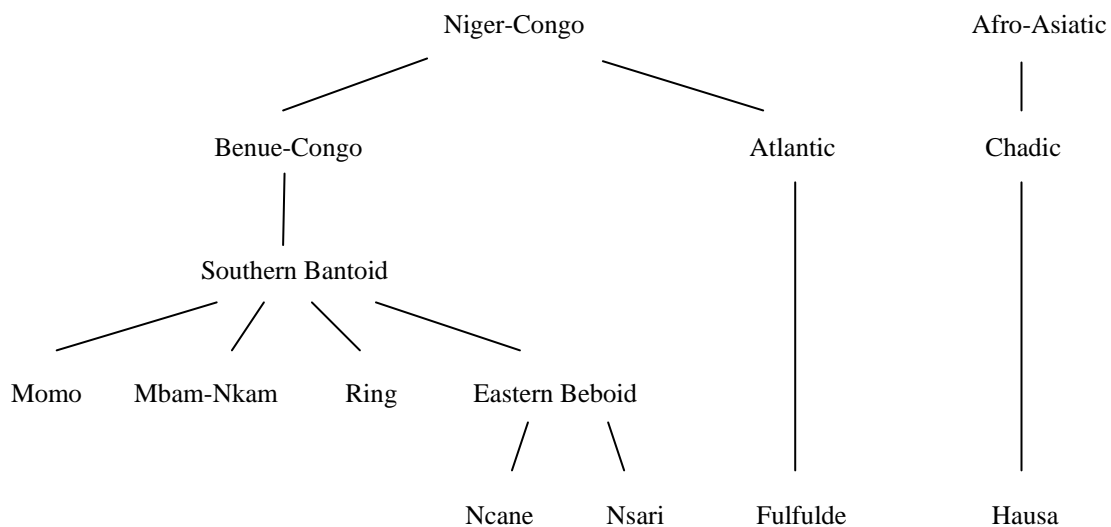
Another factor that contributed to the ethnic diversification of the Western Grassfields was the arrival of Mbororo and Hausa in the early 20th century (see chapters 5 and 7). These two groups are ethnically, culturally and linguistically distinct from Grassfields peoples. While the Mbororo are primarily agro-pastoralists and entered the area in the 1910s in search of fresh pastures for their cattle, the first Hausa immigrants were traders involved in the long-distance commerce between the

¹⁴ Ncane and Nchaney are pronounced the same. But while Ncane is a linguistic transliteration, Nchaney is spelled to match the phonetics of the English language.

¹⁵ Other sub-units of the Southern Bantoid branch are the Momo, Mbam-Nkam, and Ring clusters to which many Grassfields languages belong (cf. Nkwi & Warnier 1982: 17-18, Voorhoeve 1971).

Cameroon Grassfields and urban centres in northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. Both groups are represented in large parts of the Western Grassfields, including the Misaje area. They are Muslims and differ in their economic and socio-political organisation from their Grassfields neighbours. The language of the Mbororo is Fulfulde which – like Grassfields languages – belongs to the Niger-Congo *phylum*. But while Grassfields languages are part of the Benue-Congo family, Fulfulde belongs to the Atlantic family. Conversely, the Hausa language is part of a different *phylum*, namely Afro-Asiatic, and belongs to the Chadic family (Greenberg 1963: 42-65) (see diagram 2.1).

*Diagram 2.1: Grassfields languages, Fulfulde, and Hausa*¹⁶



2.2.2 Ecology and administrative structure of the North West Province

The Cameroon Grassfields constitute not only a cultural but also a geographical unit. They are located on the Western Highlands, at an altitude of 1,000 to 3,000 metres (Boutrais 1995/96: 216-217). The landscape is varied and includes mountain ranges, grass-covered plateaus, wooded valleys, plains, volcanic lakes, and numerous rivers. Thanks to their high altitude, the Grassfields have a relatively pleasant climate with an annual rainfall of 2,000 mm and a moderate dry season period of four to five months (November to March). The soil is fertile, owing partly to its volcanic origins, and supports both agriculture and animal husbandry (Boutrais 1995/96: 235-270).

¹⁶ I would like to thank Claudia Dombrowski and Stefanie Kolbusa for their helpful comments on the linguistic data.

The Misaje area is situated in the northern fringes of the Western Grassfields on a lowland plateau as low as 750 to 1,000 metres. Its climate is hotter than on the neighbouring highlands and more conducive to the spread of human and animal diseases, such as malaria and trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness). At the same time, the Misaje lowlands provide favourable dry season pastures that have attracted many cattle pastoralists (see chapter 5). Significantly, to the west of the Misaje area is the volcanic Lake Nyos (see map 2.4). In 1986 it produced a toxic gas eruption in which approximately 1,700 people and thousands of cattle were killed (Boutrais 1995/96: 243-244, Leenhardt 1995, Nkwi et al. 1986, Shanklin 1988). Today Lake Nyos is under steady surveillance, and an international scientific project to degas the lake has been set up (BBC News 06/02/2001, Halbwachs 2001, Kling homepage n.d.).

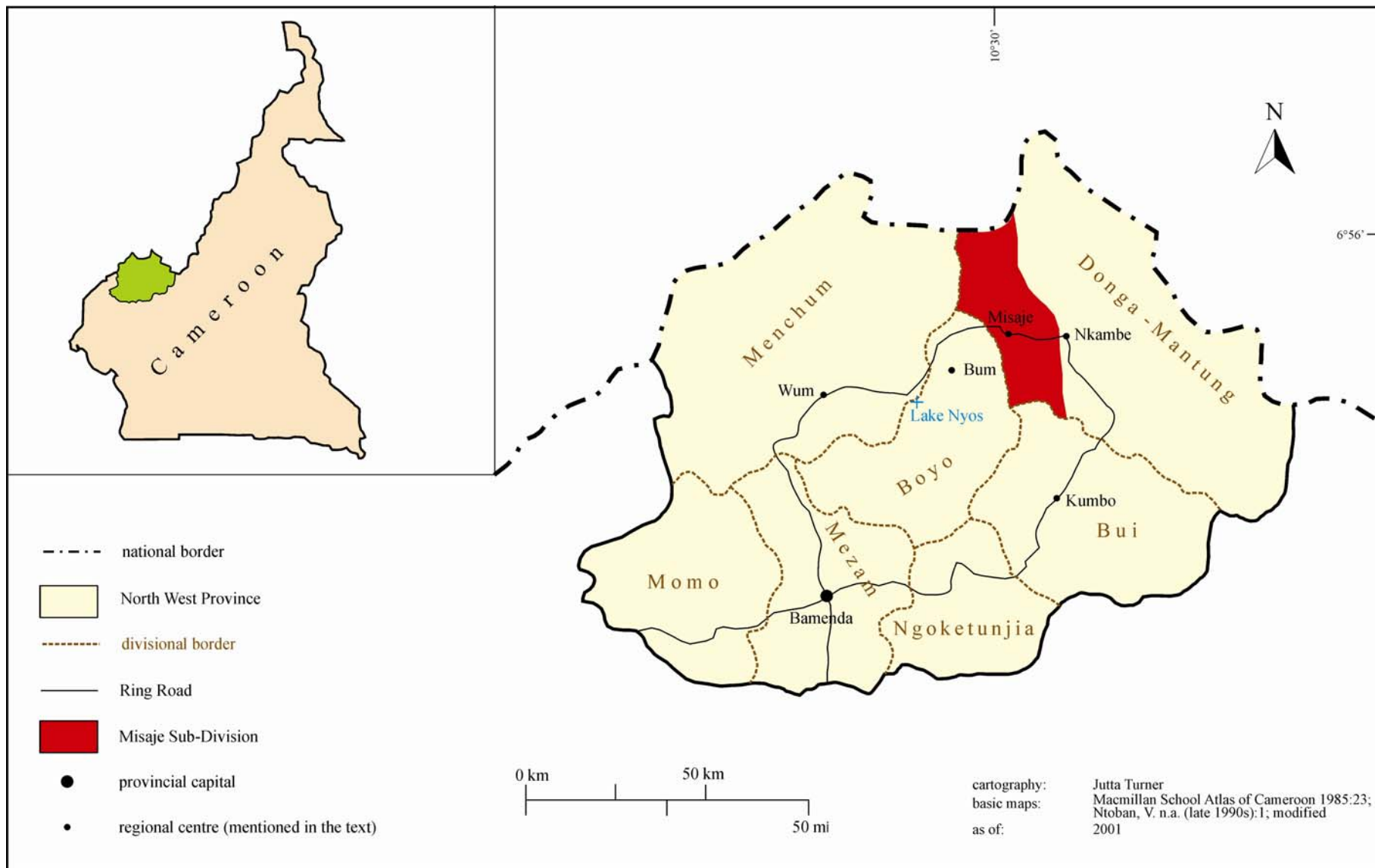
The Western Grassfields correspond to the current administrative unit of the North West Province. As we saw before, Cameroon has a total of ten provinces of which the North West and South West constitute the Anglophone region. According to the latest national census¹⁷, Cameroon by 1987 had a population of more than 10 million, while covering a territory of 475,442 km². The population of the North West Province was slightly above 1.2 million, while its size is 17,810 km². Its provincial capital is Bamenda with a population of approximately 110,000 people by 1987. With a population density of 112 inhabitants/km², as compared to 36 inhabitants/km² for the whole of Cameroon, the North West Province is among the most densely populated areas of the country (national census 1987).

The North West Province is administratively divided into seven divisions (map 2.4).¹⁸ The Misaje area is part of the Donga-Mantung Division in the northeast of the Province, which shares an international border with Nigeria. Its capital is Nkambe, the next larger town to the east of Misaje. Following the national census of 1987, Donga-Mantung had a population of approximately 230,000 people and a size of 4,280 km².¹⁹

¹⁷ The national census data of 1987 are derived from the World Gazetteer homepage: Cameroon, which also indicates the population calculations for 2005. The population of Cameroon in 2005 is estimated at 17 million, of the North West Province at 2 million, and of Bamenda at nearly 400,000 people.

¹⁸ In comparing the administrative categories used in Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon, a division is equivalent to a *département*, and a sub-division is the equivalent of an *arrondissement* (statoids homepage: Departments of Cameroon).

¹⁹ The information is derived from the statoids homepage: Departments of Cameroon.



Map 2.4: Administrative structure of the North West Province

The Donga-Mantung Division is further sub-divided, with Misaje as one of its five sub-divisions. By 1999 the Misaje Sub-Division had an estimated population of slightly more than 33,000 people and a size of 750 km².²⁰

In terms of administrative organisation each division is headed by a Senior Divisional Officer (SDO), while the head of the sub-division is the Divisional Officer (DO). He is assisted by the representative(s) of the forces of law and order. In the case of the Misaje Sub-Division these are the Brigade Commander of the Gendarmerie in Misaje Town and the Commissioner of the Frontier Police in Dumbo.

2.2.3 *The Misaje area*

The Misaje Sub-Division was created in 1993. Before then, the area was administered as part of the Ako Sub-Division that covers the northern part of Donga-Mantung. In the colonial period Misaje was administered as a distinct native authority area, having the same dimensions as the current Misaje Sub-Division (cf. Chilver 1963: 130).

The Misaje Sub-Division includes a total of twelve villages. These are administrative units based on local political structures. Each village is headed by a chief or sub-chief, known by the Grassfields term *fon*²¹, and in charge of the village territory and its inhabitants. The twelve villages belong to four independent polities that constitute distinct Grassfields groups or ethnic units. In addition, there are a number of non-autonomous settlements that count as quarters of the main villages.²²

The following table gives an overview of the size of each village and its ethnic affiliation. The source of the statistics is the Divisional Office in Misaje; the calculation is based on the last population census of 1986. Misaje Town counts as a quarter of Nkanchi and, therefore, is not specified separately in this table.

²⁰ The numerical information is drawn from the population statistics of 1999/2000 provided by the Divisional Office in Misaje (see table 2.1). The size of the Misaje Sub-Division is derived from the ORSTOM Donga-Mantung Gazetteer of villages (1973: 8). The Misaje Council by then was part of the Nkambe Sub-Division, but corresponded in size to the contemporary Misaje Sub-Division.

²¹ *Fon* (also spelled *foyn* or *mfon*) is the generic term and title for 'chief' 'in most Grassfields languages and dialects. It has entered Pidgin English and administrative English, and occasionally Grassfields chiefdoms are referred to as *fondoms*. The term *fon* is also common in academic writings on the Cameroon Grassfields.

²² Three settlements relevant for this study are Misaje and Chako, both considered quarters of Nkanchi; and Bridge Five (also called *Kiloweh* in Nsari) which counts as a quarter of Mbissa (map 2.5).

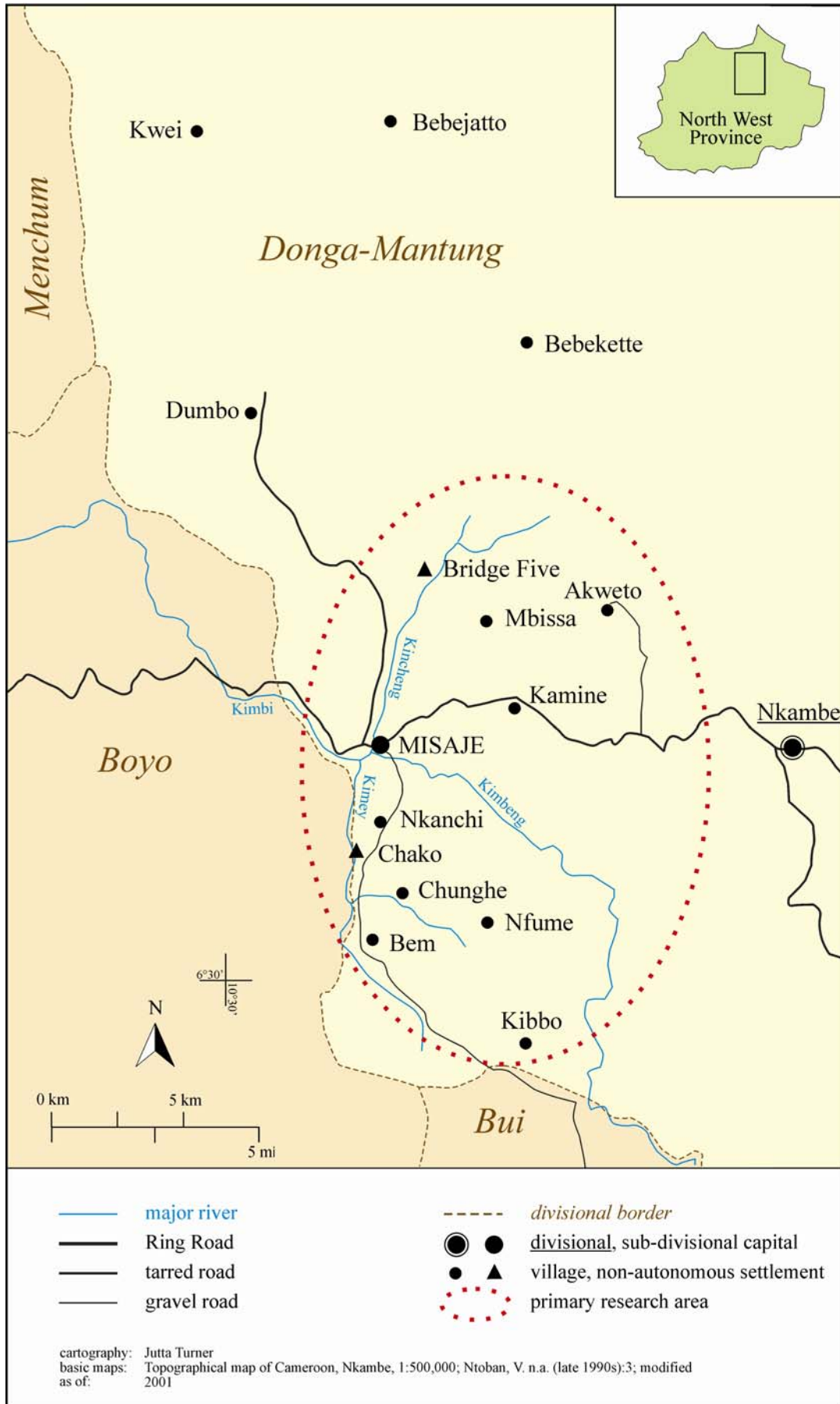
Table 2.1: Population statistics of the Misaje Sub-Division for 1999/2000

local Grassfields groups	villages	population
Nchaney	Nkanchi	10,887
	Bem	1,378
	Kibbo	935
	Chunghe	818
	Nfume	2,489
Bessa	Mbissa	1,502
	Kamine	3,179
	Akweto	3,420
Kemezong	Dumbo	4,976
	Kwei	524
Bebe	Bebekette	1,384
	Bebejatto	1,760
Total		33,252

Population statistics in Cameroon generally omit ethnicity as a valid category of distinction. Hence, it is difficult to assess the size of each ethnic group. I would estimate, however, that local Grassfields groups account for at least 60% of the Sub-Division's population, while the Mbororo may amount to 25%, and Hausa and migrants from within the Grassfields to 5 to 10% each.²³ Compared to their average representation in the North West Province of 5 to 15% for the Mbororo and less than 1% for the Hausa (Boutrais 1995/96: 548, 636), the proportion of Mbororo, Hausa, and Grassfields migrants in the Misaje Sub-Division is relatively high. This is partly due to the attraction of Misaje Town and Dumbo as centres of commerce and cattle trade.

In my research I focused on the southern half of the Misaje Sub-Division that equals to the territory of the Nchaney and Bessa chiefdoms (map 2.5). Special attention was paid to Misaje Town and its immediate surroundings.

²³ These estimates are based on the population statistics of 1999/2000 of the Divisional Office in Misaje, the cattle tax statistics of 2000/2001 of the Misaje Council, and the village survey of Misaje Town of 2001 conducted by my research team. It is extremely difficult to correlate numerical information for the different population groups, as they relate to different units of identification. While administrative population statistics refer to individual inhabitants, cattle tax statistics refer to registered cattle rearers as economic units, and the Misaje village survey refers to residential units. Proportional indications are thus approximate.



Map 2.5: Misaje Sub-Division and research area

2.2.3.1 Historical development of Misaje Town

Misaje Town is not a 'traditional village' with a longstanding history; it is a place of contested claims and multiple origins, dating back only as far as the colonial period. It is located near the Nigerian border and along the Ring Road, the main infrastructural axis of the North West Province (see map 2.4), and has a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan character. Its population amounts to approximately 7,000 people²⁴ and is an agglomerate of members of various ethnic and occupational groups who were mainly attracted by economic opportunities.

Misaje Town is the administrative centre of the Misaje Sub-Division and counts as a quarter of Nkanchi, the head village of the Nchaney chiefdom. Village boundaries are contested by Bessa individuals who claim that Misaje Town is situated on Bessa territory. This dispute goes back to the colonial period and the establishment of Misaje Town as the centre of the Misaje Native Authority Area in the 1930s.

In the following I will provide a historical sketch of Misaje Town on the basis of interviews with local informants and archival documents dating from the British colonial period. To achieve a comprehensive version of the history of Misaje Town, my assistant Jonathan and I discussed the topic with fifteen interlocutors of different ethnic and gender backgrounds. Their accounts here are merged into a single narrative. Furthermore, I cross-checked and complemented their information with data derived from colonial documents stored in the Cameroon National Archives in Buea. Some of the information introduced here will be taken up in the chapters 4, 5, and 7 on the historical establishment of the Nchaney, Mbororo, and Hausa in the Misaje area, albeit from different perspectives.

In the 19th century the area now occupied by Misaje Town was used as a hunting ground by inhabitants of the nearby villages Nkanchi and Mbissa. By then the area was still wooded and hosted a number of wild animals, mainly game but also larger ones, such as bush cows and possibly elephants.²⁵ By the early 20th century, a few Nchaney families transferred from Nkanchi to the Misaje area and began to cultivate

²⁴ The estimate of 7,000 inhabitants is based on the population statistics of the Misaje Sub-Division that indicates a total of roughly 11,000 inhabitants for Misaje Town and Nkanchi, including Mbororo pastoralists who live on the adjacent grazing lands.

²⁵ Bush cows are also known as dwarf cattle (Boutrais 1998). They were common all over the Grassfields and counted as royal property. By now only a few are left, and none in the Misaje area. The presence of elephants was reported for the neighbouring Mbembe area until the early 20th century (Chilver 1977: 163) and may well apply to the Misaje lowlands until the late 19th century.

farms. Their little hamlet was called *kiji*, a Ncane term meaning ‘meeting place’ or ‘group’. In the 1920s Hausa merchants, who partook in the long-distance trade linking the Grassfields and the Benue and Adamaoua²⁶, established a small settlement at Nkanchi. They gave Kiji a Hausa name, calling it *yelwa*, which means ‘freedom, wealth, abundance’ (Kirk-Greene 1969: 273); an appellation frequently given to prospective settlement areas.²⁷ Around the same period, Mbororo pastoralists began to settle on the nearby highlands. They practiced a seasonal transhumance and spent the dry season in the lowlands of Dumbo and Kiji. Most probably, they were responsible for coining the name Misaje, which eventually became the established toponym. According to current folk etymology, Misaje is a derivate of *mai saje*, a Hausa term meaning ‘master of the beard’. This nickname was given to a prominent Bessa businessman who operated a rest house for traders and travellers in Kiji. His business was also frequented by Mbororo herdsmen on transhumance, and soon the hamlet was popularly known as ‘the place of *mai saje*’, in short Misaje.²⁸

In the 1930s the British colonial administration decided to set up a customary court and a native authority area of the same dimensions as the current Misaje Sub-Division. The court was first installed at Bridge Five, a place on Bessa territory that was considered a central location between Dumbo, Nkanchi, and Akweto, the three major settlements of the planned native authority area. They later realised that the place was too remote and relocated the court at Misaje, which by then was still a minor settlement. In his ‘Intelligence Report on the Mbembe and Nchanti areas’ of 1935 the Assistant District Officer R. Newton supported the formation of “a new Native Authority Area which, for want of a better name, is to be called Misaje at the request of those concerned.” (Newton 1935: 50). The Resident of the Cameroons Province approved the creation of the Misaje Native Authority Area but commented that “the Misaje N.C. [Native Court] is apparently to be in some indefinite place in the bush, a ‘pis aller’ which is generally unsatisfactory, but perhaps cannot be helped.” (Resident of the Cameroons Province, Buea 1937: 2)

²⁶ Following Mohammadou (1981) I distinguish between Adamaoua and Adamawa. Adamaoua, the term I commonly use in this study, refers to the geographic and administrative unit of the Adamaoua Highlands and the Adamaoua/Adamawa Province in contemporary Cameroon. Adamawa, on the other hand, is a historical term and refers to the Adamawa Emirate of the 19th century which covered regions located in contemporary Nigeria and Cameroon.

²⁷ Schildkrout (1978: 74) provides corresponding examples from Nigeria and Ghana.

²⁸ A concurrent version to this etymology was reported to M.D.W. Jeffreys during his administrative tour in the late 1930s (Jeffreys 1951: 112).

Local versions of the court's relocation focus on the competition between Nchaney and Bessa interlocutors about the court's establishment at Misaje and Akweto respectively. The following story represents the Nchaney view and was reported by *fon* Richard Chefon, the chief of Nkanchi.

When they went out with the British to plant the palm [indicating the new location of the customary court] and approached the site of Akweto, the Nchaney bewitched Pa Dongo [the representative of the Bessa who also acted as translator for the British]. They caused him to have a runny stomach so that he was forced to retreat to the bush. In the meantime the team passed Akweto and reached Misaje. The Nchaney convinced the British that this was the intended site and the palm was planted. Pa Dongo requested to change the site again, but it was impossible to replant the palm. That was around 1938 or 1940. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 13/01/02)

Bessa informants contested the validity of this story, but acknowledged inter-group competition over the court's relocation.

Once the customary court was established at Misaje, it became the centre of the area and attracted more settlers. A few years later, the Hausa community at Nkanchi transferred to Misaje on demand of the colonial administration. More settlers were to join in the course of the construction of the Ring Road in the late 1940s and 1950s. Workers were recruited from surrounding villages and throughout the Grassfields; many came from Nkambe, then the largest settlement in the northern part of the Western Grassfields. Some of these workers settled permanently in Misaje and engaged in local business activities and/or farming. Around the same period, a second group of Mbororo pastoralists entered the region, and were encouraged by the British administration to settle in the grassy lowlands of the Misaje Native Authority Area. Consequently, the cattle business flourished in the region and attracted Hausa and Grassfields traders. The people of Pinyin, a village in the southwest of the Western Grassfields, were particularly involved in cattle trade, and a few established themselves in Misaje.

All these developments turned Misaje Town into a conglomerate of people from within and without the region, and supported its economic growth. In the early 1970s *fon* Michael Fuma, then chief of Nkanchi, transferred his palace to Misaje. In 1975 the SODEPA (*Société de Développement et d'Exploitation des Productions Animales*) cattle ranch was opened at Dumbo, a major parastatal enterprise that produces

breeding stock and beef for the national market.²⁹ While the establishment of the SODEPA ranch caused the displacement of many Mbororo settlers, it attracted technicians and business people from all over Cameroon to the area, and contributed to improving the region's economy and infrastructure.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s Misaje had developed into a small town with a flourishing economy. Conversely, the area experienced a major downturn in the second half of the 1980s as a result of the Lake Nyos disaster of 1986. While the poisonous gas emission did not reach as far as Misaje Town, the incident seriously affected business operations in the northern region of the North West Province. Many migrants and business people decided to return to their home areas due to the loss of capital and customers, or in fear of further deadly gas emissions. By the late 1980s the town's economic stagnation and the decrease in population were further reinforced by the nationwide economic depression.

In the 1990s Misaje Town, as most places in the North West Province, experienced vicious party-political struggles and the effects of the politics of belonging. At the same time, it benefited from administrative changes, in particular the creation of the Misaje Sub-Division in 1993, which resulted in the gradual improvement of the town's infrastructure. In the nine years from its creation to the end of my fieldwork in 2002, the Misaje Sub-Division was administered consecutively by four Divisional Officers. The first Divisional Officer (DO) stayed in office from 1993 to 1995. He was an Anglophone from southwestern Cameroon and was generally held in high esteem by the local population. His successor was a Francophone, who was widely disliked and faced considerable difficulties in establishing his authority. Less than a year after his induction, this DO called in the military to disband the political turmoil following the municipal elections of 1996. He was replaced by an Anglophone and native of Nso, one of the major Grassfields chiefdoms that shares a political boundary with the Nchaney. Since the political situation was still tense and fuelled by issues of belonging, the Divisional Officer faced similar difficulties to his predecessor. A crucial conflict which occurred in 1997 and provoked the DO's intervention will be discussed in chapter 3. By the end of the 1990s the political situation had calmed down. When I met the DO at the beginning of my research, he was well established and in familiar terms with the local population.

²⁹ Boutrais (1990: 82-87, 1995/96: 199-200) provides further information on the establishment of the SODEPA ranch at Dumbo.

At the end of his five-year term in Misaje, he was transferred to another Sub-Division in the north of the province whose previous DO in turn was sent to Misaje and inducted in October 2001. The new DO was an Anglophone from the South West Province and quickly familiarised himself with the administrative issues pertinent to the Misaje Sub-Division. During the period of my research, I was able to observe and compare the administrative strategies of both recent Divisional Officers. Their impact on local social relations was considerable, and they will figure prominently in several chapters of this study.

2.2.3.2 *Ethnic composition and spatial organisation of Misaje Town*

In order to substantiate my above description of Misaje Town as an agglomerate of members of various ethnic and occupational groups, I will now analyse the ethnic composition of its population on the basis of a village survey conducted by my research team in 2001. The task of the survey team was to draw a map of Misaje Town in which all independent households were indicated, and to identify the ethnic background of each household head.³⁰ The ethnic or, more accurately, ethno-regional categories used by the team were relatively broad. Furthermore, the information was based on ascriptions by others, namely the members of the survey team. The team was composed of five members, including an Nchaney, Bessa, Hausa, and Mbororo collaborator, and myself. Thanks to my teammates' familiarity with Misaje Town, we were able to identify the ethnic background of most household heads. In cases of uncertainty we inquired the information from neighbours and friends.

Table 2.2: Categories used in the village survey of Misaje Town

major units	ethno-regional categories
local Grassfielders	Nchaney
	Bessa
Grassfields migrants	Wimbum
	Pinyin
	migrants from the Bamenda area (southern North West Province)
	migrants from nearby chiefdoms (northern North West Province)
Muslim population	Hausa
	Mbororo
	Grassfields converts

³⁰ The original draft of the Misaje Town map drawn by Bah Jerome, Haruna Kadiri, Ngeh Jonathan, Talatu Yusufa, and Michaela Pelican is attached in appendix B. On the basis of this draft, the cartographer Jutta Turner designed the maps 2.6 and 2.7, illustrating the ethnic composition and the quarters of Misaje Town.

Local Grassfielders were grouped into the ethnic categories Nchaney and Bessa. Grassfields migrants were grouped into Wimbun, Pinyin, migrants from the Bamenda area, and migrants from nearby chiefdoms. This categorisation is lopsided as it includes ethnic and regional classifications. Wimbun is the official ethnonym of the local Grassfields peoples of the Nkambe area who share the same language called Limbum (Bühler 1998: 56-60). Their territory borders the Bessa area. Many Wimbun were attracted to Misaje Town by the construction of the Ring Road and later by business opportunities. Conversely, Pinyin is a chiefdom in the southwest of the North West Province.³¹ Its people are renowned for their familiarity with animal husbandry (cf. Boutrais 1995/96: 658-659, Warnier 1985: 36-47). Many Pinyin settled in Misaje Town as a result of the flourishing cattle trade and other business activities. Local informants often described the Wimbun and Pinyin as the two major groups of Grassfields migrants and as owning most business places in Misaje Town. Because migrants from other ethnic groups were specified to a much lesser degree, we grouped them into two composite categories; on the one hand, migrants from the Bamenda area (including Bafut, Bali, Meta, and Nkwen), thereby referring to the southern half of the North West Province; on the other, migrants from nearby chiefdoms (including Bum, Dumbo, Kom, Koshing, Mungom, Nso, Oku, and Wum), all located in the northern half of the Province.

The Muslim population we re-divided in three categories, namely Hausa, Mbororo, and Grassfields converts. In our survey the ethnic category Hausa was applied to those individuals who were Muslim town dwellers originating from Nigeria or northern Cameroon. They were distinguished from the Mbororo, who are generally seen as a distinct ethnic category. As informants argued, Mbororo supposedly can be identified by their physiology and their economic specialisation as cattle herders. Most Mbororo, however, do not live in Misaje Town, but in the surrounding grazing area. The few Mbororo households in Misaje Town belong either to individuals whose main compounds are in the grazing area, or who have settled in town to engage in business activities. In grouping Grassfields converts into the category of Muslims

³¹ The people of Pinyin belong to the Ngemba ethnic group. However, in the context of Misaje Town, they generally identify themselves and are referred to as Pinyin rather than Ngemba. Accordingly, in this study I will call them by the toponym rather than their ethnonym.

(rather than identifying them with local or migrant Grassfielders), we followed the practice of local informants.³²

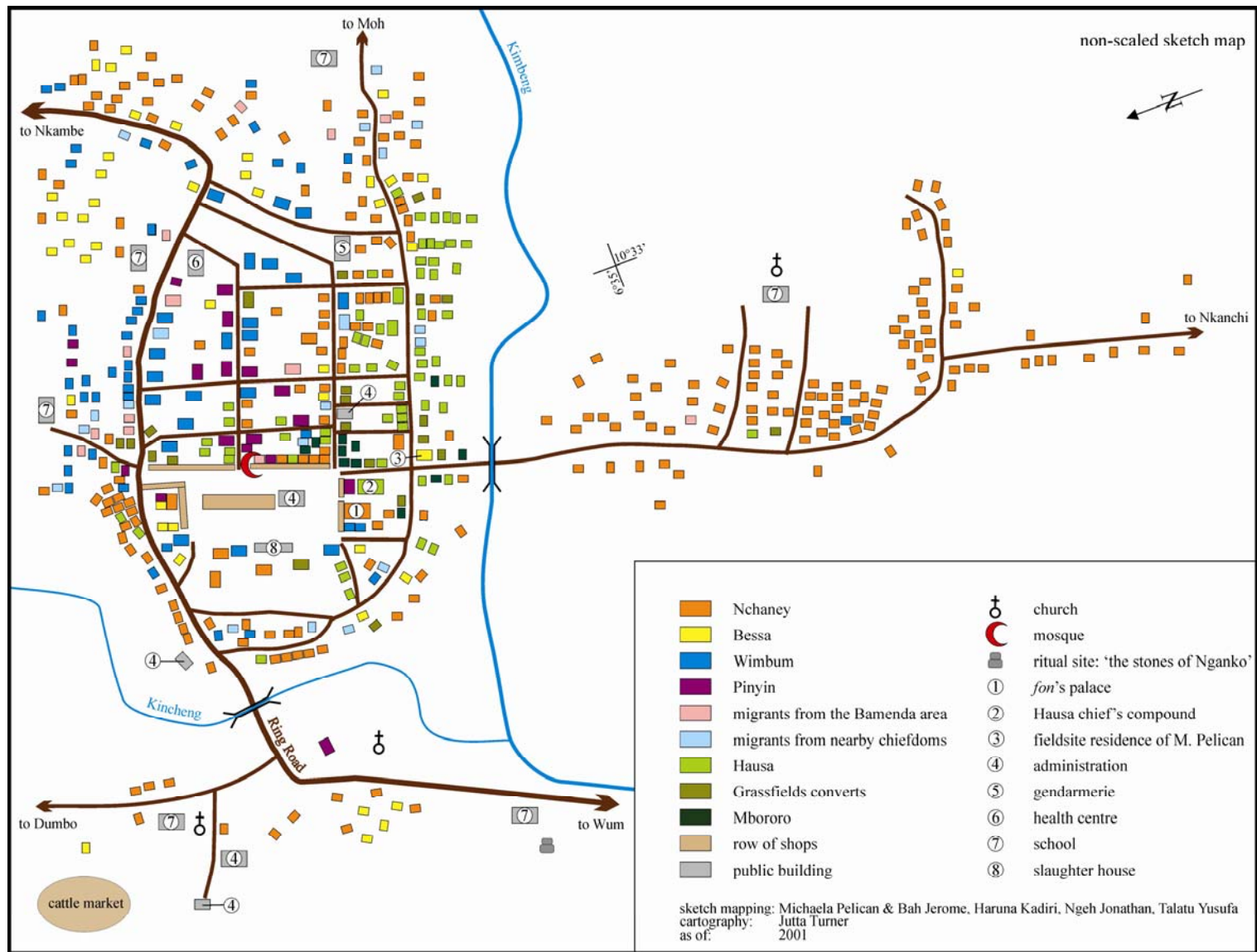
These short clarifications regarding the ethno-regional categories used in our village survey cannot fully explain their historical emergence and complexity. An in-depth analysis of the Nchaney, Mbororo and Hausa ethnic categories will be provided in chapters 4, 5, and 7. At this point, however, the applied system of ethno-regional categorisation serves as a heuristic device to illustrate the ethnic and cultural complexity of the population of Misaje Town (see map 2.6).

Photograph 2.1: Central area of Misaje Town



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje, 24/09/01

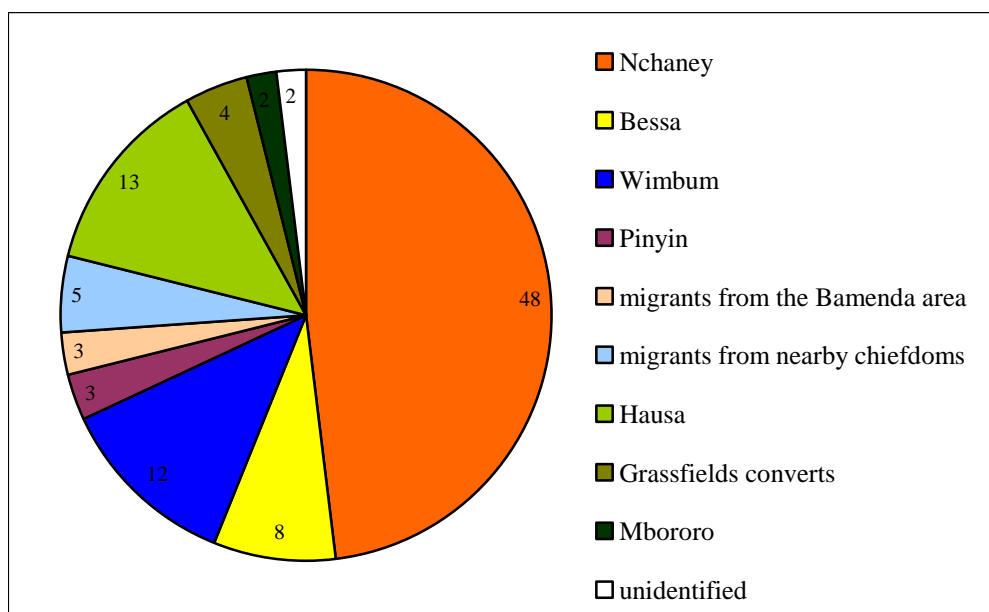
³² Practices of negotiating Grassfielders converts' ethnic identities will be discussed in chapter 7.



Map 2.6: Ethnic composition of Misaje Town

The statistical analysis of the village survey has produced the following results: Misaje Town comprises 481 identified households that equal approximately 7,000 inhabitants. 56% of the households are headed by local Grassfielders, with 48% being Nchaney and 8% being Bessa. The next larger unit is Grassfields migrants who account for 23% of the town's population, namely 12% Wimbun, 3% Pinyin, 3% migrants from the Bamenda area, and 5% migrants from nearby chiefdoms. The Muslim population accounts for 19% of the town's inhabitants, i.e. 13% Hausa, 4% Grassfields converts, and 2% Mbororo. 2% of the population remained unidentified.

Diagram 2.2: Ethnic composition of Misaje Town (in %)



These results give rise to a number of critical comments regarding popular views shared among the population of Misaje Town. The large number of local Grassfielders is not surprising. However, it is noteworthy that the Nchaney population is six times larger than the Bessa population. Consequently, Bessa claims to Misaje Town are not corroborated by their actual settlement pattern.

The second largest unit is Grassfields migrants, who are slightly more numerous than the Muslim population of Misaje. Although Grassfields migrants feature relatively peripherally in the subsequent chapters, I will take the opportunity here to describe the migrant community in more detail. A general feature of the Grassfields migrant community of Misaje Town is the lack of a collective identity which is the result of its complex ethnic composition. Grassfields migrants have in common only

their situation as 'strangers' which for most of them constitutes no significant problem, since their final aim is not to settle permanently in Misaje Town but to return to their home area. They entertain strong social and economic ties with their home region. They generally marry spouses from their home area, and invest in constructing permanent buildings in their respective home villages. While local Grassfielders tend to see Grassfields migrants as 'strangers', they have many socio-cultural practices in common. In the event of opposition to the Muslim community, local Grassfielders readily abandon the distinction between locals and 'strangers' and emphasise the shared cultural heritage of both communities. Similarly, Grassfields migrants see themselves as culturally closer to the Nchaney and Bessa than to members of the Muslim community. At the same time, they often distance themselves from the local Grassfields population, characterising them as indolent, oblivious, and backward, while describing themselves as industrious and dedicated to education and community development. This attitude is most pronounced among migrants from the Bamenda area as well as among Pinyin and Wimbun residents.

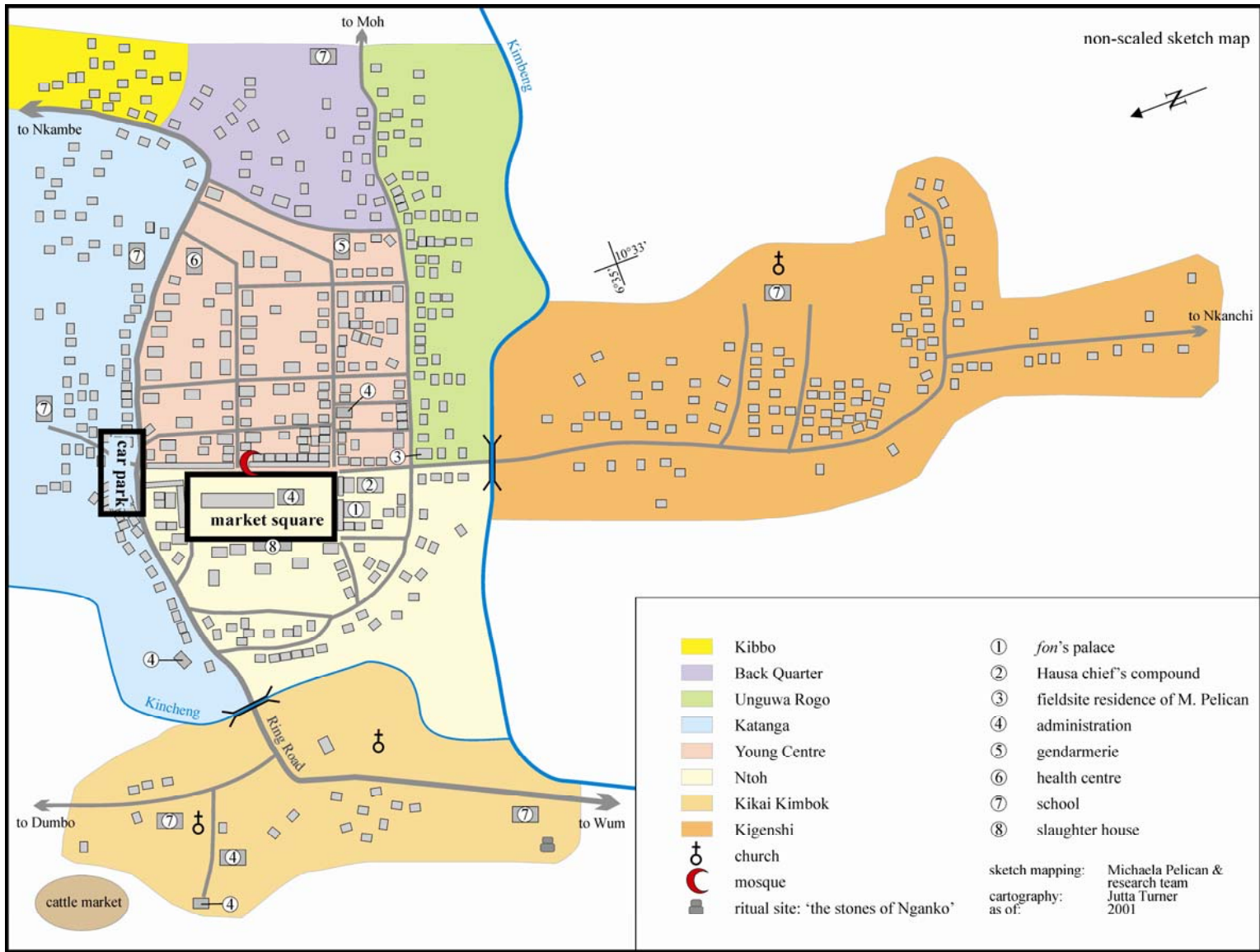
Regarding the numerical composition of the Grassfields migrant community, the most striking feature is the relatively low proportion of Pinyin migrants as compared to Wimbun, who are four times as many. This is particularly surprising, since informants generally described the Pinyin as constituting a considerable section of Grassfields migrants in Misaje Town, while ranking the Wimbun second. Since both groups partake in local business enterprises, the discrepancy between their actual numerical strength and their perceived influence cannot satisfactorily be explained in terms of their economic success. While the Pinyin are numerically few, they communicate a strong sense of unity and solidarity that seems less developed among Wimbun migrants. This difference may be explained by the fact that most Pinyin resident in Misaje Town are related by kinship ties, while the Wimbun group is much more diverse, comprising individuals of different regional and family backgrounds. A second factor supporting the prominence of the Pinyin is their active participation in community activities, such as the village council, church activities, and community development projects. By contrast, many Wimbun migrants prefer to invest in their nearby home area. Finally, while the Pinyin community in Misaje Town includes a number of well-liked individuals, many Wimbun migrants have the reputation of being stingy and asocial.

The third largest unit, with 19% of the population of Misaje Town, is its Muslim community. By far the largest proportion is Hausa. The percentage of Grassfields converts is relatively small, constituting less than a quarter of the entire Muslim community. The number of Mbororo living in Misaje Town is tiny. As a result of their economic specialisation as agro-pastoralists, most Mbororo families reside with their herds in the grazing area. Those settled on Nchaney and Bessa territory constitute an additional population of approximately 4,000 people.³³

Having discussed the numerical dimensions of the population groups of Misaje Town, I will now analyse their spatial distribution. I break down Misaje Town in its quarters, and describe each quarter in its historical development and ethnic composition. As in the above explorations, the information is drawn from interviews with local informants and the village survey of Misaje Town conducted by my research team.

Misaje Town is composed of five distinct quarters named Young, Katanga, Ntoh, Kikai Kimbok, and Kigenshi, which are introduced here in order of their historical development (map 2.7). The first major building of Misaje Town was the customary court established in the late 1930s. It was situated in the contemporary Young quarter. Young is the oldest quarter of Misaje Town, and was given its name by a notable and retired policeman from Kibbo who called it 'his young quarter'. It is also the largest quarter, hosting 46% of the town's population. It includes four sub-sections, namely Young Centre (23%), Kibbo (5%), Back Quarter (6%), and Unguwa Rogo (12% of the overall population of Misaje Town). Young Centre constitutes the town centre and has no distinct name; its ethnic composition is very heterogeneous. The northeastern part of the Young Quarter is called Kibbo, because many of its settlers originally came from the nearby village Kibbo. The quarter is dominated by a majority of Nchaney inhabitants, followed by Bessa and Wimum settlers. The eastern part of Young is called Back Quarter, referring to the quarter behind the customary court. Similar to Kibbo, it is a small quarter and inhabited by a majority of Nchaney, followed by Bessa, Wimum, and Grassfields migrants. The southern section of the Young Quarter is named *unguwa rogo*, a Hausa term meaning 'cassava quarter'.

³³ This numerical assessment is a personal estimate on the basis of the cattle tax statistics of 2000/2001, made available by the Misaje Council (see chapter 4).



Map 2.7: Quarters of Misaje Town

The area was initially used for growing cassava, but was later allocated by the local Grassfields chief to the Hausa community. Unguwa Rogo is clearly dominated by a Muslim majority, followed by local Grassfielders and a few Grassfields migrants.

The northern section of Misaje Town is called Katanga. *Katanga* is a local term for smoked cow skin, a delicacy highly appreciated by Pinyin settlers. As the story goes, Pinyin individuals frequented the compound of an Nchaney notable living in this quarter who sold smoked cow skin. Eventually, the quarter became known as ‘the cow skin quarter’, in short Katanga. The population of Katanga accounts for 19% of the town population and is dominated by Nchaney and Wimbun. To the west of the Young Quarter is Ntoh. *Ntoh* is a Ncane term meaning ‘palace’. It obtained its name when the previous chief in the early 1970s transferred his palace from Nkanchi to Misaje. The compound of the Hausa chief and the market square are also situated in Ntoh. The quarter’s population is relatively small, accounting for 11% of the overall population of Misaje Town. Its ethnic composition is very diverse, with a Grassfields majority joined by Muslim settlers and Grassfields migrants.

Across the River Kincheng, further in the west, is the Kikai Kimbok quarter. It was named after the home village of a popular preacher from the Nso area. With 3% of the total population it is the smallest quarter of Misaje Town. Its inhabitants are mainly local Grassfielders and Bamenda migrants. Finally, in the south of Misaje Town, across the River Kimbeng, is Kigenshi. The quarter is named after the nearby hill, and is situated along the road to Nkanchi. It hosts 21% of the town’s total population and its inhabitants are mainly Nchaney.

To substantiate my statements about the ethnic composition of each quarter, the relevant statistical results of our village survey are presented in the following table.

Table 2.3: Quarters of Misaje Town and their ethnic composition (in %)

quarter	sub-quarter	Nchaney	Bessa	Wimbun	Pinyin	Bamenda migrants	nearby chiefdoms	Hausa	Grassfields converts	Mbororo	n.a.
Young	total	31	8	12	5	3	5	23	7	3	3
	Young Centre	27	3	15	11	4	3	23	8	3	3
	Kibbo	55	23	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
	Back Quarter	43	18	29	0	7	3	0	0	0	0
	Unguwa Rogo	25	7	0	0	2	9	41	10	5	1
Katanga		37	13	28	3	8	7	3	1	0	0
Ntoh		45	6	8	2	0	10	19	6	4	0
Kikai Kimbok		63	31	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kigenshi		95	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	0

While this table shows the ethnic composition of each quarter, it tells us little about the spatial dispersal of each population group. Nchaney inhabitants are dispersed throughout all quarters of Misaje Town. The majority, however, lives in Kigenshi, i.e. on the way to Nkanchi. Similarly, Bessa inhabitants are found in all quarters, except Kigenshi. They tend to gather along the road to the Bessa area. Hausa, Grassfields converts, and Mbororo are mainly found in the Young Quarter, namely in Young Centre and Unguwa Rogo. Regarding the spatial distribution of Grassfields migrants, different patterns are apparent. Wimbum are found in nearly all quarters of Misaje Town, with the majority living in Katanga. Conversely, Pinyin migrants congregate mainly in Young Centre. Migrants from the Bamenda area and from nearby chiefdoms are represented in most quarters.

In concluding the analysis of the village survey of Misaje Town, I will discuss the ethnic distribution of business enterprises. The census carried out by my local survey team indicated a total of 133 business places. The majority are found in the centre of town, namely around the car park and along the market square (see map 2.7). The following table illustrates the range of businesses found in Misaje Town.

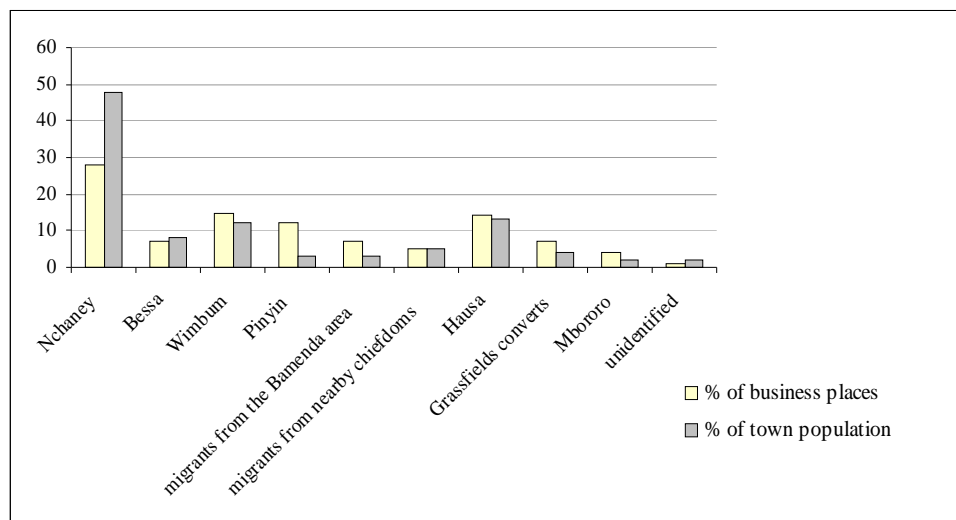
Table 2.4: Business enterprises in Misaje Town

sector	specification	number
general consumption items	provision stores	27
	specialised household item stores	2
gastronomy and entertainment	snack places/tea houses/restaurants	12
	<i>shah</i> (maize beer) houses/palm wine places	25
	bars/hotels	6
	video clubs	2
service sector	tailoring workshops/cap weaving	13
	barbers/hair dressers	7
	carpenter workshops	6
	grinding mills/bread stores	5
	electro repairs	3
	shoe menders	2
	butchery	1
	fire wood sales	1
	photographic studio	1
health	pharmacies/veterinary drugs	4
transport	garages	3
	petrol sales	3
	taxis	7
unidentified		3
total		133

As mentioned earlier, Grassfields migrants, in particular Pinyin and Wimbum, have the reputation of successful business people. Both groups were said to operate the main provision stores of Misaje Town. The Pinyin are further renowned as cattle traders.

The statistical analysis of the ethnic distribution of business enterprises has produced the following results.

Diagram 2.3: Distribution of business enterprises and town population specified by population groups (in %)



In comparing the distribution of business enterprises and the proportion of each population group in Misaje Town, a number of striking features have emerged.

While the Nchaney run the highest number of business places in town, their proportion of the overall population is still higher. Furthermore, they engage mainly in small-scale ventures, such as local bars, minor provision stores, and service sector businesses. Wimbum and Hausa are evenly distributed in terms of both proportions of business enterprises and population. The significant difference, however, is that Wimbum enterprises tend to be larger than Hausa business ventures. For example, the largest provision store belongs to a Wimbum individual who owns a total of ten buildings and two grinding mills in Misaje Town. The most striking result is the high proportion of business places run by Pinyin, which is four times higher than their share of population. Three major provision stores are owned by Pinyin individuals, and one among them owns five houses in Misaje Town. Similarly, migrants from the

Bamenda area are more strongly represented in terms of business enterprises than their proportion of population.

Cattle trade is not included in the above calculation, and would increase the number of business ventures of Pinyin, Hausa, and Wimbun. Animal husbandry, in particular of chicken, goats, pigs, and sheep is a popular complementary activity undertaken mostly by Nchaney and Bessa, but also by Wimbun, Hausa (with the exception of pigs), migrants from the Bamenda area, and migrants from nearby chiefdoms.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided the relevant national political background to the analysis of inter-group relations in the Misaje area which will be presented in the subsequent chapters. Furthermore, I have introduced the research area in its geographical and administrative dimensions, and have portrayed Misaje Town in its historical development, ethnic composition, and spatial arrangement.

In concluding this chapter, I present a few selected photographs taken during my research to add a visual dimension to the written text. In addition, I recommend watching the documentary film 'Getting along in the Grassfields: aspects of village life in Misaje (North West Cameroon)', which I composed with the help of Judith Orland on the basis of the video footage taken in collaboration with my Mbororo assistant Haruna (accessible via <http://corpora.eth.mpg.de/>).

Photograph 2.2: Misaje lowlands



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje, 03/04/2001

The photograph shows the road from Dumbo to Misaje. In the background we see the Bamenda highlands in the direction of Bum.

Photograph 2.3: Weekly market day (Saturday) in Misaje Town



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 23/09/2000

The photograph shows part of the market square with temporary market stalls, where local merchants sell a wide variety of consumption items, including food, household goods, clothing, shoes, etc. In the houses on the right are local bars where mainly *shah* (maize beer) is sold. The white building in the background is the only multi-story building in town, and belongs to a Wimbun migrant who operates a supermarket in the basement and on the top floor a bar.

Photograph 2.4: fon's palace in Misaje Town



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 15/10/2001

The fon's palace is situated behind this building which faces the market square. Visitors to the *fon* pass through the open door into the entrance hall, which also serves as a meeting place for the palace hierarchies. In the back of the photograph we can see one of the ritual sites of the Nchaney, known as 'the stone that carries another' or 'the stone of Nganko' (*tetchi Nganko* in Ncane) (see chapter 4).

Photograph 2.5: Mosque of Misaje Town



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 18/05/2001

The mosque faces the market square. This photograph was taken on a Friday afternoon, when the mosque is frequented by Mbororo and Hausa men. Women do not pray in the mosque but in their houses.

Photograph 2.6: Induction of the new Divisional Officer



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 24/10/2001

The photograph shows the Senior Divisional Officer (middle, dressed in light blue with a red cap) inaugurating the induction ceremony of the new Divisional Officer of Misaje. He is surrounded by the Mayor of Misaje, the Commissioner of Frontier Police in Dumbo, the Brigade Commander of Misaje, the Assistant Mayor of Misaje, and the outgoing Divisional Officer (left to right).

Photograph 2.7: Traditional authorities (Grassfields, Hausa, and Mbororo leaders)



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 24/10/2001

Civil servants and traditional authorities are lined up to shake hands with the Senior Divisional Officer, and the outgoing and incoming Divisional Officers. The eight men with the walking sticks are local Grassfields chiefs. Next to them is the Hausa chief, followed by four Mbororo leaders.

Photograph 2.8: Nchaney masquerade (nyamfuh)



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 24/10/2001

The Grassfields are renowned for their cult associations and masquerades. This mask is called *nyamfuh* (beast) and belongs to a family association in Misaje. Here, it is approaching the market square to perform at the induction ceremony of the new Divisional Officer of Misaje. As the critical looks on the men's faces indicate, they disapproved of me taking this photograph without prior donation.

Photograph 2.9: Mbororo display of horse-riding skills



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje Town, 24/10/2001

As part of the new Divisional Officer's induction ceremony, Mbororo youths displayed their horse-riding skills. Horses are relatively rare in the Misaje area, as they barely survive the climatic and epizootic hardship of the lowlands. These were brought down from the nearby hills and dressed ceremonially. The young Mbororo rider on the right wears a feathered Grassfielders' cap.

Photograph 2.10: End of ramadan prayers



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje, 27/12/2000

To celebrate the end of *ramadan* (Muslim month of fasting), men and children assemble on the Muslim prayer ground at the outskirts of Misaje Town, along the road to Nkambe. The prayers are read by the *imam* (Muslim prayer leader) and the Hausa chief who are facing the community.

Photograph 2.11: Christmas with a migrant couple



Photo: Haruna Kadiri, Misaje Town, 25/12/2000

One of the biggest holidays for Christians in the Misaje area is Christmas. On Christmas day, it is common to visit friends and share food and drinks together. Muslims are also welcome. On this photograph we see a migrant couple from Pinyin together with the author and their decorated Christmas tree.

3 SETTING THE SCENE: CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND LOCAL POWER RELATIONS

Having set the stage in the previous chapter, I will now begin my explorations of interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon, the guiding theme of this study. The chapter opens with the case study of a conflict that occurred in Misaje Town in 1997, and links it to informants' current assessments of interethnic relations in the Misaje area. The case study gives us a preliminary idea of interethnic relations in the Grassfields and draws together most arguments developed in later chapters.

The conflict in question arose during the investiture ceremonies of the current Nchaney chief (*fon*), and will henceforth be referred to as 'the investiture conflict'. Starting off as a minor disagreement over religious and cultural differences, the investiture conflict evolved into a near-violent clash that threatened to undermine the social coexistence of Grassfielders and Muslims in the Misaje area. Similar significant incidents occurred in other regions of the Grassfields and between different sections of the population. The temporary emergence of violent witch-hunts, which will be discussed in chapter 9, is another example. Characteristically, these ominous confrontations arose in the 1990s, fuelled by the political turmoil and the increasing social and economic insecurity that accompanied the country's democratic transition. By the time of my research in the early 2000s, the population's proclivity for violent altercation had diminished and alternative ways of conflict management became pertinent (see chapter 10). In looking back at the happenings of the 1990s, interlocutors expressed bewilderment and discomfort with the then confrontational dimensions of ethnic coexistence.

In my analysis of the investiture conflict I will focus on the interplay of integration and conflict in an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous environment, and the nature of symbolic performance. More specifically, I will examine the relationship between cultural difference and political rivalry, and describe local modalities of conflict management.

3.1 Conflict theory and the extended case method

The theoretical framework explored in this chapter entails theories of integration and conflict as elaborated in the introduction. In analysing the investiture conflict and its

impact on inter-group relations, I mainly draw on Gluckman (1973 [1966]) and Elwert (2001, 2002a, 2004, 2005). In Gluckman's understanding, conflict is primarily a socially cohesive force; a proposition I will critically evaluate in the light of the investiture conflict. Elwert's conflict model is instructive for my analysis of actors' strategies. In his typology conflicts are ordered in a field of four poles (destruction, warring, procedure, and avoidance), which correspond to different degrees of social embedding and violence.

In describing the investiture conflict, I apply the extended case method, in particular the concept of the social drama developed by Turner (1995 [1957]).³⁴ Gluckman (1961) distinguished three types of case phenomena, namely apt illustrations, social situations, and case studies. These are distinguished by their degree of complexity, and the duration of time spanning the events described (cf. Mitchell 1983: 193-194). Turner (1995 [1957], 1996a [1974]: 23-59, 1996b [1982]: 61-88) introduced a particular kind of extended case which he termed 'social drama'. Social dramas are "public episodes of tensional irruption" (Turner 1996a [1974]: 33). They entail a four-phase model that includes the phases of overt breach, mounting crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or schism. Turner focused not only on the processual aspects of conflict and conflict resolution, but also aimed at studying the individual experiences and symbolic actions on which social dramas are based (cf. Turner 1967, 1996a [1974]: 23-59, 1996b [1982]: 61-88). I draw on Turner in examining the conflict phases and the symbols and metonyms deployed in the investiture conflict.

In line with the Manchester School's thematic focus on conflict and conflict resolution, the extended case method has been employed primarily in examining acute conflict situations, and with the aim of identifying general principles that contribute to the generation and resolution of conflict (e.g. Colson 1970 [1962]), Gluckman 1958 [1940], Mitchell 1971 [1956], Turner 1995 [1957]).

The case I present in this chapter is located between a social situation and a case study as defined by Gluckman (1961). While in its description I focus on the happenings of three days, the analysis spans a period from the early 1990s to 2002. Due to its occurrence prior to my research, I was not able to observe the conflict directly. My

³⁴ On the extended case method see also Buroway (1998), Mitchell (1983), Rössler (2003), van Velsen (1967).

elaborations are thus based on informants' retrospective accounts. I am aware of the potential distortions resulting from selective memory and possible idealisation. However, by critically examining my sources of information and by considering both coherent and contradicting accounts, I have been able to reconstruct a skeleton of historical facts that may give us a fair idea of the investiture conflict.

3.2 The ceremonial investiture of *fon* Richard Chefon (a retrospective account)

I had spent several months in the field studying the relationship between Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa in Misaje, when two Hausa women friends mentioned a conflict that had occurred in 1997 during the investiture ceremonies of *fon* Richard Chefon, the current Nchaney chief. So far, interlocutors had described their relationship with their neighbours as relatively unproblematic, though overshadowed by farmer-herder disputes (see chapter 6). Yet as it turned out, this incident had nearly caused a breakdown of the groups' coexistence.

I began to investigate the investiture conflict by addressing the topic in conversations with Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, elders, youths, and women, and government administrators. Most were aware of the incident, and were able to recount the happenings in varying detail. We must question why informants did not mention this incident in earlier conversations. The reasons were twofold. Most obviously, as a newcomer and outsider, I was not supposed to know the crucial flaws of social life in Misaje. Furthermore, in view of preventing future conflicts, informants argued that the incident was best not talked about, and ultimately forgotten.³⁵

The following narrative is a composite version based on the retrospective accounts of eighteen interlocutors. Interviews were partly carried out in collaboration with my assistant Jonathan. Informants' accounts largely overlapped regarding the crucial events of the investiture conflict. Taken together, they produced a single, coherent narrative. In my reading, the convergence of interlocutors' accounts was based on their reference to factual events, rather than being the result of direct or indirect harmonisation. Moreover, while I did not come across systematic differences in their

³⁵ Pandey (1991) faced a similar problem in reconstructing Hindu-Muslim riots in Bhagalpur that occurred in 1989. In the absence of official sources, he relied on public narratives and individual accounts that generated a collective statement. Pandey (1991: 566) pleads for closer attention to the moment of violence, and to integrate fictional accounts (for example poems) as alternative sources of information into academic analysis.

descriptions of the investiture conflict, informants considerably diverged in their allocation of guilt. Their individual assessments will be discussed in a later section of the chapter.

3.2.1 *The course of events*

The *dramatis personae* in this case study are both individuals and groups, and will be introduced in the course of the story. The historical context is the 1990s, a period characterised by political turmoil and socio-economic instability.

In 1996 *fon* Michael Fuma II, head of the Nchaney chiefdom, died. As is common in Grassfields chiefdoms, succession rites took more than a year. They culminated in the ceremonial investiture of the late *fon* Michael's son and chosen heir, Richard Chefon, in October 1997. The investiture ceremonies lasted for two weeks and included general feasting, cultural performances, and courtesy visits of representatives of local population groups, neighbouring chiefdoms, and state officials.³⁶

Organisational preparations were initiated many months before the start of the ceremonies. The palace hierarchy, comprised of Nchaney title holders and elders, requested all population groups resident in the Nchaney chiefdom to contribute to the festivities in cash or kind, and to prepare delegations and cultural performances. Reactions were generally compliant. Nchaney and Grassfields migrants agreed to donate food crops and money, and to rehearse their so-called traditional dances, choir presentations, and masquerades.³⁷ Mbororo and Hausa promised to contribute meat and money for the feasting, to present dances, and display their horse-riding skills.³⁸

³⁶ In my account of the royal investiture ceremonies, I focus exclusively on the conflict between the Nchaney and Muslim communities. To get a better understanding of the ritual performances during royal investiture ceremonies, I recommend to read Argenti's (2001 [1999]) description of the royal installation in Oku in 1992. Photographs of the royal investiture, provided by *fon* Richard Chefon, are included in chapter 4.

³⁷ In popular usage in Anglophone Cameroon, the term 'traditional' (both in English and Pidgin English) is generally used to refer to cultural practices and socio-political institutions that are perceived as having a long history within the respective community. Its complement 'modern' is less commonly used. In the context of this study it is employed with reference to state and NGO-structures.

³⁸ It is a popular conviction shared by Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa that individuals and groups who participate in public festivities are supposed to honour the organisers by presenting them with goods as well as with cultural performances particular for each population group. Thus while Grassfielders are renowned for their masquerades and regional dances, Hausa are known for their professional drummers (Hausa: *mai kalangu*, meaning 'master of the drum'), Mbororo for their horse-riding skills and *baralla*, a youth dance. The same approach is adopted by government officials with regard to state celebrations (e.g. National Day, induction of civil servants, cultural

In the course of the preparatory meetings a disagreement between the Nchaney and Muslim population arose with regard to provisional rules of comportment and appearance, which the palace hierarchy planned to institute for the period of the investiture ceremonies. Following these rules, men were required to remove their caps, while women should dress in a single wrap and walk barefoot and bareheaded. Representatives of the Muslim community pointed out that these prescriptions conflicted with Muslim ideology and practice, and thus were unacceptable to Muslims in Misaje. As the two parties could not come to an agreement, the matter was brought before the Divisional Officer, himself a Grassfielder and familiar with royal investiture rites. He advised the Nchaney elders to exempt the Muslim community from Nchaney ritual prescriptions on account of their different religious and cultural background. He recommended to separate ritual and profane spaces by constructing a fence around the ceremonial ground on the market square, and to instruct Muslims to avoid that area when going to the mosque. The Nchaney agreed to build a fence, and the two parties negotiated a compromise. While important Muslim elders were exempted from removing their caps, Muslim youths should follow the rule. Those who were unwilling to do so should stay away from the ceremonial ground. Both parties were satisfied with this arrangement, but ensuing violations of the agreement caused anger and distress on both sides.

On the opening day of the investiture ceremonies, Genye, a respected Hausa elder in charge of the meat supply for the feasting, was attacked by *chombu ju-ju* (masks of the palace that act as messengers and local police)³⁹ on the grounds of wearing his cap. Hausa youths were upset about the humiliation of their distinguished elder. They complained to Nchaney notables who eventually instructed the *chombu ju-ju* to stop molesting Muslim elders.

On the subsequent day, which was a Friday and Muslim prayer day, *chombu ju-ju* harassed a Mbororo man who hurriedly passed the ceremonial ground as he was late for his afternoon prayers. He refused to take off his cap, and was encouraged by Mbororo spectators who argued that Muslims respected only Allah and did not bend down before idols or masks.

fair); they commonly call on all population groups to present cultural performances as a way of cultivating the multicultural image of the Grassfields and Cameroon in general (see below).

³⁹ *Ju-ju* is a Pidgin English term which stands for the complex of medicine and is also used to designate an individual mask (Koloss 2000: 97-103). On the panoply of Grassfields masks see e.g. Argenti (1996), Koloss (2000: 223-277).

On Saturday, the Nchaney market day, a young Mbororo man crossed a fibre rope demarcating the ceremonial ground. The *chombu ju-ju* took him to the chief's palace, and intimidated Mbororo elders on their way to the mosque. The Muslim congregation decided to retaliate. Upon leaving the mosque, Mbororo men armed themselves with their herding staffs and took position in the market square. In the meantime, the Nchaney returned from the palace bringing along their powerful *ngumba ju-ju*, a mask that should never be seen by women and comes out only at night to punish severe crimes. Muslim women heard of the event and approached the ceremonial ground to defy the alleged danger and witness the happenings. The situation turned into an open confrontation, and the two factions faced each other in a symbolic stand off: on the one side, the Nchaney approaching with their *ngumba ju-ju*; on the other, the Muslims impressing their opponents with a *kariya* (staff-hurling) performance, a skill Mbororo herders are renowned and feared for.

Suddenly, *fon* Richard's younger brother appeared with a rifle. A Mbororo man drew his knife, but was held back by his Mbororo neighbour. At this crucial moment, the Divisional Officer – supported by the Police Commissioner and a few gendarmes – stepped in and took control of the situation. Under threat of army intervention, he ordered an immediate stop to the action. The crowd – frightened by previous experiences of the military – began to disperse, and the crisis was diffused.

From here on, Muslims largely refrained from attending the investiture ceremonies, while *chombu ju-ju* were instructed to ignore Muslim trespassers.

Some weeks after the investiture ceremony, *fon* Richard Chefon invited the representatives of the Muslim community for a reconciliatory meeting. He formally apologised for the aggressive behaviour of the *chombu ju-ju* and attributed the guilt largely to his notables. The Muslim elders accepted his apologies; they confirmed their support and respect for him as the leader of the Nchaney chiefdom. Although the situation had come close to causing a disastrous breakdown of social relations in Misaje, the parties agreed to discuss the matter no further, and to continue their coexistence on normal terms.

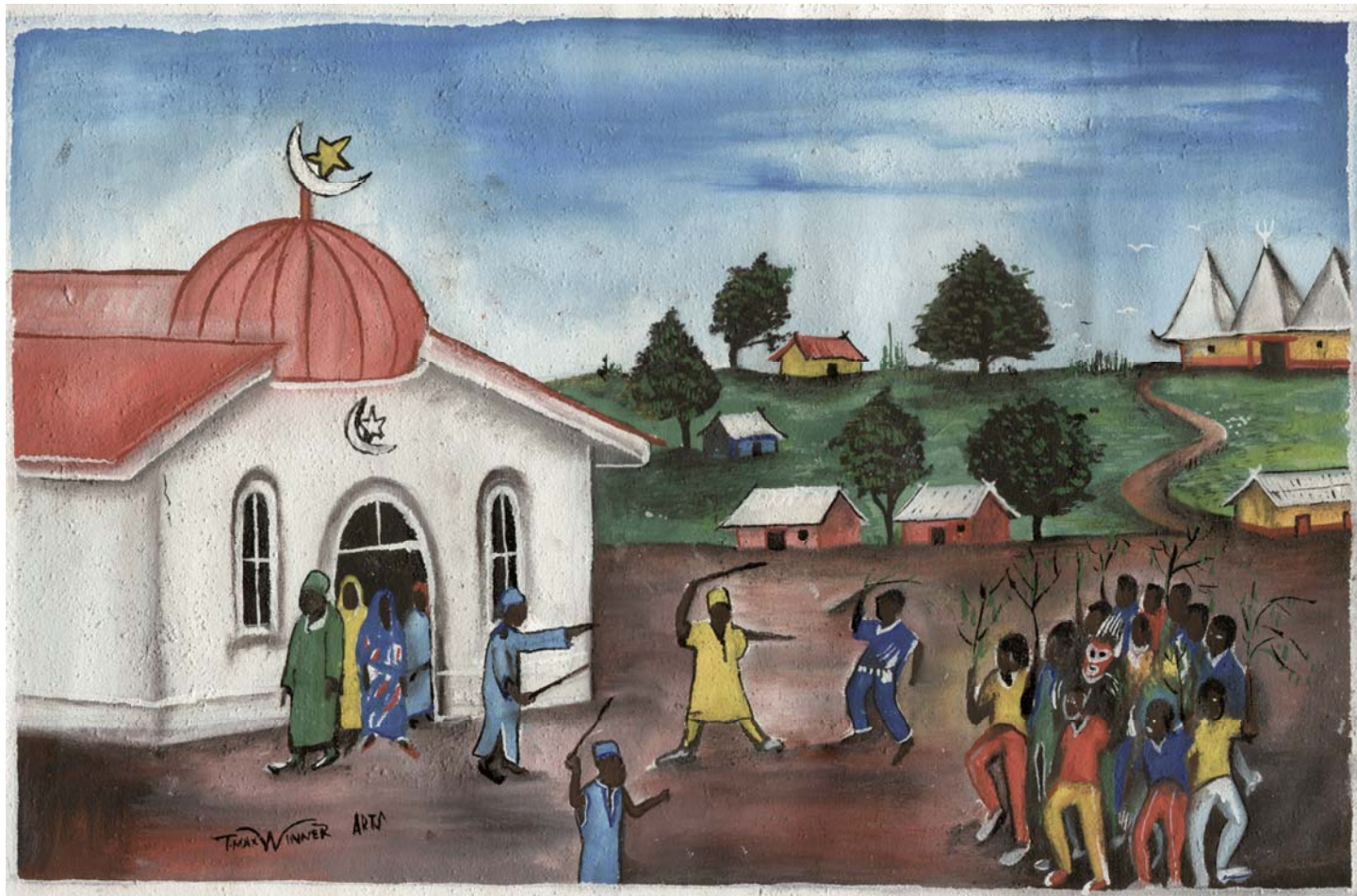


Plate 3.1: Painting of Mbororo kariya versus Nchaney ngumba ju-ju (original size ca. 26cm x 40cm)

To reflect the (re)constructed and imaginative character of the above narrative, I decided to illustrate the investiture with a painting made by a local artist on the basis of the above account. I asked my friend and host Nji Patrick to commission this painting from a Grassfields artist based in Bamenda. His interpretation illustrates the encounter between the Nchaney *chombu ju-ju* and Mbororo staff-hurlers; however, it includes a few distortions. The artist's drawing does not adequately reflect the spatial arrangement of the ceremonial ground. The *fon's* palace, here drawn at a distance in the painting's right hand corner, is actually adjacent to the market square, which constituted the ceremonial venue. Moreover, the palace is drawn with a three-pointed-roof, an architectural style typical for the Bamiléké area, but uncommon in the Western Grassfields. The Mbororo staff-hurlers are shown to exit the mosque, drawn on the left. However, unlike the painting, Muslim women do not pray in the mosque.

3.2.2 *Critical remarks*

Before attempting an analysis of the features and causes of the conflict, I will first discuss the validity of the narrative and the representativeness of the case study.

As the above account is composed of individual and collective recollections, it is by no means an objective representation of the actual happenings. It is a meta-narrative or a “master fiction” (Geertz 1985: 33) that is shaped by the partial perspectives and narrative conventions of both the informants and the anthropologist (cf. Clifford 1986). Its underlying narratives include diverging and competing interpretations. Moreover, these narratives have a “social energy” (Greenblatt 1994: 227) of their own, and not only reflect but also shape social reality (cf. Parkin 1996: xx, Schnepel 1998: 475-476). Finally, due to the retrospective character of their accounts, interlocutors tended to depict the events as a sequence of interdependent actions guided by intentionality and rational choice, which was almost certainly not the case. Much of the happenings may have been the result of contingency, misinformation, and miscalculation. Emotions, such as fear, anger, and pride, must equally have motivated individuals’ actions (cf. Parkin 1985, Svasek 2002). Reassessing their role more than three years after the event is inevitably hypothetical.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, the above narrative provides at least a skeleton of the historical events during *fon* Richard Chefon’s investiture. Moreover, as I am primarily concerned with the ways in which individuals and groups have managed to overcome their differences, the account constitutes a valid basis for analysing informants’ current assessments of their interethnic relations with regard to this past event.

The second point concerns the representativeness of the chosen case. Truly, the investiture conflict of 1997 is a relatively unusual case, both with regard to its origin and form. As far as I know, at no other time and in no other place in the Grassfields has a conflict emerged over the issue of wearing caps, nor have I ever heard of a symbolic stand off, such as portrayed in the above narrative. Nonetheless, the conflict in question constitutes a valid case to consider the circumstances under which religious and cultural differences are perceived as problematic, the strategies that are used in resolving ensuing arguments, and more generally the positive and negative impacts of conflict on social relations. As Mitchell (1983: 191) rightly argues, the

⁴⁰ On the difficulty of assessing emotions see also Schlee (2002: 21-25).

value of a case study lies not in the representativeness of the events but in the validity of the analysis.

3.3 Analysis of the investiture conflict

In analysing the happenings during *fon* Richard Chefon's investiture, we may first determine the main components of the story. It is a story about caps and courtyards, about staffs and masks. At the same time, it is a story about the negotiation of political and ritual authority between neighbouring groups and the intervention of state officials. We may thus interpret it as a struggle over political and cultural autonomy, played out symbolically via metonyms of cultural identity and difference.

In trying to discern different phases of conflict development, I apply Turner's (1995 [1957], 1996a [1974]: 23-59, 1996b [1982]: 61-88) model of the social drama with its four phases of breach, crisis, redress and reintegration. The conflict started with the public *breach* of social norms, namely the Muslims' refusal to remove their caps and the Nchaney's infringement on Muslim standards of comportment. It was followed by a phase of mounting *crisis* which culminated in the symbolic stand off of the Nchaney masquerade and Mbororo staff-hurlers. *Redressive action* was then taken by the Divisional Officer in order to prevent the conflict's escalation. Eventually, the groups' *reintegration* was achieved by a strategy best described as functional indifference.

In order to better understand the happenings during *fon* Richard Chefon's investiture, I will embed them in their social and political background, and discuss the conflict in its symbolic connotations.

3.3.1 Modalities of coexistence

As outlined in the previous chapter, Misaje is a small town inhabited by a variety of peoples of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Socio-cultural and religious differences are continuously conveyed and enacted in terms of language, clothing, demeanour, habitus, settlement pattern, and many other practices that function as diacritical markers.⁴¹ The major axis of distinction follows religious lines, separating

⁴¹ Schlee (1994) distinguishes identity markers, ethnicity emblems, and diacritical features. While the first two refer to an emic perspective, the latter implies an etic assessment. All three are indicators of ethnic and, more generally, social identities.

the Muslim community (Mbororo and Hausa) from the majority of Grassfielders. Occasions during which the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of the Western Grassfields is accentuated are public events, such as market days, traditional celebrations, and national ceremonies. But also during informal encounters on the road, at work, in town or at home, ethnic and cultural distinctions are prevalent.⁴²

Informants perceived their living together as generally peaceful and agreeable. Most of the time, individuals have no problem in accepting others being different, be it with regard to diverging religious, economic, political, or socio-cultural practices. Ethnic stereotypes are widely shared and inform individuals' action on a more general level, while interpersonal relations are shaped by individual experiences. Grassfielders are commonly characterised as superstitious, greedy, and inclined to alcohol; Hausa count as lazy and thieves; and Mbororo as arrogant and potentially violent (see chapters 4, 6, and 9). Although these stereotypes are contested by members of the respective groups, they constitute "fields of shared meaning" (Eriksen 1998: 55). While strengthening ethnic boundaries, they simultaneously contribute to the groups' social integration.

In political terms the groups' coexistence is guided by the principle of precedence, which informs intra- as well as interethnic relations (cf. Kopytoff 1987: 52-61, Lentz 2005: 155-159). Local Grassfields groups claim political supremacy on the grounds of their anteriority and their relationship with the land and their ancestors (see chapter 4). As Mbororo and Hausa established themselves only by the beginning of the 20th century, they generally count as 'late-comers' or 'strangers' whose rights to local resources and power is mediated via their relationship with the local Grassfields population.

The analytic concept of 'the stranger', introduced by Simmel (1992 [1908]: 764-771) and applied by Shack (1979) and Skinner (1963) to the African context, is helpful in understanding historical transformations in interethnic relations in the Grassfields. As the two latter authors argue, before colonial rule so-called stranger populations were both marginal and integral elements of African social and political systems. During the colonial period, however, the political status of these stranger populations changed, as the colonial powers sought to regulate their presence. The

⁴² Rather than illustrating the performance of ethnic and cultural identities in Misaje in a written account, I prefer an audio-visual representation. In the documentary film 'Getting along in the Grassfields' I depict cultural performances in the context of national ceremonies, traditional celebrations, and market encounters (accessible at www.eth.mpg.de).

dichotomy between 'host' and 'stranger' populations became increasingly defined in legal terms. After independence, the administrative distinction was between 'citizens' and 'aliens'. Consequently, many stranger populations were either naturalised or expelled, while others willingly returned to their places of origin.

In the subsequent chapters I will illustrate in more detail the degree to which group identities and relations in the Grassfields have been influenced by colonial and post-colonial policies and models of ethnicity. At this point, however, I want to stress that earlier notions of host-stranger relations are still influential in shaping interethnic relations. On the basis of living on the territory of Grassfields chiefdoms, Mbororo and Hausa are expected to pay symbolic tribute to their local Grassfields chief, such as Christmas gifts of cattle or money, and to participate in major festivities, such as royal investiture ceremonies. Although the concept of host-stranger relations implies a political hierarchy, it does not define the actual distribution of power. Local power relations are open to negotiation and, more often than not, are shaped by the intervention of state officials and government policies.

The general acceptance of socio-cultural differences and of political hierarchies are two key principles guiding interethnic relations in the Grassfields. Both principles allow for differing interpretations that frequently result in disputes and ongoing negotiations. Such minor conflicts have an integrative rather than dissociative propensity, as they support communication and interaction across ethnic and cultural boundaries (Gluckman 1973 [1966]: 1-26).

The conflict that arose during *fon* Richard Chefon's investiture started off as a minor disagreement about religious and cultural differences, and developed into a near-violent conflict over local power relations. In the initial phase all population groups, including Mbororo and Hausa, complied with the common model of contributing to the investiture ceremonies as an expression of their membership in the Nchaney chiefdom. When Hausa and Mbororo representatives made clear that they could not accept the provisional standards of comportment that the Nchaney palace hierarchy attempted to institute, the latter interpreted the Muslims' objection in political terms: as a sign of their disregard for the Nchaney chief, and of their denial of Nchaney primacy. A second, spiritual dimension of the Muslim's offence of Nchaney authority becomes evident when reading Argenti's (2001 [1999]) description of the royal installation of 1992 in Oku, a Grassfields chiefdom in the centre of the North West Province. In Grassfielders' perspective, royal investiture ceremonies are a

critical transitional period in which any breach of ritual prescriptions or social order endangers the future well-being of the chiefdom and its population. Hence, the Muslims' refusal to remove their caps constituted a potential source of spiritual danger. Although this argument was never explicitly phrased by any of my informants, it is instructive in understanding the vigour with which the palace hierarchy tried to impose their rules of comportment. Muslim representatives, on the other hand, sought to negotiate a compromise, with the aim of conveying their political loyalty and preserving their groups' religious integrity and cultural sovereignty. The solution proposed by the Divisional Officer complied with the concerns of the Muslim community and, at the same time, acknowledged Nchaney authority, while limiting it to the ceremonial ground.

Up to this point the dispute remained within locally established frameworks of negotiating cultural differences and local power relations. Subsequently, however, it developed into a serious altercation that threatened to escalate and, eventually, was stopped forcefully. In order to understand this turn of events, it is necessary to embed the conflict in its national political context and to discuss the implications of the Divisional Officer's intervention.

3.3.2 Political liberalisation and cultural politics of the 1990s

As outlined in chapter 2, the 1990s were characterised by the country's democratic transition and the politics of belonging. The ensuing atmosphere of political rivalry, social insecurity, and aggression impacted also on the local level, and facilitated the emergence of the investiture conflict.

Many Cameroonians interpreted the liberalisation of political space as an opportunity to generally question established power relations. For example, prominent Grassfields chiefs who, so far, had enjoyed their subjects' full allegiance were harshly criticised by their followers for their party-political involvement; some were physically attacked or even ousted (N. Awasom 2003b).

Party-political struggles were also deployed to redefine inter-group relations. In Misaje political rivalry between local candidates and their counterparts in neighbouring Nkambe dominated the municipal elections of 1996 and eventually prompted army intervention; an episode whose memory shaped the investiture conflict. Misaje elite individuals thought it strategic to manipulate the municipal

elections, with the aim of installing a council of the ruling party CPDM which would be distinct from the SDF council of their competitors at Nkambe.⁴³ However, the election fraud had unforeseen consequences, as their CPDM council was contested by SDF militants on whose instruction council and market activities were boycotted. The then Divisional Officer, who was a francophone and unfamiliar with regional and local conditions, was out of his depth with the civil protest; he ordered military intervention to reinstate law and order. The army came, dissolved the demonstrations, captured and abused recalcitrant militants, and detained leading figures of the local SDF opposition. They made an example that would not be forgotten.

It is against this background of social insecurity and growing violence that we have to interpret the investiture conflict of the following year. Nchaney and Muslims opted for an increasingly confrontational course. Although the stand off of the Nchaney masquerade and Mbororo staff-hurlers was essentially symbolic, these were symbols of terror and aggression. Moreover, with the appearance of a rifle and a knife, the threshold between symbolic and physical violence was crossed.

The moment of conflict escalation was also the moment when the Divisional Officer intervened. Here one must keep in mind the population's prior experience of military intervention, and the implication that this would cause more violence and harm than the issue at hand was worth. Eventually, the conflicting parties dispersed without the Divisional Officer having to execute his threat of army intervention.⁴⁴

A second feature of national politics that facilitated the investiture conflict was the government's emphasis on ethnic and cultural identities and minority representation.

As described in chapter 2, in the early 1990s the UN and its partner organisations declared cultural authenticity as an indispensable component of individual and collective identity, and a human right that governments should preserve and encourage (Hellman 2003: 9-12, Kuper 2003). In compliance with these guidelines,

⁴³ CPDM stands for Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement, SDF for Social Democratic Front. A similar incident occurred during the municipal elections in 1996 in Bum where the SDF candidates were fraudulently disqualified and a CPDM council was instituted (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998: 80). It is important to remark that the vast majority of councils in the North West Province went to SDF candidates, while only four were given to CPDM politicians, including Bum and Misaje.

⁴⁴ As incidents of civil disobedience continued to occur in Misaje, the Divisional Officer actually did call in the army at a later stage, because local villagers had publicly attacked the Gendarmerie Commandant. The offenders were apprehended and taken to the divisional capital for trial and imprisonment.

the Cameroonian government under President Biya adopted the cultural policy of ‘unity through diversity’.

Cameroon is popularly portrayed as a multicultural and bilingual nation, a country characterised by ecological and ethnic diversity, and glossed as “*Afrique en miniature*” (Ministère de la Culture 2002) or “the microcosm of Africa’s cultures” (Cameroonian government homepage). This rhetoric is deployed both in the international and national arena. It reflects the efforts of the Cameroonian government to comply with international demands and the tourist market and, concurrently, its attempts to diffuse political opposition into the fields of cultural expression or folklore.⁴⁵ Local cultural performances have increasingly been objectified in national celebrations and the media.⁴⁶ Examples that illustrate this trend include a weekly television series depicting Cameroon’s cultural heritage, the biennial *Festival National des Arts et de la Culture* (FENAC) instituted in 1992, annual ‘cultural fairs’ organised by the provincial administrations (see chapter 5), and the encouragement of local population groups’ to participate in national celebrations (e.g. National Day, Women’s Day, and Youth Day) with cultural performances, such as dance and choir presentations, masquerades, and horse-riding displays. In the perspective of local actors, however, their groups’ participation in national celebrations is primarily a political statement that confirms both their ethnic and national identities.⁴⁷

Government policies promoting ethnic and cultural difference and minority representation impacted also on individual and group strategies in the investiture conflict. In his support for the Muslim community the Divisional Officer complied with the government’s policy of safeguarding cultural and minority rights. At the same time, his actions may have been motivated by self-interest and personal rivalry as much as by administrative guidelines.

Concurrently, Mbororo and Hausa interpreted the Divisional Officer’s backing during the initial negotiations as an encouragement to defy political and cultural domination

⁴⁵ In this interpretation I build on an argument put forward by a number of Cameroonian scholars, most pronouncedly by Nyamnjoh (1999). He argues that, with its politics of ethnic and cultural difference, the Cameroonian government encourages ethnic discord on the local and regional level in order to diffuse popular opposition at a national level. Nyamnjoh’s interpretation ties in well with Kourouma’s (2001) literary description of African despots who keep the masses singing and dancing in praise of their rule, while exploiting and abusing their subjects.

⁴⁶ Handler (1988: 52-80) describes similar attempts of cultural objectification in French-Canada.

⁴⁷ In Mbembe’s (1992: 17-18) reading, national ceremonies have been used by the Cameroonian government to express and exert its power. He interprets individuals’ and groups’ participation in these events as a strategy to partake in the government’s riches.

and to oppose the Nchaney majority. The latter's obduracy, on the other hand, was hardened by the Divisional Officer's apparent partiality. These views are endorsed by individuals' allocation of guilt which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

3.3.3 The symbolic performance of cultural difference and political rivalry

Scholars of the Manchester School were interested in the processual character of conflict and conflict resolution, but also in the dramatic elements entailed in it. Following Parkin (1996: xvi), it was Gluckman (1958 [1940]) who first introduced the subject of the politics of cultural performance in his *Analysis of a social situation in modern Zululand*. His approach was later refined by Mitchell (1956) and Turner (1967, 1996a [1974]) who focused on ritual performance and the deployment of symbols and metaphors. The theme of ritual performance and the dramaturgical metaphor have found their way also into German anthropology (see e.g. Köpping & Rao 2000, Schmidt & Münzel 1998). In my analysis of the symbolic performance of cultural difference and political rivalry during the investiture conflict I draw on Turner's (1967: 50-52) concept of the multivocality of symbols and on Schnepel's (1998) analysis of the significance of ritual contest as compared to physical combat. My focus in this section is on the phase of mounting crisis and on the polysemy of the deployed metonyms, namely Muslim caps, Grassfields masks, and Mbororo herding staffs.

We must question how the act of wearing a cap advanced to a symbol of Muslim resistance. Throughout the Grassfields, caps for men and head ties for women are a common piece of clothing and indicate the wearers' social status. For Mbororo and Hausa the head gear is an integral part of their public outfit.⁴⁸ Among Grassfielders the wearing of a cap or head tie is less obligatory; yet the head gear is often used to convey its wearer's wealth or socio-political status.⁴⁹

The palace hierarchy's provisional instruction that all residents of the Nchaney chieftdom should move around bareheaded implied the public expression of respect

⁴⁸ Women generally cover their heads with a head tie and scarf, while men wear embroidered caps. Some Muslim rulers wear a turban as a symbol of their rank, while accomplished *alhajis* bring along a specific head gear to indicate their pilgrimage to Mecca (see photograph 7.3 of *alkali Yusufa*)

⁴⁹ Wealthy Grassfields women like to wear large, gold embroidered headdresses in the so-called Yoruba style. A black crocheted men's cap decorated with a porcupine quill or a red feather designates its wearer's position as a sub-chief.

and adherence to the new chief, according to Nchaney standards. Among Mbororo and Hausa, however, wearing caps had mainly religious implications, and only in the context of the royal investiture did it take up the political connotation introduced by the Nchaney hierarchy. After some negotiations, Nchaney and Muslims agreed on a provisional arrangement in which political subordination was still expressed via moving around bareheaded, but which delimited the ritual and symbolic space to the ceremonial ground.

The crucial factor that elicited and endorsed Muslim resistance was not the issue of removing their caps, but their numerous confrontations with Nchaney masks, namely the *chombu ju-ju*. Disagreements between Muslims and local Grassfielders about the numinous nature and functions of masks go far beyond the investiture conflict.

Masquerades are an integral element of the socio-political organisation of Grassfields groups and have religious and socio-political connotations (cf. Argenti 1996, 1998, 2005, 2006, Engard 1989, Koloss 1977, 1980a, 1980b, 2000: 97-103, Röschenhaler 2004a, von Linting 2004). Masks are understood as powerful numinous beings that can cause illness and death, and whose function is to supervise religious and social comportment. Most belong to family associations or secret societies whose members guard the knowledge of their spiritual power. As this knowledge can be transmitted and acquired, the same mask can be found in many different localities.⁵⁰ Within the Grassfields there is a wide range of popularly known masks, among them the *chombu ju-ju* and the *ngumba ju-ju* encountered in Misaje. The *chombu ju-ju* belong to the palace. As local Grassfielders and Muslim informants explained, they are the ‘traditional police’ and messengers of the *fon*. Their appearance normally indicates a spiritual danger, such as the passing of a witch or a more powerful mask. Furthermore, the chief sends them to reinforce his commands; for example, to escort culprits to the palace or to compel individuals to fulfil their obligations to the community. The power of the *chombu ju-ju* is both spiritual and physical, and they occasionally use their whips to beat offenders or frighten spectators. Their action is thought to be inspired by a numinous power, and the identity of the masker, i.e. the individual who embodies the mask should remain unknown.

⁵⁰ On the transmission of associations and cults and their masks see e.g. Röschenhaler (2004b, 2004c, 2006) whose regional focus is on the Cross River region (southwestern Cameroon and eastern Nigeria).

While the majority of Grassfielders believe in the efficacy and veracity of masks, Mbororo and Hausa largely refute the *ju-ju*'s authority with recourse to their Muslim faith. They deny them their numinous power and treat them as disguised human beings. Among Grassfielders it is mandatory that spectators remove their head gear and bow down when confronted with a passing *ju-ju*. Most Muslims, however, refuse to pay the demanded respect, arguing that their religion does not permit them to bow down before idols, but only before Allah. Furthermore, many Hausa and Mbororo informants complained that the *chombu ju-ju* in Misaje are pointlessly violent.⁵¹ As one Hausa woman formulated it,

The *ju-ju* here are more like enemies. They are used to beating women and even children, especially Hausa children. The mothers also get angry because they cannot accept that their children get beaten up like that. No, the tradition is not followed well. A man can just enter the cloth of a *ju-ju* and start beating children and women! They don't respect the function of the *ju-ju*. (B.S., Misaje, 14/11/01)

In order to avoid unnecessary confrontations, the Hausa chief instructed his people to stay indoors when maskers pass, which is probably the simplest and most effective strategy to deal with irreconcilable cultural and religious differences.

During the investiture, the Muslims' initial reluctance to remove their caps was substantiated and reinforced by their repugnance towards the *chombu ju-ju*. Although Mbororo and Hausa had been instructed by the Divisional Officer and their community leaders to avoid the ceremonial ground, accidental confrontations could not be entirely circumvented. By attributing intentionality to accident and misadventure, the conflicting parties interpreted these encounters as the result of mutual disrespect.

In the end, the conflict culminated in the confrontation of the *ngumba ju-ju* and Mbororo staff-hurling performance. The *ngumba ju-ju* is the mask of the regulatory society in Misaje.⁵² It is considered much more powerful and dangerous than the *chombu ju-ju* and appears only at night. Women are not supposed to see it, as it is believed that its sight will turn them barren. When the Nchaney threatened to bring

⁵¹ Engard (1989: 149) reports that the risk of minor injuries during masquerades is real, as maskers are not held publicly responsible for their action. Some degree of accountability may exist outside the context of the performance to the palace hierarchy or the cult association to which the mask belongs.

⁵² *Ngumba* originally is the name of the regulatory society in Bali. The same term is used in Pidgin English and is common in Misaje. Alternative terms used among other Grassfields groups are *kwifon* (Kom) and *ngwerong* (Nso) (cf. Fisiy 1995: 51).

out their *ngumba ju-ju* at daytime, they had in mind the mask's spiritual power which would have lasting effect on their opponents, rendering their women barren and causing illness and death. Mbororo and Hausa were equally aware of the *ngumba ju-ju*'s alleged danger and the Nchaney's intention. But rather than shying away, their women made a point in defying the mask and challenging its efficacy.

Concurrently, Mbororo and Hausa men prepared themselves to confront the Nchaney with their own particular device, namely a Mbororo staff-hurling or *kariya* performance. *Kariya* is a Hausa term and means 'protection' (Awde 1996: 82).⁵³ It is normally not a performative but a practical skill, Mbororo youths acquire while herding their family's cattle. The herding staff, or *sawru* in Fulfulde, is the main tool used in guiding cattle and defending the herd against wild animals or thieves. Its metonymic character refers to cattle which, in turn, stand for Mbororo identity. Both men and women are familiar with using a herding staff, be it as a walking stick, a herding tool or a weapon of defence. As a Mbororo friend recounted, his cousin's wife successfully defended her family against three robbers with her herding staff. And when the thieves ran off, one of them commented "A Mbororo man or woman with a staff is no small fight!"

Against this background it is understandable that the Muslims' *kariya* performance in the investiture conflict impressed and frightened their Nchaney opponents. Furthermore, it was generally assumed that they had fortified themselves by taking protective medicine to increase their courage and shield them against injury. Thus the Mbororo *kariya* performance, similar to the Nchaney *ngumba ju-ju*, included connotations of physical and magical power.

By considering the symbols of Muslim caps, Grassfields masks, and Mbororo herding staffs in their social contexts, we have been able to determine at least part of the multivocality they assumed during the investiture conflict. The most vital metonym was Nchaney masks, which – while having contentious meanings for the two groups – primarily signified ritual authority.

⁵³ In chapter 5 we will learn that the Mbororo in the Grassfields belong to two sub-groups, namely Jaafun and Aku. Informants pointed out, that *kariya* is considered a speciality of the Aku. Jaafun, on the other hand, are known for their *soro*, a stick beating contest which is aimed at the public performance of self-restraint and courage (cf. Bocquené 2002: 119-132, Bovin 1974/75, Brackenbury 1923/24b, Virtanen 2003: 113-121, Whitting 1995).

A second feature of the politics of cultural performance, I want to look at in the context of the investiture conflict, concerns the relationship between symbolic confrontation and physical combat. I herein draw on Schnepel's (1998) explorations of ritual performances of power and authority in Orissa, India. Schnepel (1998) describes a variety of ritual performances, taking place in different historical periods, in which assertions to royal authority are based on the claimants' proximity to a deity. In his interpretation ritual performance and royal authority in India are closely interrelated and cannot be separated into distinct domains of religion and politics. Ritual performances constitute a vital locus for the (re)negotiation of power relations; ritual contests are thus not only symbolic but 'real'. They may even be more consequential than purely physical combat as they refer to meanings and values of a higher authority.

In applying Schnepel's analysis to the investiture conflict, a number of similarities are discernable. In the Grassfields, the same as in Orissa, ritual performance and royal authority are closely interlinked, hence the Nchaney's insistence on the observance of ritual prescriptions during royal investiture ceremonies (cf. Argenti's 2001 [1999]). Secondly, the confrontation between Nchaney masquerade and Mbororo staff-hurlers was not only symbolic but 'real', where local power relations were renegotiated in the face of spiritual and physical danger. In agreement with Schnepel (1998: 479) I may suggest that their symbolic stand off was charged with greater meaning than a purely physical combat for material ends, as it ventured into the spheres of cultural ideology and social values that are at the basis of group identities and inter-group relations.

3.4 Individual assessments and the allocation of guilt

So far, I have based my analysis on the compounded version of informants' retrospective accounts. In the following I will introduce individual informants' assessments of responsibility, and go beyond the simplistic dichotomy of Grassfielders versus Muslims. As these individual accounts will show, Nchaney and Muslims did not constitute two homogenous units, but each side included a panoply of opinions, diverging interests, and cross-cutting allegiances.

The question of responsibility took a prominent place in informants' assessments of the conflict. Similar to Pandey's (1991: 563) experiences with reconstructing the history of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, individual accounts often took the character of

pre-emptive narratives that were aimed at falsifying particular explanations and allocations of guilt. As I am primarily interested in the ethnic component of the conflict, I will group informants' assessments according to their authors' ethnic backgrounds. I however do not intend to create ethnicised master fictions; rather, their juxtaposition will show that informants' assessments differ as much along the lines of status, gender, and age, as along the line of ethnicity.

3.4.1 Nchaney perspectives

In our conversations *fon Richard Chefon* acknowledged the conflict that had occurred during his investiture ceremonies, but emphasised that his current relationship with the Muslim community was good. In his view, the conflict arose from two sources: firstly, a misunderstanding between the Nchaney palace hierarchy and the Muslim community regarding mutually acceptable rules of comportment and appearance; and secondly, the partiality of the Divisional Officer who encouraged Muslim opposition against Nchaney authority in order to consolidate his own power vis-à-vis the Nchaney *fon*. As *fon* Richard Chefon argued, royal investiture ceremonies are normally convened by the palace hierarchy, while the prospective chief is excluded from decision making. The decision that Muslims should go bareheaded thus was not taken by him but by the Nchaney notables, who did not fully understand Muslim rules of comportment. Of more consequence than this misunderstanding, however, was the involvement of the Divisional Officer (DO). In *fon* Richard Chefon's view, the DO was supposed to keep a neutral position and stay away from the conflict, as this matter was to be resolved on the level of the chiefdom rather than the state. He identified three motives for the DO's involvement, namely personal gain, such as gifts of cattle or money for his partiality, greed for power, and not least, his ethnic background as a native of Nso. Nso is a neighbouring Grassfields chiefdom that the Nchaney had successfully faced in a bloody and well-remembered inter-chiefdom war in the 19th century (see chapter 4). In *fon* Richard Chefon's understanding the grievances of that century-old conflict were a crucial factor motivating the DO's stance against the Nchaney.

Nji Beniwa, an Nchaney sub-chief⁵⁴, evaluated the situation quite differently from *fon* Richard Chefon. For him, the blame was primarily with the Muslims who violated the rules of 'the owners of the land'. Instead of acknowledging the legitimate supremacy of the Nchaney, they turned to the Divisional Officer for assistance, and even demonstrated their readiness to fight. They provoked the appearance of the dangerous *ngumba ju-ju* and, consequently, were affected by illness and death. Until they sought expiation and ritual cleansing through sacrifices performed by the village elders, the problem between the two communities would remain unresolved.

By allocating the guilt fully to the Muslim side, *nji* Beniwa's view is exceptionally one-sided. His statement that inter-group relations could only normalise after the Muslims had sought ritual cleansing is rather rhetorical. It reflects a procedure of social reintegration common among Grassfielders which, from a Muslim perspective, is inconceivable.

The views of *fon* Richard Chefon and *nji* Beniwa reflect the two individuals' socio-political roles. While the *fon* is concerned with sharing his political power with the Divisional Officer, sub-chiefs are occupied with securing respect and support from their followers. Conversely, commoners' assessments of the conflict tended to be less coloured by political considerations and more informed by personal experiences and allegiances.

3.4.2 Hausa perspectives

Genye is a well respected Hausa elder and was one of the main actors on the Muslim side. When he was attacked by the *chombu ju-ju* for wearing his cap while distributing meat for the festivities, it came as a surprise. However, Genye specified that not all Nchaney were in support of the *ju-ju* attacks. Some notables took sides with the Muslims and advised the maskers to respect Hausa and Mbororo elders. Above all, Genye stressed the involvement of the Divisional Officer whom he considered the spokesperson and protector of the Muslims. Genye saw the victory on the Muslim side, arguing that the Nchaney were intimidated by the Muslims' force of opposition and by the Divisional Officer's intervention, and eventually sought reconciliation. In

⁵⁴ *Nji* is both a common name and the Grassfields title for a sub-chief or lineage head. In this case, it indicates the individual's socio-political status as an Nchaney sub-chief.

his assessment the political power of the Hausa was strengthened and they were increasingly involved in decision-making processes in the palace.

Amina Mudi is the wife of the Hausa chief and a Grassfields convert. She was strongly implicated in the conflict, because the Hausa chief's compound is located besides the *fon*'s palace, and during the investiture ceremonies was a central meeting point for members of the Muslim community. She blamed mainly the Nchaney but criticised also the Mbororo for their uncompromising attitude. The Nchaney wanted the Mbororo to contribute cattle and in addition expected their presence as an expression of their adherence to the new chief. As Amina argued, the Nchaney should have anticipated Mbororo opposition, as the latter would never accept traditional laws that conflicted with Islamic ideology. The Hausa, on the other hand, tried to compromise as much as possible and to preclude problems by staying at home or avoiding the ceremonial ground. Furthermore, Amina explained that she was personally confronted with Nchaney individuals who accused her of endorsing Muslim aggression. Local Grassfielders appealed to her background as a woman of the neighbouring Mbembe (Grassfields) group and expected her to take their side. However, being the wife of the Hausa chief, she was bound to side with the Muslim community, and was thus treated by some Nchaney as a traitor.

The perspectives of Genye and Amina Mudi reflect the views of two Hausa individuals who, due to their status and background, had allegiances on both sides. While Genye highlighted differing attitudes among Nchaney, Amina pointed at divergent interests and strategies of Mbororo and Hausa.

3.4.3 Mbororo perspectives

Adamu is the son and follower of the late *arDo* Affang, who was the leader of the Mbororo community resident on Nchaney territory (see chapter 5).⁵⁵ He pointed out that the Mbororo community willingly supported the investiture ceremonies by contributing six cattle. But the Nchaney did not take this into consideration when imposing their rules of comportment. In Adamu's view, the anger of the Nchaney was primarily directed against the Mbororo, although the conflict concerned the entire Muslim community.

⁵⁵ *ArDo* is a Fulfude term and the title for a Mbororo group leader.

*Mallam Egih and mallam Idi*⁵⁶, two Mbororo men, made it clear that not all Mbororo or Nchaney supported the idea of an open confrontation. They themselves did not want to get involved and were warned by their Nchaney friends to avoid the market square. Furthermore they explained that, although the Muslims were alerted and went to the mosque armed with staffs and knives, the elders advised their youths to concentrate on an impressive *kariya* performance and to restrain from violence in order to avoid a rupture of social and economic relations.

Ceede is a middle-aged Mbororo woman, who lives in the vicinity of Misaje. She attended the festivities on four days while making errands in town. Her account of the events was strikingly detailed and neutral. She pointed at differing approaches of Hausa and Mbororo in dealing with the Nchaney. As Hausa and Nchaney were neighbours sharing the same space, the Hausa were interested in keeping good relations with the Nchaney. They felt uncomfortable with the Mbororo's offensive approach and aimed at mediation. In the end, their religious affiliation was the decisive factor to rally with the Mbororo, since the Muslim ideology of unity superseded local allegiances.

The perspectives of Mbororo men and women corroborated the views of Nchaney and Hausa informants, indicating diverging strategies and interests on either side. Moreover, in their assessments Mbororo informants also pointed at their own people's contribution to the conflict. While many Mbororo elders kept away from the ceremonial ground to avoid confrontations with Nchaney maskers and instructed their youths to stay peaceful, the latter were less concerned and actively contributed to the conflict's acceleration. Mbororo youths' unruliness is a feature generally criticised by their elders and their Nchaney and Hausa neighbours (see chapter 6).

3.4.4 Divisional Officer's view

In interviews the Divisional Officer (DO) argued that the responsibility for the investiture conflict lay with the Nchaney, as they tried to exert cultural hegemony over the Muslim population. He asserted that this kind of conflict was a unique incident, and that in all other Grassfields chiefdoms Muslims were given the

⁵⁶ *Mallam* is the generic title for a Muslim scholar, and is attained upon having completed reading and memorising the Koran. The original term is Arabic and has been adapted to Fulfulde and Hausa. While the singular form is the same in both languages, it varies in its plural form (*mallum'en* in Fulfulde, *mallamai* in Hausa).

opportunity to circumvent traditional rules that conflicted with their religious ideology. He noted that it was not only the Muslim population of Misaje Town but also visiting market women who were forcefully subjected to those rules, and sought his protection. The DO expressed his irritation with the Nchaney chief and his notables who obstructed his initial efforts towards mediation and who, eventually, sent the *ngumba ju-ju* to his house in revenge for the support he lent to the Muslim community. While they thought the face-to-face encounter with the mask would harm the DO, he did not take the issue seriously. His father was an *ngumba* owner in Nso and thus “he could not be poisoned by his own food”.

Similar to the *fon*, the DO interpreted the investiture conflict against the background of the long-standing rivalry between Nchaney and Nso. At the same time, he justified his intervention with recourse to administrative guidelines in support of cultural autonomy and minority rights.

In bringing together the various perspectives on the investiture conflict, we can outline at least two subplots to the major opposition of Nchaney versus Muslims. On the one hand, there is the antagonism between the Nchaney palace hierarchy and the Divisional Officer who is seen not only as a representative of the state but also of the rivalling Nso chiefdom, and which reportedly influenced both parties’ actions. On the other hand, there are the divergent approaches and interests of Hausa and Mbororo with regard to their Nchaney neighbours. While most Hausa pleaded for compromise, Mbororo youths tended to take a more offensive approach. Both stances reflect the respective group’s position in the local power hierarchy and their diverging ideas of integration into the Misaje community. While the Hausa are more willing to take up a subordinate position, the Mbororo wish to be integrated on equal footing with the Nchaney (see chapters 5 and 7). However, in the context of the investiture conflict these divergent approaches were superseded by their common religion and Mbororo and Hausa pursued a joint strategy.

When the conflict reached its peak, individuals and groups had polarised themselves in two clear-cut factions, namely local Grassfielders versus Muslims. Once the crisis was diffused, underlying scissions, internal rivalries, and cross-cutting allegiances between individuals and groups resurfaced and facilitated the process of reintegration.

3.5 Reintegration and dealing with the past

In Turner's model of the social drama,

[t]he final phase [...] consists either of the reintegration of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimisation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties. (Turner 1996a [1974]: 41)

It provides the researcher with the opportunity to assess socio-political changes by comparing political relations before and after the conflict. Furthermore, the phase of reintegration has its own rhetoric, non-verbal language, and symbolisms that disclose general rules of conflict resolution (Turner 1996a [1974]: 42-43).

In applying Turner's analysis to the final stage of the investiture conflict, we may first note that the conflict ended in a phase of reintegration rather than schism; Nchaney and Muslims managed to reconcile and to reinstate their social and economic relations. Nevertheless, socio-political relations between the conflicting parties were altered, as were their relations with the state and its representatives. As I have not witnessed the situation before the investiture conflict, it is difficult for me to assess the actual changes in local political relations. Nonetheless, I will outline major alterations on the basis of informants' individual assessments.

The phase of reintegration was initiated by the Nchaney chief who invited Muslim representatives for a reconciliatory meeting and apologised for the maskers' excesses. He deemed it strategic to compromise and to invest in good relations with the Muslim community in order to strengthen his position vis-à-vis the Divisional Officer whom he came to consider his primary opponent in the administration of the Nchaney chieftom. The Muslim side accepted the *fon's* apologies. They saw their political authority significantly strengthened and were confident that they henceforth were able to assert the limits of their tolerance, if need be with the assistance of officials. The Divisional Officer had proven to his superiors and the local population that he was capable of managing this critical situation, and thus reasserted his superordinate position in local power politics.

Despite the groups' eventual reintegration, the Misaje community never succeeded in negotiating a final solution to the specific problem of cultural and religious differences regarding royal investiture rites. They ultimately deployed a strategy which I term 'functional indifference'. By leaving the issue unresolved and accepting or ignoring the existence of inherent contradictions, they achieved a temporary

compromise that kept interethnic relations flexible, while maintaining the possibility of reviving the controversy when required or opportune. Lentz (2002: 8) reports similar conflict management strategies employed in land disputes between Dagara and Nuni farmers in the border region of Ghana and Ivory Coast. Both parties considered it strategic to publicly confirm their claims, while leaving the dispute unresolved until a future incident might require its revival.⁵⁷

The notion of functional indifference is closely related to the concepts of compromise and avoidance. Strategies of compromise and concession have been described by Eriksen (1998: 14-18) for Mauritius and by Mutie (2003) regarding the coexistence of Kamba and Maasai peoples in Kenya. Mutie (2003: 294) defines compromise as “a negotiation process through which diverse and clashing interests coalesce in a give-and-take relationship”. Both authors state that compromise and concession is a pertinent strategy in overcoming ethnic and cultural differences in their respective field sites.

In the case of the investiture conflict the process of conflict resolution involved a compromise insofar as the rivalling parties agreed to ignore the incident. Their compromise, however, did not go as far as determining a binding solution to the specific problem of wearing caps during royal investiture rites. This omission may be interpreted as a strategy of avoidance.

Elwert (2001, 2004, 2005) presents avoidance as one of the four poles in his conflict model. Avoidance strategies, the same as destruction, are characterised by a relatively weak embedding. They do not draw on institutions of conflict resolution, nor do they contribute to their generation, and thus are prone to relapse into destruction (Elwert 2001: 2544, 2004: 30-31, 2005: 15, see also Eckert 2004: 15).

Alber (2004: 177) defines avoidance strategies as tactics of deliberately evading or ignoring conflict by abstaining from action. She provides examples from encounters of the Baatombu with the French colonial authority in Benin. In contrast to Elwert’s assumption of the probable relapse of avoidance to destruction, Eriksen (1998: 47-48) argues that avoidance, in addition to compromise, is a relevant and successful strategy in securing peaceful coexistence in Mauritius, and a strategy supported by government policies.

⁵⁷ The term indifference is also used by Bailey (1996) to describe the moderate and pragmatic approach to ethnic difference and conflict exhibited by the inhabitants of Bisipara, a village in eastern India, in the 1950s. However, in his conflict analysis he applied a variant of the economists’ expected-utility framework (Bailey 1996: 162); a theoretical approach I do not use in this study.

As argued above, the initial, more offensive character of the investiture conflict was bolstered by the national political developments of the 1990s and the atmosphere of social insecurity and violence. However, in the final phase of the conflict, actors switched back to the established strategies of functional indifference, avoidance, and compromise; strategies that have been widespread in the Grassfields, both in preventing and resolving inter-group conflict.

In concluding this section I will discuss some of the symbols and rhetoric that informants deployed in assessing the effects of the investiture conflict, namely the symbol of blood and the idiom of forgetting the matter.

Many informants argued that “since no blood was shed, no grudge should be kept”. From an Nchaney perspective, the spilling of blood would have implied long-term consequences, because it would have angered the ancestors and required spiritual sanctions. Similar incidents, such as the inter-chiefdom war between Nchaney and Nso (chapter 4), are vividly remembered and socio-political relations with these groups have remained strained. From a Mbororo and Hausa perspective, the upshot of violence would have threatened their social and economic continuity in the Nchaney chiefdom. In the investiture conflict, however, no blood was shed, and its effects on inter-group relations have remained limited.

In looking back at the investiture conflict, informants expressed discomfort and confusion regarding the evolution of a minor disagreement over religious and cultural differences into an imminently violent conflict. In their view, the incident was best wiped from collective memory and should no longer enter public discourse. A similar approach was shared by Panday’s (1991: 563) informants towards the recollection of Hindu-Muslim riots in Bhagalpur (India) who preferred to let “bygones be bygones” in order to ensure the reputation of their town and the future coexistence of Hindus and Muslims. Thus informants’ conclusive statement that the incident had passed and should be forgotten, on the one hand, reflects their strongly ambivalent feelings towards that time period and the incident itself. On the other hand, it illustrates that all parties have a strong interest in getting along, i.e. in peaceful coexistence, and that dissent and conflict are considered part and parcel of everyday life.

3.6 Conclusion

In the introductory section of this chapter I discussed the extended case method and stated as its final aim the identification of general principles that contribute to the generation and resolution of conflict. It is now time to accomplish this objective and to summarise the findings of this chapter.

In his renowned study of the Ndembu in Zambia, Turner (1995 [1957]: ix) emerged with the finding that the contradiction of the matrilineal and virilocal principle was a major factor supporting the cyclical emergence of social dramas in this society, and that this contradiction was further complicated by larger historical changes effected through colonial rule. If we draw an analogy and apply Turner's analysis to the investiture conflict, we may assume that the givens of cultural and religious heterogeneity and the flexibility of local power relations in the Western Grassfields are a major source of recurrent conflict. This, however, is not the case. As I will explore in detail in chapters 6 and 8, interethnic coexistence is facilitated via a system of economic complementarity and a multiplicity of cross-cutting ties. The Western Grassfields, alongside many other West African locales, could be cited as an example of "integration through difference" (Schlee 2001a: 18, 20). Nonetheless, the groups' coexistence is not entirely conflict-free, as quarrels do emerge over access to natural and state resources (see chapters 6 and 10).

If the causes of the investiture conflict were not underlying contradictions rooted in the religious and cultural heterogeneity of the research area, they may be located in external factors; in particular the national political developments of the 1990s and the intervention of state officials. In my reading, the general atmosphere of political instability and social insecurity, coupled with state policies promoting ethnic and cultural identities and minority representation, facilitated the upsurge of more offensive strategies, as pursued by both Nchaney and Muslims. One cannot determine with any certainty whether this conflict could have emerged in a different time period, nor is it possible to fully establish the conscious strategies of all conflicting parties and individuals. I believe, however, that actors on both sides were stimulated by the general socio-political developments and, quite possibly, by personal motives to 'try it on' in situations where they previously may have adopted strategies of avoidance or compromise.

The premise that individuals and groups have changed their strategies over the past fifteen years in pursuing their interests vis-à-vis each other and the state will successively be explored throughout the study. As we will see, the most striking transformation in group strategies is observable among the Mbororo who have been renowned for their social aloofness and evasiveness in the face of conflict, but have come to adopt a notable voice in the local and national political arena (chapters 5, 10).

A second finding to be presented at the end of this case analysis concerns the effect of the investiture conflict on interethnic relations. Here I will take up Gluckman's (1973 [1966]) argument of the socially cohesive propensity of conflict, and try to locate the investiture conflict in Elwert's (2001, 2004, 2005) conflict model.

Following Gluckman's (1963a: 110-136) study of political conflict within Zulu and Barotse society in southern Africa, we may draw the distinction between rebellion and revolution. While revolution leads to radical and constitutional change, rebellion contributes to the reproduction of an existing political system. In addition, Gluckman elaborates on rituals of rebellion which he sees as bounded forms that occur primarily within stationary or repetitive social systems. Such rituals are characterised by the open criticism of particular distributions of power, yet without questioning the structure of the system itself. In Gluckman's reading, rituals of rebellion demonstrate the potential for civil rebellion, but are untenable in systems open to revolution. Applying Gluckman's analysis to the investiture conflict may provide us with a model of how rituals of rebellion may lead to civil rebellion or ultimately to revolution. We may read the symbolic stand off of Grassfielders and Muslims as a ritual of rebellion on the verge of actual civil rebellion. Whereas the transitional unrest of the 1990s had the potential for revolutionary upheaval, the investiture conflict itself was finally diffused by the intervention of government authority, and ended in the groups' reintegration. While setting out as a socially cohesive conflict, it evolved into a disruptive conflict. Ultimately, its effects on social relations among Grassfielders and Muslims remained limited, as both parties agreed to forego its consequences.

The more elaborate conflict model of Elwert (2001, 2004, 2005) provides two axes to assess the integrative or dissociative propensity of conflict, namely the degree of violence and of social embedding. The investiture conflict exhibited a generally low degree of social embedding, as no acknowledged guidelines or procedures existed of dealing with cultural and religious difference in the context of royal investiture rites. Initial attempts at achieving a compromise largely failed. The strategy most common

among Mbororo and Hausa would have been avoidance, meaning that individuals of both groups stayed at home or systematically circumvented the ceremonial ground. Corresponding to Elwert's (2001: 2544, 2004: 30-31) assumption that actors tend to switch from avoidance to destruction rather than procedure, both Nchaney and Muslims opted for a relatively aggressive approach. Yet unanticipated by Elwert, they eventually switched back to avoidance – or functional indifference – in order to reinstate their peaceful coexistence.

I have opened my analysis with the case study of a conflict over religious and cultural differences that occurred in Misaje in 1997. In chapter 10 I will conclude it with the case study of a second, major conflict that emerged from a homicide in 2001 and exhibited quite different ways of conflict management. In the chapters between these two case studies, I will provide the historical backgrounds to the coexistence of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, and describe some of the many minor and less dramatic events (cf. Gulliver 1971: 354, Turner 1996a [1974]: 34) that are equally significant in understanding interethnic relations in the Grassfields.

4 NCHANNEY HISTORY AND IDENTITY

The focus of this chapter is on local Grassfields groups, in particular the Nchaney who played a significant role in the investiture conflict, and on whose territory Misaje Town is situated. The Nchaney here typify Grassfields groups in general, with whom they share similarities in their historical development and self-understanding. Concomitantly, I will engage with Mbororo and Hausa, their historical establishment in the Grassfields, and their understanding of ethnicity in chapters 5 and 7.

The Nchaney chiefdom comprises five villages, with Nkanchi being the head village (see chapter 2). Misaje Town counts as a quarter of Nkanchi and, since the 1970s, has been the seat of the *fon*'s palace. Nchaney residents constitute approximately 48% of the town's total population, while Bessa inhabitants amount to 8%. Nchaney settlement in the Misaje area dates back to the 17th century. In the course of their establishment and subsequent expansion, they encountered other Grassfields groups, some of whom were incorporated into the Nchaney chiefdom, while others ascertained their position as autonomous polities. In the early 20th century the Nchaney encountered the German and later British colonial authorities who aimed at administering the area in support of their own interests. In line with their policy of indirect rule, the British were strongly interested in local systems of political organisation, and confirmed the Nchaney chiefdom in its current territorial dimensions. Around the same period the Nchaney were confronted with the influx of Mbororo and Hausa and subsequently Grassfields migrants who established themselves on Nchaney territory without relinquishing their ethnic identities. In the post-colonial period the Nchaney were confronted with the Cameroonian government and with changing policies of political representation, particularly during the 1990s. As a result of these historical developments, Nchaney political and ethnic self-understanding underwent a number of transformations, which I will outline in this chapter.

4.1 Studying ethnicity in the Grassfields

Anthropologists have identified colonialism as a major driving force for the emergence and transformation of ethnicities in Africa. The proponents of a most

radical interpretation are Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Amselle (1998, 1999 [1985]) who claim that current ethnic groups are primarily the product of colonial invention. As my elaborations on Nchaney history will show, contemporary modalities of history-telling and ethnic self-categorisation largely correspond to the colonial model. However, their contents indicate processes of inclusion and exclusion, and changes in collective self-understanding that preceded the colonial period. Moreover, processes of constructing local history and identity extend to the present and articulate themselves in the activities of ethnic elite associations.

My elaborations on Nchaney history and identity are based on two sources of information. Written accounts are available from the colonial period and have been complemented by anthropological studies. So far, no ethnography has been written of the Nchaney, but there are detailed studies of neighbouring Grassfields chiefdoms.⁵⁸ My second and main source of information is interviews with conversant and entitled individuals, who discussed many aspects of Nchaney history with and for me, and whose critical comments on a preliminary version of this chapter further elucidated established modalities of historiography among Grassfields groups.⁵⁹ In this study, historiography is understood in a broad sense, referring not only to the codification of history in a written text, but to oral and visual practices of constructing and narrating history. In dealing with both kinds of sources it is important to keep in mind that the construction of history and identity is always informed by the current interests of their authors, or in Friedman's (1992: 837) formulation "history is an imprinting of the present onto the past."

4.1.1 The Nchaney in colonial administrative accounts

Early accounts on the history of Grassfields groups were recorded by British colonial administrators. The most detailed description of the Nchaney and their history is found in R. Newton's intelligence report on the Mbembe and Nchanti areas from 1935. Newton followed the guidelines that were provided by the colonial government based on its agenda of establishing control through indirect rule. He focused his

⁵⁸ Among the closest neighbours are the Bum (e.g. Nyamnjoh 2002b) and Wimbun (e.g. Bühler 1998, Pool 1994, Probst 1992). Further in the west are the Aghem (e.g. Kopytoff 1981) and We (Geary 1976); further in the south are the chiefdoms of Nso (e.g. Goheen 1996, Kaberry 1952, 1959), Oku (e.g. Argenti 1996, Koloss 2000), and Kom (e.g. Nkwi 1976).

⁵⁹ I am also grateful to Nicolas Argenti, Sally Chilver, and David Zeitlyn for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

enquiry on the following themes: geographical background information, history of the ethnic groups inhabiting the survey area, political organisation and inter-clan relations, local judicial systems, and ethnographic curiosia. A second source of information on the Misaje area is the unpublished notes of M.D.W. Jeffreys who, in his position as Senior Divisional Officer for special duties, toured the Bamenda Province in the 1930s.⁶⁰ His inquiries seem more random; but thanks to his anthropological background, they include detailed information and illustrative case studies left out in Newton's report.⁶¹ Although the data collected by colonial administrators tend to be eclectic and policy oriented, they are useful in situating and complementing present-day views, as long as they are read critically.

In colonial reports the Nchaney are known by the ethnonym *Nchanti*. In contemporary popular speech and administrative reports, however, the term Nchanti is no longer common. Three alternative terms have come to replace the colonial appellation: Nchaney stands for the chiefdom and its inhabitants, their language is called Ncane, and Nkanchi is the head village of the Nchaney chiefdom. As *fon* Richard Chefon, the head of the Nchaney chiefdom explained, the proper name of his people is *Nchan*. The original name of the village was Nchanti and later on turned into Nkanchi. The group of elders and notables, on the other hand, claimed that the term Nchanti used in colonial documents was actually the result of British mispronunciation. In the same way Mbororo do not talk of Nchaney or Nkanchi, but (mis-)pronounce both the name of the people and the village as *Sandi*. In the context of this study, I will adhere to the contemporary terminology, using Nchaney to refer to the chiefdom and its people, Ncane for their language, and Nkanchi when denoting the village. The ethnonym Nchanti will only be used in quotes from colonial documents.

In the following I will critically discuss three themes that relate to colonial history and the construction of identities in the Western Grassfields. These are the distinction between 'tradition' and 'custom' as proposed by Ranger (1983), the colonial classification of Grassfields peoples into 'tribes' and 'clans' and the distinction

⁶⁰ M.D.W. Jeffreys also administered the Bamenda Division from 1936 to 1945 (Jeffreys 1966).

⁶¹ Many thanks to Sally Chilver for giving me access to Jeffreys' (1951) notes, and providing me with a better understanding of the practicalities of colonial administration and research (personal communication, Oxford, 23/05/03).

between ‘natives’ and ‘strangers’, and the significance of Grassfields groups’ claims to Tikar origin.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) pointed out that many aspects of so-called traditional organisation, history, and legal arrangements in contemporary Africa are not based on locally developed customs, but were the outcome of colonial intervention and the projection of Western concepts onto their colonies. Ranger (1983) critically distinguishes ‘tradition’ from ‘custom’, taking ‘custom’ as a loosely defined and flexible body of inherited practices while ‘tradition’ refers to a “closed corporate consensual system which came to be accepted as characteristic of ‘traditional’ Africa.” (Ranger 1983: 248)⁶²

Among Cameroonians the terms ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’ are frequently mentioned but carry connotations different from Ranger’s use. ‘Tradition’ and its Pidgin English equivalent *country-fashion* denote practices inherited from previous generations, still relevant in everyday life, and therefore variable and adaptable to contemporary situations. The term ‘custom’, on the other hand, is mainly used when referring to practices and procedures introduced or fixed by the colonial masters. For example, the customary court is a judicial institution introduced by the British, while the traditional council is the local judiciary body of the palace that deals with village affairs (see chapter 10). Relevant is also the notion of ‘traditional authorities’ which refers to local political institutions, such as Grassfields chiefs and their associates. It will be important to keep the local meanings of these terms in mind when reading through accounts and statements quoted in this study.

Hobsbawm and Ranger’s argument of the codification of tradition, history, and identity through colonial intervention remains highly relevant to a critical analysis of the Cameroonian case.⁶³ However, I would plead for a less radical and more subtle approach which admits agency as well as self-reflexivity to both colonial masters and colonial subjects. I will take as an example the colonial classification of Grassfields groups into ‘tribes’ and ‘clans’. Colonial administrators and government anthropologists were well aware of the problems implied in practically applying these concepts to local population groups. In the Grassfields ‘clan’ was introduced as an

⁶² In a later article Ranger (1993: 83) critically discusses his use of the terms ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’, and admits that his argument was too polarised.

⁶³ As this study is confined to the Western Grassfields, I mainly engage with the British colonial era; but similar processes occurred in French administered Cameroon (see e.g. Tardits 1980, Geschiere 1993, Nyamnjoh 2003).

administrative term to denote political and residence units. As the Assistant District Officer Newton (1935: 39) indicated in his report on the Mbembe and Nchanti Areas, the administrative definition of ‘clan’ differed from its anthropological connotation as an exogamous, unilateral group of persons, which applied to only two of the 27 residence units in his survey area. Similarly, the colonial anthropologists and historians Chilver and Kaberry (1967, 1970: 249) stated that the concept of ‘clan territory’ was a misnomer. Moreover, they argued that the classification of Grassfields groups into ‘tribes’ or ethnic supra-units (Aghem, Bali, Mbembe, Tikar, and Widekum) on the basis of cultural commonalities and shared migration histories was of doubtful validity and significance. Nonetheless, the terms ‘clan’, ‘clan territory’, and ‘tribe’ were commonly used in administrative English and have also entered colloquial Pidgin English. As we will see, many interlocutors use these terms when referring to ethnic units.

Colonial administrators and government anthropologists were confronted with the ambivalent task of matching Western concepts, interests, and ideologies with African realities and practicalities (cf. Chilver 1963). One pertinent aspect of this endeavour was the British attempt to understand the political structure of their subject groups in terms of Western models.⁶⁴ This was largely not for humanitarian motives, but to enable them to co-opt local power-holders as agents of indirect rule and to legitimise colonial hegemony (Amselle 1998: 11-12, Ranger 1983).

In line with organising the Grassfields into administrative units (so called ‘native authority areas’), the British distinguished between ‘native’ and ‘stranger’ populations, and therewith consolidated existing power differences. In this context the term ‘native’ is not derived from the idea of autochthony, which denotes a people that emerged from the very area and has no migration experience. It is a political term that refers to local population groups whose claims to pre-eminence were endorsed by the colonial administration. The term ‘natives’ has entered colloquial English and Pidgin English, and is commonly used to denote Grassfielders in general or local Grassfields groups, contrasting them to Mbororo, Hausa, and Grassfields migrants who count as ‘strangers’ to the respective region. The distinction between ‘natives’ and ‘strangers’

⁶⁴ The agenda of conceptualising Grassfielders’ political organisation in Western terms also features in the writings of Chilver and Kaberry; for example, when equating Grassfields polities with ‘states’ (Kaberry 1962: 287), or in translating socio-political ranks with English titles like lord, lordling, or palace steward (Chilver & Kaberry 1960: 2). With my Swiss background, I find it difficult to understand the system of British aristocracy, let alone the equation of British nobility to Grassfields’ titles.

regained significance in the 1990s in the context of legislative changes that define citizenship in terms of ethnic and regional belonging (see chapter 2).

Taking colonial subjects not only as objects of colonial manipulation but attributing them agency and responsibility, also implies ascribing them the capability and power to select, manipulate, or invent information for their own purposes. Local historical accounts, at any given time, are therefore not neutral but influenced by ideological, political, and economic goals of their narrators and advocates. They may respond in form and content to structures imposed by a superior authority, and may aim at adopting strategies that promise most success. As Chilver and Kaberry (1967: 6) noted, the administrative intentions of colonial inquiries “inevitably led to the stressing by informants of those aspects of their history which might serve a local purpose or local alignments, and the suppression of others”.

Within Grassfields historiography, the claim to Tikar origin is an example of the strategic construction of history and identity and has extensively been discussed in anthropological literature (e.g. Chilver & Kaberry 1967, 1971, Fowler & Zeitlyn 1996, Jeffreys 1964, Kopytoff 1981, Price 1979, Yenshu & Ngwa 2001). Since the Nchaney also claim Tikar origin, I will briefly outline major arguments in the debate.

The term Tikar was popularised by the British administration in their ethnic classification of Grassfields groups. It was and still is applied to those groups who claim their origin from Kimi (present-day Bankim) or Ndobo⁶⁵ in the Upper Mbam River area in Adamawa. Anthropologists and historians have associated Tikar origin with the existence of certain political institutions, namely a regulatory society, a princes' society, and a model of seven royal councillors and palace stewards (Chilver & Kaberry 1967: 22, Kaberry 1962: 283). However, the Grassfields groups that claim Tikar origin correspond neither in terms of their language nor cultural practices with the so-called Tikar proper who still live in the Mbam area on the Tikar plain (Fowler & Zeitlyn 1996: 6).

We must question why Grassfields polities should claim Tikar origin. The answers given by anthropologists differ slightly, but generally stress the political and symbolic significance of such claims. Chilver & Kaberry (1971) interpret claims to Tikar origin as a political statement. In Kopytoff's (1981: 373) reading, Grassfields polities – often made up of lineages of locally disparate origins – claim Tikar descent as a way of

⁶⁵ Ndobo is an ethnonym for proto-Tikar (David Zeitlyn, personal communication, Canterbury, 12/05/03).

constructing a shared history and identity. Fowler & Zeitlyn (1996) identify various facets in Grassfielders' claims to Tikar origin. On the level of local politics, such claims entail the appropriation of the qualities of sacred kingship and absolute power attributed to Tikar kings. Interestingly, these claims only appear in administrative records of the 1920s, i.e. with the advent of the British colonial regime. Thus, looking at them in the context of Cameroon as a colony divided between the British and the French, they may reflect a desire to reject incorporation into the British system, taking into account that the Tikar region was situated in French administered Cameroon. Finally, despite their later relative insignificance, the Tikar seemed to have acquired fame as a brave and successful warrior people that resisted FulBe attacks, and as a 'model tribe' complying with colonial standards.

My reason for engaging with the 'Tikar problem' is to illustrate and situate the production of history and identity in its historic context of hegemonic structures. Even though the colonial period ended decades ago, its legacy on the form and content of historical narratives persists. The accounts of Nchaney history that I collected during my research largely corresponded to the colonial type of historical inquiry. This resulted from the fact that my own questions as well as the choice of information supplied by my informants were still influenced by the colonial model.

4.1.2 Local informants' accounts on Nchaney history

Discussing Nchaney history and identity with local informants, it became clear that historiography among Grassfields peoples entails clear hierarchies and formats. In contrast to the historiography of Misaje Town, narrating the collective history of the Nchaney is considered the monopoly of the palace hierarchy, i.e. elders and notables, while women and youths are generally excluded from history-telling.⁶⁶ This understanding is shared by Grassfielders as well as Mbororo and Hausa; although, as we will see later, the three groups differ in their modalities of historiography.

Secondly, it became clear that history, among the Nchaney, is not imagined as a single-minded, homogenous body of knowledge, but rather as a patchwork of details known to different members of the palace hierarchy. Producing a concise collective history thus entails an intellectual effort equivalent to the analytical processes applied

⁶⁶ Lentz (1998: 168) reports similar experiences for northwestern Ghana, not only for the contemporary period but also during the colonial period.

by anthropologists and historians. This duty was taken up by a group of nine (later four) notables, elders, and educated men who met twice for several hours to compile and discuss the information known to them, and to come up with a preliminary version of the Nchaney history. I attended their meetings together with my assistant Jonathan who was able to oversee their discussions in Ncane, while they presented the final narratives in Pidgin English. Simultaneously, I carried out a number of interviews with *fon* Richard Chefon, the head of the Nchaney chiefdom, whose historical account was based on personal discussions with his notables and councillors. Occasionally, the *fon* called for me to add details he had misrepresented or forgotten at previous meetings. I soon realised that, even if confined to the palace, writing Nchaney history was a matter of continuous compilation, discussion, negotiation, modification, amendment, and adaptation of information contributed from different, though officially entitled sources that were influenced by personal interests and agendas. This experience is not particular to my enquiries into Nchaney history; similar findings have been reported for other areas of the Grassfields (Kaberry & Chilver 1961: 355) as well as northern Cameroon (Schilder 1994: 91-92) and, contentiously, are a common feature of historiography everywhere (David Zeitlyn, personal communication, Canterbury 12/05/03).

In 2003 I sent a preliminary version of this chapter to Jonathan and asked him to discuss it with informants and friends in Misaje. The feedback was remarkable. Most readers were appreciative, but also very critical. They approved the use of colonial sources and visual material which in their view verified the presented account on Nchaney history. They criticised our limited choice of interview partners, and recommended to interrogate not only the *fon* of Nkanchi but also of neighbouring groups to cross-check his claims. Another criticism pointed to the fact that my historical analysis of Nchaney identity does not take into account age or gender differences. This admittedly is a weakness, but resulted from Grassfielders' modalities of historiography which exclude women and youths from history-telling. Further criticisms have been integrated into the subsequent text.

In the following I will briefly discuss the nature of the information on which the Nchaney history is based. While its main body is oral history, it includes elements from history taught at school, and some descriptions are coloured by contemporary perspectives, such as development and human rights discourses. Furthermore, Nchaney informants frequently referred to geographical sites and historically fixed

periods (e.g. German and British presence) to situate and validate their accounts. *Fon* Richard Chefon also introduced photographs, maps, and documents to substantiate current claims to land based on historical events. As we will see in later chapters, the use of written and visual material to endorse historical narratives is a strategy most popular among Grassfields groups, while Mbororo and Hausa rely mainly on oral accounts.

Furthermore, in recent times, the histories of Grassfields peoples have become the object of more or less professional academic research and have increasingly been appropriated by members of the educated elite. For example, at least two distinct books on the history of the Bali Chamba have been published in Cameroon within the last 15 years, written by elite members with university degrees (Titanji et al. 1988, Ndifontah n.d.). For the Misaje area no in-depth study has been carried out or published so far, although attempts were made. Nkenda Simon, the headmaster of the Misaje Government School, reported that he had compiled a booklet on the history of the Bessa based on oral traditions and interviews with notables and elders. Unfortunately, the manuscript got lost. Although local history is not included in the curricula of primary and secondary schools, it is tacitly practiced by many teachers on their own initiative. Moreover, university students of geography, environmental management, anthropology, and other subjects are increasingly encouraged to carry out small scale studies in their home villages resulting in dissertations for Bachelors and Masters Degrees (e.g. Ntoban n.d.). However, in all these academic and partly pseudo-academic endeavours, it is still the history of the palace rather than of the common man, not to speak of women, that is written down and perpetuated for future generations.

Against the background of my diverse sources of information, I will aim at presenting a multifaceted version of Nchaney history that incorporates the mosaic character and socio-political embeddedness of individual accounts. In selected cases I will condense individual accounts into standardised narratives. In other cases I will provide the reader with a variety of alternative versions of local history which reflect their authors' diverging perspectives, social positions, as well as political and economic interests.

4.2 Nchaney history

My account of Nchaney history consists of five sections that illustrate consecutive historical phases, namely the migration and early settlement period, the establishment of the Nchaney chiefdom, its expansion, its relationships with neighbouring chiefdoms, and the integration of non-Grassfields population groups. In the course of these phases, emic understandings of Nchaney ethnicity have changed. Encounters with other groups set off processes of inclusion and exclusion, and shifting group boundaries elicited transformations in Nchaney self-understanding (cf. Barth 1998 [1969]).

4.2.1 Nchaney myth of origin

At the roots of Nchaney identity is the mythical migration of their ancestors that culminated in their settlement at Nkanchi, probably in the 17th century. The following narrative panel is based on the accounts of *fon* Richard Chefon and the group of elders and notables interviewed:

We migrated from Kimi in the Banyo area in Adamawa; we are Tikar. This happened as a result of a serious war caused by the Muslims in the 16th or 17th century. We were called the *nchan* and were under the leadership of Ngungu whose name means ‘the carpenter bee’. He was afraid that his children might be killed. He transformed into a bee and swallowed his family. He flew to this place here [at Nkanchi], which by then was a virgin place, a free land. When he got here, he vomited his children. He was no longer called Ngungu but Mbene and the place was called *fembene*, meaning ‘home or palace of Mbene’. His children were called *bami babi soshung* in our language which means ‘the people of those who are seven’. These were the seven kingmakers from the seven families that make up the Nchaney. When Mbene died, he transformed into a rock. The same happened to the seven kingmakers. The place with the rocks of the *fon* and the kingmakers became a shrine, and is called *fewong* meaning ‘head of the village’ or ‘our country’. It is the village’s sacrificial site. In case of any problem, the kingmakers go there and call the names of their Gods of the land. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 09/01/02; Nchaney notables & elders, Nkanchi, 06/01/02)

As Newton (1935: 40) confirmed, the Nchaney trace back their origin to Kimi in the Upper Mbam River area and claim Tikar descent. Yet they only partly fulfil the criteria for counting as Tikar, as they have no princely society but only a regulatory

society (*ngumba*) that serves as the executive arm of the palace. *Fon* Richard confined the Nchaney's departure to the period of the FulBe *jihad*, which he dated to the 16th or 17th century. Actually, the Sokoto *jihad* was initiated in 1804. But, while *fon* Richard may have simply misremembered his history lesson at school, there could as well have been previous, minor *jihads* or slave raids that affected the area (David Zeitlyn, personal communication, Canterbury, 12/05/03).

Nicolas Argenti (personal communication, London, 23/04/03) suggested viewing the Nchaney myth of origin against the background of slave raids, a common feature of the Grassfields of the pre-colonial period. Taking into account that 'eating' serves as an idiomatic expression which denotes the appropriation of power (cf. Bayart 1993), *fon* Ngungu's 'swallowing' of his people could be interpreted as an act of attaining power through sacrificing or cannibalising his followers, i.e. by selling them into slavery. As has historically been reconstructed, many Grassfields chiefs served as collaborators to the FulBe and Chamba raiders, supplying them with slaves from within their own chiefdoms and thereby legitimising their power (Argenti 2006, Geary 1976: 91 et passim, Nkwi & Warnier 1982: 83-88, Warnier 1989, 1995). Similarly, *Fon* Ngungu's 'vomiting' of his children can be read as an act of procreation, namely the creation of a new chiefdom.

A crucial component of Nchaney identity is vested in the group's relationship with the land they occupy. This connection is expressed in the ritual responsibilities of the *fon* and the seven kingmakers. They are in charge of fostering the relationship with their ancestors who are represented in the eight stones on the village's sacrificial site. The Nchaney's identification with the land and the ancestors is a distinctive feature of many Grassfields groups. The land is generally thought to "punish those who transgress against the moral code, and can be called upon to make judgment in disputes" (Goheen 1996: 24, see also Fisiy 1995: 54-55). Moreover, land is considered the primary means of production, and is at the root of Grassfielders' self-understanding as farmers.⁶⁷

The contemporary population of Nkanchi is conceived as descendents of the seven founding families who are represented by the seven kingmakers. The names of the founding families are Basse, Bame, Sanda, Gwala, Ngonje, Ndomo, and Yahdo. Each

⁶⁷ Similarly, land plays a significant role in many agricultural societies in western and central Africa (e.g. Schoffeleers 1979, Zwernemann 1968).

family has its own initial settlement area which includes a sacred site where its members can hide in case of war.

Each family has its own place like that. It is the elders of every family, i.e. the kingmakers, who are in charge of the respective rites. For some families it is a forest to hide in, for others it is a rock. The particular forest at Nkanchi was much larger before and there was also a lake that evaporated. The forest served to protect the village against aggressors who would die in it. At Misaje there are these two stones, the *tetchi Nganko* meaning 'the stones of Nganko'.⁶⁸ The site is also called 'the stone that carries another'. The first people who occupied that area were from the Yahdo family. The Nganko who are a subsection of the Yahdo are authorised to perform the rituals there. During war, people hid inside the stones. There was a door that would open in war times for the members of the Yahdo family, i.e. the women, children, and elderly hid inside the rock while the men went out to fight. After the war was finished, people came out again. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 09/01/02; Nchaney notables & elders, Nkanchi, 06/01/02)

One informant suggested that 'the stone that carries another' may also signify the Nchaney supporting population minorities like the Pinyin, Wimbum, Mbororo, and Hausa, by allowing them to stay and profit from their land. There exist other fantastic stories about the two stones. The small stone, for example, is believed to roll down to the river to take a bath at night. As the story goes, the *fon* of Nkanchi initially refused that the Islamic Primary School should be built on its present site below the two stones. The Muslim community insisted, despite Nchaney reservations that the school would be magically destroyed.

Besides the seven founding families who migrated in a group, there is an eighth family in Nkanchi, the Che. Two distinct versions of the historical encounter and relationship between the seven founding families and the Che were presented. According to the account reported by members of the Che family, they were the original inhabitants whom the seven founding families met upon their arrival. *Fon* Richard Chefon, on the other hand, claimed that the Che were relatives of the Ndomo and joined them later. Both parties agreed that the Che had their own leader who accepted the political hegemony of the *fon* of Nkanchi, while keeping his ritual independence. Up to now, the Che have their own shrine, though smaller than the

⁶⁸ 'The stones of Nganko' are also indicated on map 2.6 and photograph 2.4.

shrine of the seven founding families at Nkanchi. Unlike the latter they have no king-maker, but their sub-chief is second in rank to the *fon* of Nkanchi.

Fon Richard Chefon's version is best understood as an attempt to assert his primacy and to defuse the Che's political claims by introducing fictive kinship relations. In response to reading an earlier version of this chapter, members of the Che family contested *fon* Richard's statement, indicating that the Che were not related to the Ndomo but to the Basse and Sanda, and that their shrine was as valuable and effective as the shrine at Nkanchi.⁶⁹

4.2.2 Name-list of Nchaney fons

The next step in Nchaney history, after their migration and settlement at Nkanchi, is the establishment of the Nchaney chiefdom. This phase is best described by presenting the name-list of Nchaney *fons* and complementing it with anecdotes on the subsequent chiefs' reigns. Royal name-lists have been collected since the colonial period and have become an integral element of Grassfields groups' oral histories (Chilver & Kaberry 1967: 13).⁷⁰ Anecdotes on the various *fons*' reigns inform us of internal political struggles, and also illustrate the Nchaney's embeddedness in the wider historical and political framework.

The Nchaney *fon*-list includes the names of fifteen chiefs, starting with Mbene (Ngungu), the mythical ancestor of the Nchaney who allegedly moved to Nkanchi in the 17th century, and ending with *fon* Richard Chefon who was enthroned in 1997 (see chapter 3). While *fon* Richard Chefon and his advisors were able to recall the names of all fifteen chiefs, the group of elders and notables only remembered seven *fons*. The following is a compilation of the information contributed by both parties. All dates indicated in the table and in the subsequent text are based on the historical account of *fon* Richard Chefon; little attempt has been made to verify them.

⁶⁹ Some members of the Che family criticised that their history was not represented adequately, and that too much attention was paid to *fon* Richard Chefon's statements.

⁷⁰ King-lists as part of oral history are not limited to the Grassfields. Schilder (1994: 81-84), for example, discusses the royal name-list of Mundang chiefs in northern Cameroon.

Table 4.1: List of fons of Nkanchi

	name	approximate reign	characterisation
1	<i>fon</i> Mbene (Ngungu)	17 th century	mythical ancestor
2	<i>fon</i> Mbene II		no further information
3	<i>fon</i> Kabo		
4	<i>fon</i> Krine		
5	<i>fon</i> Kimenchung		
6	<i>fon</i> Chimbang		
7	<i>fon</i> Bamine		
8	<i>fon</i> Fimban		
9	<i>fon</i> Massa		
10	<i>fon</i> Nchenghe	around 1850 – 1880	bad ruler, dethroned
11	<i>fon</i> Fuma I	around 1880 – 1933	successful ruler in a period of pre-colonial inter-chiefdom wars and colonial threats
12	<i>fon</i> Ngong	1934 – 1950	bad ruler, dethroned
13	<i>fon</i> Sale	1950 – 1968	successful ruler in a period of affluence
14	<i>fon</i> Michael Fuma II	1968 – 1997	local chief and government administrator
15	<i>fon</i> Richard Chefon	1997 – present	

The mythical ancestor and founder of the Nchaney was Ngungu, who became known as *fon Mbene* after settling at Nkanchi. He was followed by eight generations of *fons* of whom only their names are remembered.

The subsequent ruler was *fon Nchenghe* from the Basse family. He ruled for approximately 30 years (1850 – 1880), but left behind a bad reputation.

He was a bad ruler and dethroned. He demanded heavy fines, for example a goat, from persons he judged guilty. The people were angry and decided to transfer the chieftaincy to a different family, that is to the Bame. Nchenghe was no longer addressed as *fon* but *shey*, the title of an ex-chief. Nchenghe was annoyed and suspected his family to have contributed to his downfall. He gave the condition that the Basse should only get back the chieftaincy if they provided seven baskets of mosquitoes, seven baskets of rats, and one hare caught by hand, that is alive. Since this is impossible, the Basse cannot succeed and that is why the chieftaincy is still with the Bame. (Nchaney elders and notables, Nkanchi, 06/01/02)

The chieftaincy was handed over from Nchenghe to *fon Fuma I* who belonged to the Bame, another of the seven founding families of Nkanchi. *Fon* Fuma I was born around 1880 and died in 1933. He is remembered as a good ruler who defended his chiefdom against attacks of the neighbouring polities Bum and Nso, and successfully mastered early colonial challenges.

A German governor was moving around, and was said to be shooting *fons*. When he came to Nkanchi, the chiefs of the area assembled. He asked them to line up to kill them. *Fon*

Fuma insisted to be shot on behalf of the other chiefs; but the bullets missed him and so the governor finally gave up. (Nchaney elders and notables, Nkanchi, 10/01/02)

Fon Richard Chefon confirmed the historical background to this story about *fon* Fuma's mystical powers. He reported that the Germans set up their military camp at the current market square in Nkanchi which is called *kibalaki*, meaning 'the (German) barracks'. *Fon* Fuma supplied them with provisions, and instructed his subjects to cultivate crops next to the German encampment. The Germans also needed carriers for their excursions. While the officers travelled on horseback, local carriers accompanied them by foot from Nkanchi to Tulawa, their second military camp on the road to Bissaula. As confirmed by Assistant District Officer Newton (1935: 9), the villages situated close to the road to Nigeria, including Nkanchi, frequently came in contact with the German colonial administration. They were required to provide men for the chain of mail-runners from Bamenda to Kentu. Moreover, it was during *fon* Fuma's reign that Hausa traders began to settle at Nkanchi from where they later transferred to Misaje (see chapter 7).

Shortly after Fuma I had died in 1933, ***fon* Ngong** took up office. He ruled for sixteen years but was dethroned in 1950 because of his harsh rule. As the Nchaney elders and notables reported, "he beat people in the palace and did not respect human rights. He was a wicked man and even speared people."⁷¹ Both Newton and Jeffreys must have toured the Nchaney area while *fon* Ngong was in rule. Indeed, Jeffreys' notes on Misaje include a complaint letter by the council clerk, H.N. Laban, written in 1941 and addressed to the Misaje Native Court. Laban reported the uncooperativeness of the Nkanchi village head in building a rest house for the Resident's visit to the area, and described the instigation of a fight by the village head (Jeffreys 1951: 116-117).

Following Ngong's dethronement in 1950, ***fon* Sale**, was ordained to act as interim ruler until Ngong's designated successor Michael Fuma was old enough to take over in 1968. *Fon* Sale enjoyed the reputation of a competent ruler.

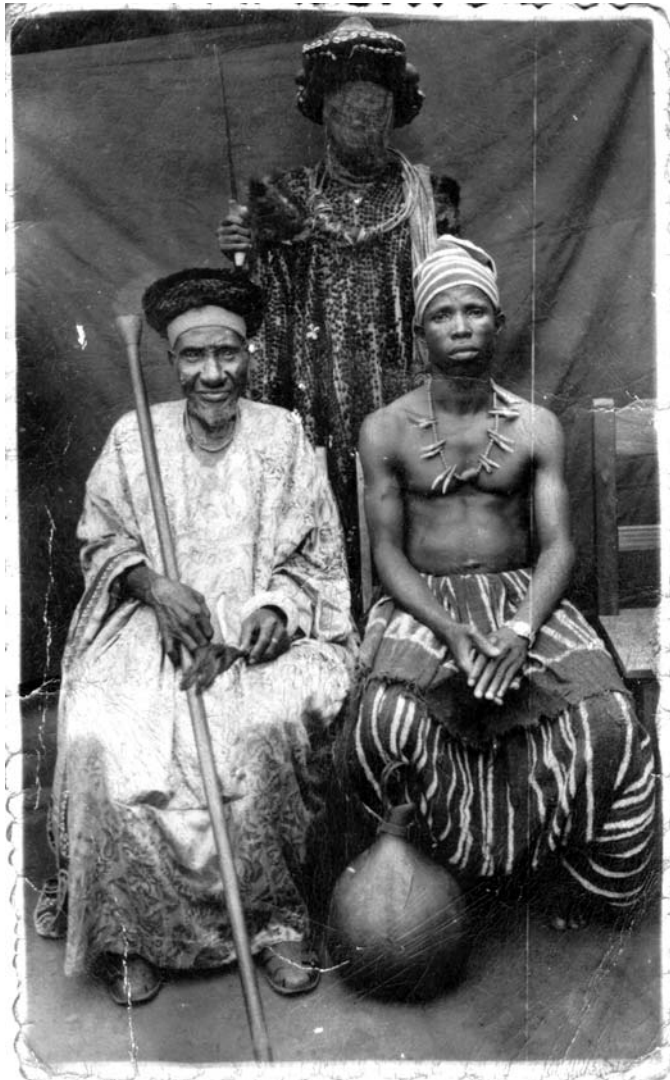
Fon Sale was very successful during his reign: five tigers [leopards] were caught and one buffalo, and barren women gave birth. Things like that could only happen during the reign of a good *fon*. Today that there are no tigers, a good *fon* can be known if many of our children are successful in their exams or hold important positions in the government, like parliamentarian or minister or even Reverend Father. Now that we have one Reverend

⁷¹ This is clearly a contemporary perspective, as in the first half of the 20th century human rights discourses were not yet applicable.

Father from Nkanchi while the other neighbouring villages do not, we say we have caught a tiger. (Nchaney elders and notables, Nkanchi, 06/01/02)

Fon Sale's reign coincided with the construction of the Ring Road (the main infrastructural axis of the North West Province) and the road to Dumbo. The British employed local workers and also brought in skilled labour migrants from other areas of the Grassfields. Around the same period Mbororo pastoralists began to enter the region and boost the local economy with their demand for food crops. All in all, it was a prosperous era and a period of economic development which must have coloured people's perception of *fon Sale's* rule.

Photograph 4.1: shey Sale and fon Michael Fuma II



All photographs in this chapter have been contributed by *fon* Richard Chefon and are part of the palace album.

This picture was taken on 05/03/1968, on the day that *fon Sale* handed over the chieftaincy to *fon* Michael Fuma and henceforth no longer bore the title of *fon* but *shey*. *Shey Sale*, sitting on the left, is dressed in a fine gown, tailored in the Hausa style. He is adorned with insignia of eminence, namely a long stick and a fly whip. *Fon* Michael Fuma II, sitting on the right, is dressed in a so-called kings' cloth; a hand-woven fabric dyed in blue and white, owned by Grassfields palaces, and worn only by chiefs during important rituals. *Fon* Michael wears a necklace made of leopard teeth, and at his feet is a calabash that symbolically contains ancestral substances transmitted from *fon* to *fon* (cf. Warnier 1993b). Noteworthy is also his watch which, by then, was a symbol of modernity. Behind the two, stands *kilah*, a mask in charge of protection that belongs to the Yahdo family.

***Fon* Michael Fuma II** was a successful and well educated ruler. His reign lasted from 1968 to his death in 1997. Not only was he a chief, but also an administrator. He

was the chairman of the Ako Rural Council which nowadays comes close to the post of mayor of Misaje. Moreover, he was married to seven wives and had more than 40 children. *Fon* Michael was also renowned for his mystical powers.

When *fon* Michael was about to be crowned, he transformed into a ghost and left for Lassin.⁷² Each village he passed, he transformed into an elderly, sick woman. The population was thick because they were following the evil spirit to cast it out of the land. From Lassin he was chased to Kibbo, to Kamala, to Nfume, to Chunghe, to Nkanchi, to Misaje, and finally to Bridge Five where he got tired as well as the people chasing him. When the population returned, he followed them and entered river Kincheng. Finally, he came to the palace and was enthroned the next day. He demonstrated his magical powers to prove that he was a strong leader for all the villages he had passed through. He started from Lassin because his mother was from there. He stopped in Bridge Five which is already Bessa country. (Nchaney elders and notables, Nkanchi, 10/01/02)

Fon Michael's alleged transformation into a female spirit that ultimately entered river Kincheng alludes to beliefs in *mami wata*, a dangerous water spirit popular in many parts of West Africa (see e.g. Meyer 2004, Wendl 1991). Moreover, the extraordinariness of his faculties associates him with Ngungu, the mythical ancestor of the Nchaney.

Photograph 4.2: fon Michael Fuma II and his associates



The photograph was taken in 1972. It shows *fon* Michael Fuma II sitting in the palace yard surrounded by some of the kingmakers and sub-chiefs. The person on the far right is Mallam Awudu, by then the leader of the Hausa community in Misaje who counts as a sub-chief to the Nchaney *fon*.

⁷² Lassin is a village situated on Noni land at the southern border of Nchaney territory.

Fon Michael Fuma was perceived as a skilful administrator and politician both on the level of the local polity and the Cameroonian state. The beginning of his rule occurred in the early days of independent Cameroon. He was one of the young and dynamic rulers who succeeded in combining their traditional role with national politics and struggled for the development of their area.⁷³ It was also *fon* Michael Fuma who, due to his administrative responsibilities, transferred the palace from Nkanchi to Misaje and thereby consolidated Nchaney territorial claims to Misaje Town.

Fon Michael Fuma's reputation as a cunning politician is dominant in *fon* Richard Chefon's accounts of his father's rule. He told us, how *fon* Michael Fuma 'snatched' development projects from other areas:

The SODEPA⁷⁴ ranch first was planned to be established on the Mbot plain. But because my father was so powerful he brought it to where it is now. He wanted SODEPA on his land because it would bring development. It is a parastatal enterprise established under the Swiss. But the problem of Lake Nyos later on created a lot of problems and interrupted much of the development.⁷⁵ Even now, Wimbum people are still struggling to get hold of SODEPA. The people living at Tanti were forced to quit the place, and the village of Kwei was shifted to the present side. Most of the graziers left to Nigeria. Since the Dumbo and the Kwei were brothers to the Nchaney there were no major problems with my father, and the government attempted to compensate them for their losses. The Dumbo were the main beneficiaries, profiting from the reduction of unemployment, the construction of roads, of the palace, assistance in water projects etc. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 13/01/02)

The interesting point here is not the verification of these claims, but *fon* Richard Chefon's understanding of his own position, taking his father as a role model. Since Cameroon's independence and reunification, and increasingly with the political liberalisation of the 1990s, chiefs have aspired to combine their local political roles with administrative functions. They have aimed at becoming leading figures in the struggle for government resources and rural development, and to be recognised as being on the same level with government administrators.

⁷³ Another example was *fon* John Yai, the late chief of Bum, whose political engagement has been described by Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (1998).

⁷⁴ SODEPA stands for *Société de Développement et d'Exploitation des Productions Animales*. The SODEPA cattle ranch at Dumbo was opened in 1975 and produces breeding stock and beef for the national market (see chapter 2).

⁷⁵ Lake Nyos is a volcanic crater lake that produced toxic gas in 1986 and killed approximately 1,800 people and thousands of cattle (see chapter 2).

Fon Richard Chefon, the current chief of Nkanchi, was enthroned in 1997. He spent several months in ritual seclusion, also known as the ‘fattening period’, during which the kingmakers and sub-chiefs instructed him in his duties. The ritual preparations culminated in the investiture ceremonies in October 1997 (see chapter 3). The administrative induction took place in May 1998. At the time of my research, *fon* Richard Chefon was a young man in his early thirties with a basic educational and professional training background. At this early stage of his rule, he was preoccupied with enforcing respect and allegiance from his subjects, negotiating power relations with neighbouring Grassfields chiefdoms, and consolidating his authority over land and people vis-à-vis government and community officials.

Photograph 4.3: Investiture ceremony of fon Richard Chefon



The image shows a sequence in *fon* Richard Chefon’s ritual enthronement in 1997. *Fon* Richard is taken from the palace to the market square. He is led by Tantoh Genesis, a member of the Che family and his maternal uncle. He is followed by members of *ngumba*, the palace regulatory society.

Photograph 4.4: Administrative induction of fon Richard Chefon



The photograph was taken at *fon* Richard Chefon's administrative induction on 07/05/1998. It shows *fon* Richard Chefon (third from the right) in company of the Brigade Commander of Misaje, the Commissioner of Frontier Police in Dumbo, the Mayor of Misaje, the Senior Divisional Officer, the Divisional Officer and the Commissioner of Public Security of Donga-Mantung (left to right).

In comparing the information on the earlier *fon*'s reigns supplied by *fon* Richard Chefon and the Nchaney elders and notables, a number of points are remarkable. In general, the material is complementary and overlaps in most arguments. Differences occur with regard to the type of information, its character, and orientation. While the elders and notables relied on oral tradition exclusively, *fon* Richard Chefon had access to alternative sources like photographs and documents mainly stored in the palace. He also referred to administrative documents, such as maps kept at the divisional archives in Nkambe, to validate his land claims against neighbouring chiefdoms. As Nyamnjoh (2003: 130) confirms, inquiries into colonial archives have become a popular strategy in which *fons* are often assisted by their educated and external elite. A second variance refers to the character of the information supplied. Many of the stories recounted by the Nchaney elders and notables included mythical elements that illustrate their chiefs' supernatural powers. *Fon* Richard Chefon, on the other hand, stressed the rulers' practical skills in negotiating power relations. A third difference concerns the political orientation of historical narratives. The knowledge of elders and notables is confined to socio-political relations within the village. They focused on the

relationships between the *fon* and his subjects, the ruler and his councillors or sub-chiefs, or between families. Conversely, *fon* Richard Chefon's knowledge and interest centred on inter-village, inter-chiefdom, and interethnic relations, and the relationship between the *fon* and the colonial and post-colonial administration.

When looking at the content of the stories on Nchaney rulers, the most striking feature is the practice of dethroning bad rulers. As reported by the Nchaney elders and notables and by *fon* Richard Chefon, both *fon* Nchenghe and *fon* Ngong were bad rulers who maltreated and exploited their subjects. They were deposed by the seven kingmakers and, consequently, were given the title of *shey* as an indicator of their former position. This leads me to two observations and one speculation. To start with the latter; although the subject of slavery was never mentioned by Nchaney informants in their historical accounts, it is quite probable that the dethronement of *fon* Nchenghe was related to the internal, hidden slave trade which by the mid-1800s was in its heyday (cf. Nkwi 1987: 119-127, Warnier 1989, 1995). Proceeding with the two observations: first of all, the practice of dethroning bad rulers conflicts sharply with the model of sacred kingship and absolute power attributed to Tikar kings.⁷⁶ Secondly, even nowadays the *fon*'s authority over his subjects is limited and occasionally contested. Nchaney and Bessa *fons* frequently complain about the lack of recognition; so do members of the external elite who see their local chiefs as important actors in the struggle for development and government resources (see chapter 10). In such situations reference is often made to more powerful and hierarchical Grassfields chiefdoms where the *fon*'s authority is thought to be uncontested. Such an assertion, however, is rather a projection of the ruler's desired absolute power than reality. Even in centralised chiefdoms like Nso the *fon*'s authority principally rests on his subjects consent (Kaberry 1959).

⁷⁶ As the following examples of three Grassfields groups illustrate, there is no single practice in dealing with bad rulers. Historical accounts on Oku, a renowned Grassfields chiefdom with strong 'Tikar features', include stories about the dethronement of earlier *fons*. Unlike the Nchaney case, dethroned Oku *fons* were killed, which corresponds to the idea of sacred kingship (personal communication with Nicolas Argenti, London, 23/04/03). The Meta, on the other hand, combine a ranked system with relatively decentralised political organisation. Here, unlike in the Oku case, the *fon*'s power is not conceived as divine, but as transferred to him through ritual acts of key members of the human community. Thus, a misbehaving *fon* could be deposed and live a commoner's life (Dillon 1990: 133-141). In Mankon, finally, both strategies were practiced: *fons* who behaved anti-socially were deposed or killed (Rowlands 1987: 56).

4.2.3 Expansion of the Nchaney chiefdom

With the establishment of the Nchaney chiefdom in the 17th and 18th century arose also the need to expand, to occupy new areas, and to incorporate new population groups. The *fon* of Nkanchi succeeded in asserting his primacy over four villages who subordinated themselves politically and culturally. Their members nowadays claim Nchaney identity on the grounds of residing on Nchaney territory, speaking Ncane, adhering to Nchaney cultural practices, and respecting the Nchaney *fon*'s pre-eminence. In terms of ritual authority, however, they are independent and have their own shrines.

When Newton visited the Misaje area in the mid 1930s, he found an Nchaney chiefdom comprised of five villages, which he identified as the Nchaney 'clan territory':

Nchanti, properly the name of the largest of a group of five villages, was applied to the whole group by the German Administration, a custom which has been continued. This group includes the villages of Nchanti, Nfume, Nchawnge, Kiwo and Bebem. These speak a common language which appears a little different from that spoken by Dumbo, Bissa and Nkwe and by the two remaining villages, Akwato and Kamini. (Newton 1935: 3-4)

The disruption of the local power balance through colonial intervention was only too obvious to administrators like Newton. As he explained, all five villages were placed under the *fon* of Nkanchi for taxation purposes by the German administration (Newton 1935: 42). Furthermore, he cautioned to treat them as equal (Newton 1935: 73), knowing that the chiefs utilised the colonial endeavour of ordering and encoding power relations for their own ends. In the same manner, *fon* Richard Chefon asserted his supremacy over the five villages not only in terms of 'traditional' privileges, but by reference to administrative credentials of colonial origin.

Proof of the fact that the *fon* of Nkanchi is the overall leader is his power to enthrone the leaders of the other places that have developed into villages themselves. When the administration came, i.e. in the 1930s and 40s, the *fons* of Nfume, Bem, Kibbo, and Chunghe were recognised as third class and some as unclassified *fons*. These are administrative matters.⁷⁷ (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 09/01/02)

⁷⁷ Grassfields chiefdoms have been administratively classified into first, second, third class, and unclassified chiefdoms. The rulers of the first three categories function as auxiliaries of the administration and receive a monthly salary or token from the government. The Nchaney *fon* counts as a second class *fon*.

According to *fon* Richard Chefon, the villages of Kibbo, Bem, Chunghe, and Nfume are offshoots of Nkanchi. They were founded during the reign of *fon* Fuma I (1880-1933) in response to population pressure and a famine caused by a locust plague. Conversely, Christopher Mbang, an elder of the Che family, presented the relationship between Nkanchi and the four villages differently:

Because of population growth, groups of people migrated and settled on Nkanchi land, respecting the authority of the *fon* of Nkanchi. They were headed by their own chiefs but accepted to honour the *fon* of Nkanchi, to take up membership in the Nchaney clan, and to adopt the Ncane language. (Christopher Mbang, Misaje, 17/12/01)

The two versions coincide in claiming mutually approved leadership by the *fon* of Nkanchi over all five villages, which has been challenged by Newton (1935: 73) for the colonial period. However, they differ regarding the putative origin of the population groups. *Fon* Richard Chefon endorsed his assertion of the four villages as offshoots of Nkanchi by naming the families that moved to the respective places. Christopher Mbang's hypothesis that these villages were founded by population groups coming from different areas is supported by Newton's inquiry into their respective migration histories. Newton (1935: 40-41) as well as Chilver and Kaberry (1967: 29) reported that Bem and Chunghe claimed origin from nearby, while the people of Kibbo recounted having moved together with those of Dumbo. The Nfume, finally, claimed to originate from Kano.

Similar to the above discussed issue concerning the status of the Che, *fon* Richard Chefon's version has to be understood as a political statement, and as an attempt to portray his chiefdom as large and powerful. The presence of members of the Nkanchi families in those four villages is incontestable, but most probably they were not the village founders.

Among the five villages under Nchaney hegemony, the Nfume are a particularly interesting case. Firstly, their claim to originate from Kano challenged colonial administrative reasoning. While Newton (1935: 40) simply questioned the Nfume's reference to Kano, Jeffreys was stunned.

I do not believe this claim. In the days when such a migration must have occurred to allow the complete loss of their Kano tongue, no small body of people could have migrated that distance and remained intact. They would have been caught and sold as slaves by the

Fulani⁷⁸ – if by no one else. The village head of Dumbo laughed this story to scorn and pointed out that this was the first time he had heard such a ridiculous claim and that this story had not been told to the Administrative Officer making the intelligence report. (Jeffreys 1951: 115)

Despite Jeffreys' scepticism, the Nfume's claim to Kano origin has prevailed till today. I was recounted the following version by Benjamin Kokila, a member of the royal family in Nfume:

Our *fon* came from Kano in Nigeria. My people left Nigeria because it was overcrowded. As we came here, we settled at Mbissa. We saw that we could not stay all of us at one place. So, some of us decided to leave Mbissa and to settle at Nfume. For the Nchaney, they are quite different. They came from a different place, which I do not know about. Our old fathers who came first were used to talk Hausa and also bent down for prayers [were Muslims]. As they died and we met the people who already stayed here, we just followed their own fashion. We took over their language and also the Christian faith. Those of us who remained at Mbissa and became members of the Bessa clan adopted Nsari as their language. Those who came to Nfume adopted the Ncane language. [...] If it is to identify ourselves, we conceive us as members of the Nchaney clan in the first instance. Since we have come to stay this side, we are Nchaney and we are together with them. For our brothers who are at Mbissa, they are members of the Bessa clan and they first of all are with the Bessa. But when it comes to *country-fashion*, for example in case of installing a new chief, marriage arrangements, or war alliances, the family relationship with our brothers at Mbissa becomes important.

When the chief of Mbissa died, we the Nfume were invited to join the death celebration, because we are all the same. Some of us decided to move on from Nfume and settled at Loh, Lassin, Bem, Chunghe etc. They were also invited for the death celebration of the Mbissa *fon*. [...] Concerning marriage relations, the Nfume cannot intermarry with the people from Mbissa, the relationship is too close. But there is no problem in getting married to people from Kamine or Bridge Five. Because of the close family relationship with the people in Mbissa, intermarriage is not possible. If it happens, the couple has to separate, a fine of seven goats has to be paid, and rituals have to be performed by the elders. It is a law, otherwise you go mad or die and no children can be procreated from such a marriage; they will die. [...] In case of war we would have to ally with our brothers at Mbissa. Even if the Nchaney attacked Mbissa, we could not join the fight, because we

⁷⁸ The ethnonym Fulani is a Hausa term that entered the vocabulary of the British colonial administration in referring to members of the FulBe ethnic group, including the Mbororo. The term has also entered common language use in the Western Grassfields, and most Grassfielders and state agents refer to the Mbororo as Fulani.

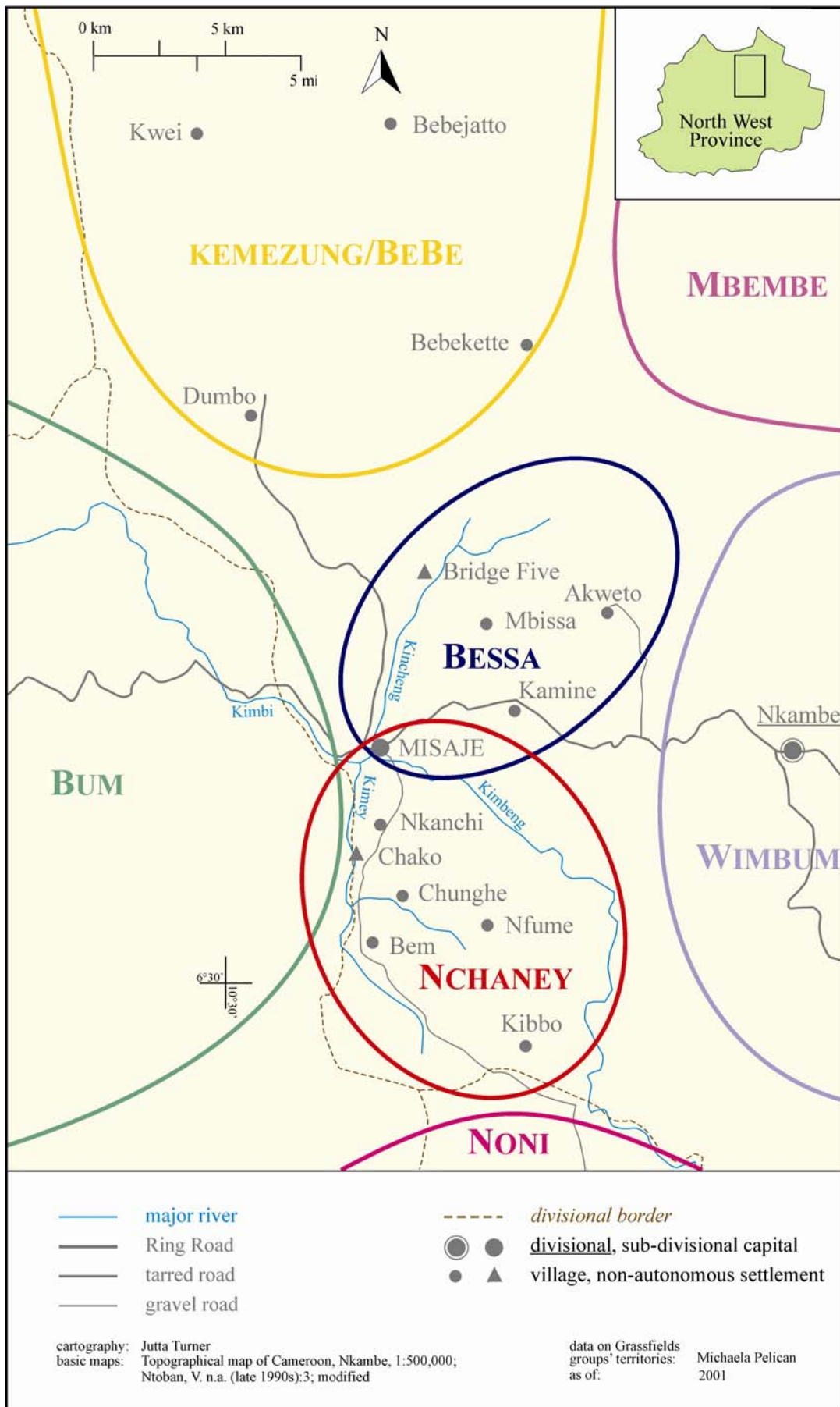
cannot fight at the side of the Nchaney and kill our brothers. That would affect us. And if we joined the Mbissa against the Nchaney, they would no longer allow us to stay with them. (Benjamin Kokila, Nfume, 11/01/02)

The account by Benjamin Kokila shows the ways in which the Nfume are caught between two identities that entail different sets of loyalties. On the basis of territorial and administrative identification, which for the Nfume is the overriding one, they consider themselves as Nchaney and therefore have to submit to the hegemony of the *fon* of Nkanchi. In terms of identification based on shared origin and descent, they stress their relation with part of the Mbissa population who territorially and administratively belong to the Bessa ‘clan’. This second, descent-based identification thus cross-cuts territorial boundaries and identities, but plays a subordinate role in everyday life. As we will see below, a similar situation applies to Mbororo and Hausa living on Nchaney territory. Yet, unlike the Nfume, they attribute significantly more meaning and weight to their descent than to territorial identity.

4.2.4 Inter-chiefdom relations

By the 19th century, the Nchaney chiefdom was well established, comprising the five villages of Nkanchi, Kibbo, Bem, Chunghe, and Nfume. Further expansionist activities led to confrontation with neighbouring chiefdoms, some of which culminated in bloody battles. The 19th century was characterised by trade relations, but also by violent struggles over people, land, and power between Grassfields chiefdoms (cf. Nkwi 1987). Those conflicts contributed to the consolidation of Grassfields chiefdoms’ political and territorial authority, and their distinct identities. Up till today, the memory of such battles has remained vivid, and is occasionally used to conceive of contemporary inter-chiefdom relations in historical terms.

The Nchaney share boundaries with the Bessa, Kemezung and Bebe, Bum, Noni, and Wimbum (see map 4.1).



Map 4.1: The Nchaney and neighbouring chiefdoms (schematic illustration)

The Nchaney and their neighbouring groups speak different and for the most part mutually unintelligible languages. Yet thanks to a high degree of multilingualism, communication is relatively unproblematic (Brye & Brye 2001, Nkwi 1987: 55).

Informants characterised the relationship of the Nchaney with the Kemezung and Bebe to the north and the Wimbum to the east as amicable, and intermarriages are common. The relationship perceived as the closest is with the Noni, situated to the south of Nchaney territory, with whom they share linguistic similarities, cultural institutions, and frequent intermarriages. The Noni actually fall under the political hegemony of Nso, one of the most powerful and prominent Grassfields chiefdoms. The inter-chiefdom relations that Nchaney interlocutors described as overshadowed by historical struggles include their relationship with Nso, Bum, and Bessa.

*Nchaney – Bansa*⁷⁹

The Nchaney and the Bansa share an ambivalent relationship which goes back to the Nchaney-Bansa war in pre-colonial times. Informants related a number of differing versions of the historical event, but the most detailed account was given by Nji Enock Tanjong, the headmaster of the Islamic Primary School in Misaje:

During the time of commerce, the relationship between the traders coming from Nkanchi, Fonfuka, Kamine, Wimbum etc. brought about intermarriages. Only the Nso people could not intermarry because of the tribal war which took place during the reign of *fon* Fuma. The Bansa wanted to expand their territory and capture the whole of this area. They had already penetrated Noni and approached Nchaney land coming through Bem. The Noni usually came down to Nkanchi to exchange corn against things like palm nuts, oil, kernels etc. Bem was captured and they followed the valley coming down to Nkanchi. They entered the compound of Kikunge, a member of the Che family. Kikunge, by that time, was in a loincloth; that is, he was circumcised. He left the house and tied his loincloth. When he saw the Bansa coming in, he said, as a man, he cannot allow these people to penetrate. He used his own sense to save the village; in a mystical way. He opened his mouth: a cloud came out and covered the Nso aggressors. When the people were covered in the cloud, they could not see anybody, but the Nchaney instead could see them well and slaughtered them like goats. The few who were still to come received the message and escaped the place. Since then the Nchaney do not have any good relationship with the Bansa again. They do not intermarry. (Nji Enock Tanjong, Misaje, 11/01/02)

⁷⁹ Nso is the name of the chiefdom, while the people are called Bansa and their langue Lamnso.

Sporadically, allusions to the Nchaney-Banso war were made in colloquial conversation. They still influence the perception of inter-chiefdom relations. Occasionally, even interpersonal rivalry is perceived in historical terms. For example, *fon* Richard Chefon and the former Divisional Officer explained their political divergences as rooted in the Nchaney-Banso war (chapter 3).

Nchaney – Bum

The second precarious inter-chiefdom relationship is the one with Bum, a relatively large and influential chiefdom situated to the west of the Nchaney ‘clan territory’. Mention of Bum aggression against the Nchaney is found in reports by Newton (1935: 41), Chilver and Kaberry (1967: 32) as well as W.M. Bridges (1933) who worked as Assistant Divisional Officer in the Bum Native Authority Area.

The first real war with Nchanti people took place in the time of Yunji, Mbangakue’s successor. A man from a village called Bem situated near Nchanti, suffered the misfortune of losing his wife and children who were killed by the Nchantis, and so he ran to the Bum Chief, who agreed to take the matter up. In the ensuing fight no record is given as to the result – it was therefore probably unfavourable to Bum, the more especially as the latter appear to have lost their chief in it. They returned, disheartened, to carry out the customary funeral rites of a chief, and allowed a year to elapse before attempting to revenge this reverse hoping that their enemies had meanwhile forgotten their existence. Desultory battles with the Nchantis followed up to the time of the arrival of the Germans – but none of these ‘wars’ appear to have been regarded very seriously, and it seems certain that no definite advantages were really claimed by either side. (Bridges 1933: 10)

Contemporary Nchaney versions of this incident focus on current boundary disputes which they tend to explain as a result of pre-colonial power struggles and their arbitration by the colonial administration. The following account was reported by Nji Enock Tanjong, the headmaster of the Islamic Primary School in Misaje:

Still under the reign of *fon* Fuma, he got the news that people from Fonfuka [headquarter of the Bum chiefdom] were intruding in his land. So he sent messengers to inquire about the matter. The Nfume people joined for that journey because they were brothers to fight for the land. One Nfume man, Ndogo Nge, was arrested and taken to Fonfuka as a captive. This provoked the Nchaney to get their weapons. Upon their return, that is after they had retrieved their brother, they captured Ndamume, a Bum man, and used him as a bridge to cross the river. They arrived back home and celebrated the release of their

brother. The government represented by the administrator D.K. Musa went there and constructed the boundary stone to separate Nchaney and Bum land. Both sides had to pick stones and put them on a heap, indicating the boundary. The Nchaney claimed the boundary to be at Fonfuka market. The Bum claimed the boundary to be at Nkanchi market. Administrator D.K. Musa, a Wimbun man from Nseh, used a telescope to measure the distance of the divisional headquarters before he set the border stone.⁸⁰ He cooperated with Dr. Jeffreys and they made a map. There are still problems between the Bum and the Nchaney concerning the chiefdoms' boundaries. (Nji Enock Tanjong, Misaje, 11/01/02)

Despite conflict and competition between the two chiefdoms, individual relationships of villagers have hardly been affected. Unlike in the case of the Bansa, intermarriage with the Bum is permitted and common. This observation is supported by Nkwi (1987) in his study of inter-chiefdom relations in the Western Grassfields who interprets the coexistence of trade friendships on the individual level, and of hostile relations on the institutional level as “a marked characteristic of traditional diplomacy” (Nkwi 1987: 96).

Nchaney – Bessa

Most complex is the relationship between the Nchaney and the Bessa, although historically, the two groups never confronted each other in a war.

From the perspective of the Nchaney, their relationship with the Bessa, in particular with the villages of Mbissa and Kamine, is characterised by numerous cross-cutting ties. They share intermittent kinship relations, based on frequent intermarriages and common descent, with at least part of the Bessa population. In political terms, the relationship between the Nchaney and the Bessa is strained by competing claims over the territory of Misaje Town, and the post of mayor of Misaje. Both sides aimed at endorsing their claims via historical reconstruction. *Fon* Richard Chefon claimed initial supremacy over Mbissa and Kamine on the basis of kinship relations with their *fon*, and the substantial presence of settlers who originated from Nkanchi. He asserted his claims by referring to a map by S.N. Clarke from 1880 which allegedly is kept at the Cameroon National Archives in Buea. *Fon* Richard Chefon's arguments are mainly rhetorical. In British colonial reports, Kamine and

⁸⁰ Obviously, optic instruments like a telescope or binoculars have left a lasting impression on the local population, and many individuals believe that they have more functions than just making distant objects appear nearer and larger.

Mbissa were associated with Akweto, while the Nchaney ‘clan territory’ was confined to the five villages.

The ethnonym Bessa – referring to the inhabitants of Mbissa, Kamine, and Akweto – never appeared in colonial reports. Although Newton (1935: 40) mentioned that Akweto and Kamine shared common ancestry and jointly constituted a ‘clan’ in its literal sense, the villages were administratively treated as three independent chiefdoms. In the post-colonial period the *fon* of Akweto was classified as a second class chief and given supremacy over Kamine and Mbissa.

As an additional complication, the village Mbissa has two *fons*: one is administratively recognised, the other ritually endorsed.⁸¹ All informants agreed that this coexistence of two *fons* with distinct responsibilities in one chiefdom was the outcome of colonial intervention.⁸² *Fon* Richard Chefon explained the contemporary situation as follows:⁸³

The origin of having two *fons* dates back to the German period. [...] That is, when the *fons* sent representatives to the Germans, they gave them the power and authority and even dressed them up to look like *fons*. They did so thinking the Germans might kill their messengers. When the latter came back alive, they declared themselves *fons*. [...] The issue of having two *fons* [in Mbissa] is a mistake of the past we cannot change today. The great-grandfather of *fon* Ngwang had sold his traditional rights to *fon* Mamoh and there is nothing we can do. If we want to solve the problem in the traditional way, *fon* Ngwang [ritually endorsed *fon*] will go to the libation ground with his traditional cup. He will talk and pour libations to prove that he is the legitimate *fon*. *Fon* Mamoh [administratively recognised *fon*] cannot do that. He cannot talk with any cup but he would simply say that he is following what he has inherited from his father. In the past, his fathers worked with the predecessors of *fon* Ngwang and they were recognised as *fons*. If it has not been like that, he should die. The tradition will not kill him; because what he said is true. On the other hand, if the administration wants to settle the matter, it might cause conflict, because *fon* Ngwang has a big family and many people supporting him. The same applies to *fon* Mamoh who equally has a large family and a large group of followers. Both families

⁸¹ The same feature applies to the Nchaney villages Kibbo, Chunghe, and Nfume.

⁸² Dillon (1990: 201-205) recounts a similar dual system for the Meta village Njindik where political and ritual powers are shared between the *fon* and one senior village notable. He explains this situation in terms of first-comer versus late-comer relations, and the acquisition of chieftaincy as a rank rather than power. While the notable’s lineage constituted the first settlers and is in charge of ritual duties, the *fon*’s lineage, by the time of its arrival in 1900, was the only one that had achieved a royal rank and possessed chiefly regalia.

⁸³ The interview was carried out by my assistant Jonathan in summer 2002, i.e. after I had left Cameroon. The following passage is taken from Jonathan’s notes.

know that there are two *fons*. If one of them is dethroned, conflict will result. The only way to resolve the problem is to go back in time, and that is impossible. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 18/08/02)

The explanation that the existence of two *fons* in Mbissa resulted from the strategy of sending an impostor to the Germans was also mentioned by the British District Officer R.B. Cardale in his annual report of 1941. He reported a conflict between the two village heads which eventually was judged in the Misaje customary court. Cardale believed that the case was resolved by recognising the acting chief in his office. But as the contemporary situation shows, the predicament of two *fons* in Mbissa persists.

As Bessa informants confirmed, the current relationship between Akweto and Kamine, as well as between the two chiefs of Mbissa, is characterised by petty quarrels and rivalry. Over the past years, members of the Bessa elite in and outside the area have attempted to overcome internal enmities by trying to reconcile their chiefs. Moreover, they have actively fostered a sense of collective identity among the inhabitants of Mbissa, Kamine, and Akweto on the basis of common origin and language.⁸⁴ Consequently, the Bessa chiefs and elite are less interested in stressing cross-cutting ties with the Nchaney, but in dichotomising Bessa versus Nchaney ethnicity. This development has also been recognised by *fon* Richard Chefon who mainly blamed the Bessa elite for the contemporary friction in the Nchaney-Bessa relationship. However, tensions between Nchaney and Bessa are not just a contemporary feature, and stories on how the Nchaney tricked the Bessa in the past are numerous (see e.g. the story on the location of the customary court in chapter 2).

While Grassfields peoples share many cultural, socio-political, and economic features, political confrontations between chiefdoms contributed to the consolidation of distinct ethnicities. In addition, new understandings of Nchaney identity emerged as a result of facing culturally different groups, such as Mbororo and Hausa.

⁸⁴ See Brye & Brye (2001: 14-17) for an analysis of the variance of Nsari spoken in Mbissa, Kamine, and Akweto.

4.2.5 Integration of other population groups

Mbororo, Hausa, and Grassfields migrants settled on Nchaney territory in the early 20th century, without claiming political autonomy. Their arrival occurred during the colonial period in which delineated notions of ethnicity, such as ‘tribe’, ‘clan’, and ‘clan territory’, were introduced. These idioms have been incorporated into local understandings of ethnicity. Thus the Nchaney perceive and claim all population groups living on their territory as ‘clan’ members despite ethnic and cultural differences.

Mbororo, Hausa, and migrants are members of the Nchaney clan. The Fulani [Mbororo] and the Hausa staying on Nchaney land are considered members of the Nchaney clan. They are looked upon as children but they can move anytime. The same applies to Pinyin and Bamenda people staying on Nchaney land; that is, membership of a clan is tied to residence on its land. The Pinyin and Bamenda people are under the Nchaney; that is, they are members of the Nchaney clan because they cannot carry their problems to their home village. They have to be judged by the *fon* and therefore it is necessary that they are members of the traditional council. (Nchaney elders and notables, Nkanchi, 06/01/02)

‘Clan’ membership is primarily defined in terms of territorial identity and the acknowledgement of the political and judicial supremacy of the *fon* of Nkanchi, as illustrated in the investiture conflict analysed in the previous chapter. Shared cultural features play no role here; nor is there any need for reference to a shared history. Hausa, Mbororo, and Grassfields migrants were mentioned in Nchaney historical accounts only peripherally, and mainly with the aim of reifying their political subordination to the Nchaney chief.

The first ethnically and culturally distinct individuals who settled on Nchaney territory were early Hausa traders and their followers. At this point, I am mainly concerned with accounts on Hausa history from an Nchaney viewpoint. Alternative perspectives will be explored in chapter 7 where I focus on Hausa history and ethnicity. As we learn from *fon* Richard Chefon, the arrival of the Hausa coincided with the rule of *fon* Fuma I who welcomed them because of their trading activities.

The first Hausa chief, Mallam Awudu, was brought in from Nkor by *fon* Fuma I around 1900. We had no Hausa people this way and *fon* Fuma was interested in having them staying with us because of their engagement in trade. The Hausa usually bought kola nuts in Nso, and passed through Nkanchi on their way to Bissaula in Nigeria. The Nchaney

were interested in kola nuts, Hausa caps, and salt, because there was no salt by that time; instead they used the ashes of burnt plantain peelings. They were also interested in lime stone, *kanwa* [potash]. The Nchaney had palm oil, traditional caps, and wives to offer in exchange. At first, the Nchaney dressed in bark clothes. The Hausa traders and the Germans brought clothes, mainly shirts and shorts as trade goods. (fon Richard Chefon, Misaje, 13/01/02)

Table 4.2: Hausa trade exchange (according to fon Richard Chefon)

Grassfields		Nigeria
kola nuts	↔	salt
palm kernels		lime stone, <i>kanwa</i> (potash)
palm oil		<i>daddawa</i> (spice)
traditional caps		rubbing oil
mats		Hausa caps
wives		clothes

The Hausa's integration into the Nchaney community was generally assessed positively by Nchaney informants. Already in 1935, Newton described significant cultural and economic impacts of the Hausa community on the population of the Mbembe and Nchanti areas:

There is a large floating Hausa population, principally along the North to South trade route and the East to West route along the Donga valley; Hausa influence in dress and manners is very noticeable and is increasing. It is also probable that there are considerably more converts to Islam each year than there are to the various forms under which Christianity is presented to the people. (Newton 1935: 21)

Despite the Hausa's spatial and political integration, many Grassfielders perceive them as culturally different and somehow obscure. Particularly their initial activities as Islamic scholars knowledgeable in the Muslim faith and healing (*mallam* in Fulfulde and Hausa) raised suspicion and rumours among local Grassfielders, some of which have persisted until today. This is well illustrated in the following quotes from two interviews with Nchaney informants, which accentuate the perceived cultural and moral gap.

The Hausa people are truly poor. From the beginning their wives never went out of the fenced compound. They were not used to farming. They were actually depending on the Fulani [Mbororo]. The Hausa man from the word go is an idle sitting man, just relying on the Koran to beg from the Fulani. It is a matter discussed on and agreed upon. (M.C., Misaje, 18/12/01)

The Hausa at first only came working as *mallams*, i.e. sitting in front of their houses doing some unidentifiable work. At night they would go out to steal, both from Aku [Mbororo sub-group] and from country people. Only later on, they got involved in the cattle business when the Pinyin people were already buying and selling. (B.J., Misaje, 24/09/01)

This view of the Hausa as idlers and thieves enraged Hausa informants who read the preliminary version of the Nchaney history. They argued that the Nchaney interlocutors misinterpreted the relationship between Hausa and Mbororo as one of dependency. Since giving alms to the poor is a commandment prescribed in the Koran, receiving support is not shameful. Furthermore, a young Hausa man pointed out that it was Hausa traders who “brought civilisation to them [the Nchaney] long before the white man came. Hausa people even took them to Nigeria; they worked for Hausa as porters.” (J.M., Misaje, 23/07/03) Finally, Hausa informants refuted the accusation of theft, incriminating Mbororo youths instead, and insisted that Hausa merchants partook in cattle trade long before the Pinyin (see also chapter 7). Conversely, other non-Muslim readers endorsed the above statements by the two Nchaney interlocutors.

A second distinct category of individuals who were welcomed to settle on Nchaney territory were migrants from neighbouring and distant Grassfields areas. They essentially moved to Misaje in connection with the construction of the Ring Road in the 1950s, and in relation to cattle trade which has been flourishing since the 1940s. Nchaney informants hardly mentioned Grassfields migrants and their integration into the Nchaney community in their historical accounts. However, *fon* Richard Chefon and his councillors were able to recall the names of a few early migrants, like Pa Ngwa, a Meta man who came in 1922. *Fon* Richard grouped the migrant population in three major categories: the people from Bamenda and Pinyin who came for business (cattle trade in particular) or farming; migrants from Nso who were mainly involved in the road construction; and individuals from the neighbouring Wimbun area who engaged in business or were allegedly societal outcasts, exiled or driven away by threats of witchcraft (see also chapter 9).

More detailed than Nchaney accounts on the establishment of Hausa and Grassfields migrants in Misaje are their narratives on the recent history of the Mbororo. This probably has to be viewed against the background that the Nchaney derive greater economic benefits from the Mbororo than from the Hausa or

Grassfields migrants. As I will outline in more detail in chapter 5, the Mbororo in the Misaje area belong to two sub-groups that settled at different periods. The Jaafun who arrived in the first half of the 20th century established themselves on the highlands near Nkambe, and descended with their herds to the lowlands of Misaje and Dumbo for seasonal transhumance. The second group, the Aku, entered the region in the second half of the 20th century and settled permanently in the lowlands around Misaje. According to *fon* Richard Chefon, his father *fon* Michael Fuma II was actively involved in the establishment of the Aku and their leadership in the Misaje area.

ArDo [Fulfulde, title for a Mbororo group leader] Affang originally came here in 1952. But before him, the first *arDo* was *arDo* Maguwa from whom *arDo* Burti took over. *ArDo* Maguwa was the first Aku, he settled close to Bridge Five. He was sacked because he was wicked. He did not like other Fulani [Mbororo] to come, and even spoilt the area where he stayed with bad medicine. Nobody can ever graze there again. Maguwa ran away because he had eaten [embezzled] tax money. The son who remained here, Jeji Hamadu, did not become *arDo* because his father misbehaved. He, too, escaped to Nigeria because of the debts, and is now at Ngida Jikum. Another son is at Nso and is very rich. When *arDo* Burti became *arDo*, my father was working with the council. Burti was stubborn and destructive and also ate tax money. My father *fon* Michael, in his position as municipal administrator, that is chairman of the local council, sacked him. After that, Affang became *arDo* in 1973, on July 20th. That was the same day I, *fon* Richard Chefon, was born, which also gave me the name Affang. It was the native authorities who chose the *arDo*. By the time *arDo* Affang was made *arDo*, it was my father who imposed it on him since, by then, he only had 20 to 30 cattle. Actually, it was *fon* Michael who brought *arDo* Affang here, because they had been friends in Nigeria at Boko where my father schooled and completed standard six. The time *arDo* Affang came here, he had only two children and 20 to 30 animals. The rest of the family were all born here. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 13/01/02)

This account only reaches back to the 1950s, when the first Aku pastoralists settled in the Misaje area. In its structure and content it resembles the description of the reigns of Nchaney *fons*' discussed in the royal name-list above, i.e. it is largely concerned with offices and institutions. As we will see in chapter 5, Mbororo history told from an Aku or Jaafun perspective is different, and we will hardly come across the kind of information supplied here.

Thanks to the relatively recent arrival of the Mbororo, many Nchaney still remember the changes initiated by their influx and settlement. The distinction

between Jaafun and Aku plays a significant role in the Nchaney perception of Mbororo. The following interview passage with Mbang Christopher, an Nchaney elder, illustrates Grassfielders' perception of Jaafun and Aku as ethnically and culturally distinct, not only from the Nchaney but also from each other. The term Mbororo is commonly used among Grassfielders when talking of Jaafun, while Aku are referred to as Aku.

In the Misaje Sub-Division, we used to have Mbororo people [Jaafun] only during dry season; that is from December till mid-March. Then, they went back to Ndu, Nkambe, and Nso where they stayed in grass houses. There were no permanent graziers. They only lived in grass huts; that is, they were identified as nomads. It is only in 1952 that the other 'race', the Aku graziers, came to the Misaje Sub-Division from Nigeria. They actually are two different people with two languages.⁸⁵ The Aku people farmed the same like us, and generally took care of their animals so as to avoid farm damage. They may now get involved in stealing and misbehaving because of the effects of social integration. But the first 'race', the Mbororo [Jaafun] were more careless and wild, causing a lot of farm damages. The knifing system⁸⁶ was very common with the Mbororo [Jaafun]. They attacked their own people as well as country-people and sometimes even respected us more than themselves. In case of farm damages they escaped overnight back to the uplands. They did not care about the farmers. (Mbang Christopher, Misaje, 18/12/01)

Most Nchaney informants agreed that rampant farmer-herder conflicts are a feature of the past and are mainly associated with the Jaafun. Conversely, they assessed their socio-economic relations with the Aku as relatively good. The increasing involvement of Aku youths in cattle theft was lamented by Nchaney as well as Aku elders (see chapter 6).⁸⁷ However, the Nchaney showed little inclination towards excluding the Aku from the Nchaney 'clan' and its territory.

Historical accounts on Nchaney history illustrate an ever widening radius of Nchaney polity and ethnicity, starting with the mythical ancestors' establishment at Nkanchi, and ending with the accommodation of Hausa, Grassfields migrants, and Mbororo as members of the Nchaney 'clan'. Moreover, these narratives show the extent to which

⁸⁵ While Jaafun and Aku are both Mbororo sub-groups and speak the same language Fulfulde, though with dialect variations (see chapter 5), Grassfielders perceive them as two distinct ethnic groups.

⁸⁶ The knife is an integral part of a Mbororo man's herding equipment. Mbororo youths are thought to be quick in using their knives in brawls (see also chapter 6).

⁸⁷ I did not receive any response from Mbororo informants on the Nchaney history; the reason being that there are only a few Mbororo in the Misaje area who can read English and who would be interested in the topic (see also chapter 5).

local conceptions of ethnicity have been modified in response to colonial and post-colonial intervention, and the ways in which idioms like ‘tribe’, ‘clan’, ‘clan territory’, ‘natives’, and ‘first-comers’ are used to bolster political claims.

4.3 Local Grassfielders’ self-representation to the state

In this section I will focus on the use of ethnicity and history in contemporary politics and in local strategies of representation to the state. In order to illustrate the variety of strategies deployed in the Misaje area, I will broaden my ethnic focus and include other local Grassfields groups, namely the Bessa and Kemezung, in my analysis. As we will see, political representation is no longer limited to local rulers and their associates. Ethnic elite associations have also become influential agents in claiming political offices and economic assistance from the state and international organisations.

4.3.1 Changing avenues of political representation

During the colonial period, political representation of Grassfields groups towards the administration was vested in the *fon*. After Cameroon’s independence and reunification, Grassfields *fons* continued acting as representatives of their peoples, but their political and administrative powers were considerably curtailed. After abolishing the ‘House of Chiefs’ in 1972, Ahidjo issued a presidential decree in 1977 in which he confined the role of chiefs to auxiliaries of the administration. Chiefs were supposed to mediate between the administration and the local population, and to assist in executing government directives and tax-collection. Moreover, chiefdoms have been classified into first, second, and third class chiefdoms on the basis of their relative power, and their leaders are correspondingly remunerated for administrative tasks (Fisiy 1995, Fokwang 2003: 96-97, Jua 1995).⁸⁸

With their chiefs largely excluded from national politics, Grassfields and other groups had to look for alternative ways of representing their interests to the state.

⁸⁸ This classification system was introduced by the British colonial administration; for a critical discussion of its impact on inter-chiefdom relations see Yenshu & Ngwa (2001). The five first class chiefdoms are Bafut, Bali, Kom, Mankon, and Nso; they have been influential since the colonial period. The classification of second and third class chiefdoms is an ongoing process, and is related to demographic, political, and administrative developments. The *fon* of Bum, for example, has been advanced to the status of a second class *fon* during my research in 2001; the *fon* of Nkanchi has been made second class *fon* in the 1970s.

Educated individuals, including some Grassfields *fons*, entered the ruling party and achieved positions of pre-eminence as parliamentarians, court presidents, ministers, mayors, municipal councillors, and party leaders. In the Misaje area, the late *fon* Michael Fuma II was successful in occupying an administrative function as chairman of the Ako Rural Council, and in attracting government projects to the area. Yet he was the only Nchaney in a prominent political position, while other groups, like the neighbouring Wimbum, produced a number of influential officials.

Legislative changes and the reintroduction of a multi-party system in 1990 opened up new avenues of political representation. A number of Grassfields chiefs engaged in party politics, much to the dislike of their subjects who preferred their chiefs to remain neutral mediators in the democratic struggle between civil society and the state.⁸⁹ With the introduction of democratic votes, debates about ethnic belonging and local citizenship came up and facilitated the emergence of ethnic elite associations (see chapter 2). By now, nearly every chiefdom in the Grassfields has its own elite association which acts as the group's representative to the state and development organisations.⁹⁰

4.3.2 The Nchaney fon and political representation in the 1990s

Fon Richard Chefon sees himself as the legitimate representative of the Nchaney 'clan'. He claims to know Nchaney history best, as he bases his version on accounts of palace notables and official documents. References to colonial maps, and assertion of good relations with the colonial masters are part and parcel of his vocabulary, not only in interviews with the anthropologist, but generally in dealing with neighbouring chiefdoms and the Cameroonian government.

Officially *fon* Richard Chefon is non-partisan; but in order to further his interests as the head of the Nchaney 'clan', he joined the North West Fons Conference (NOWEFCO) which was founded in 1995 to unite *fons* in support of the ruling party (cf. N. Awasom 2003b, Fokwang 2003: 121). Besides NOWEFCO there existed NOWEFA, the North West Fons Association, which was founded in 1993 and

⁸⁹ The party-political involvement of *fon* Ganyonga III of Bali has been described by Fokwang (2003: 107-137). On the political dealings of *fon* Angwafo III of Mankon see N. Awasom (2003b), Nyamnjoh (2002b, 2003), and Rowlands (2002).

⁹⁰ It seems there are regional variations regarding the prominence of ethnic or regional elite associations. While in the South West Province associations are formed more on the basis of regional units, in the North West they are organised on an ethnic basis (personal communication with Ute Rösenthaller, Halle, 05/10/05).

affirmed political neutrality. *Fon* Richard Chefon's preference for NOWEFCO was not motivated by party-political considerations but by the factor that NOWEFA was dominated by first-class *fons*, while NOWEFCO declared all chiefdoms to be equal, irrespective of their administrative classification. In 1998, the two *fons*' associations held a joint meeting and decided to fuse into the North West Fons Union (NOWEFU).

As *fon* Richard Chefon explained, the *fons*' associations put forward a number of requests to the government. They demanded that government officials should respect Grassfields tradition and political protocol, they called for the reinstatement of the House of Chiefs, and stipulated government support to develop their respective 'clan areas'. So far, *fon* Richard Chefon has had little success in attracting development aid to Misaje or the Nchaney area. Instead he has been pre-occupied with securing his own interests, with bolstering his authority over his subjects, and furthering his influence over neighbouring groups and government officials.

4.3.3 Ethnic elite associations as political representatives

Elite associations are not a new phenomenon in Cameroon but date back to the 1950s, when the first high school graduates ascended to government positions. Many of them developed from college associations or church groups, and their members' prime objectives were to assist each other socially and economically.⁹¹ Many educated elite members also aimed at supporting their home areas. But during Ahidjo's regime, their regional and ethnic loyalties were restrained, as they were considered inimical to the aspired ideal of national identity (cf. Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998). With political liberalisation in the 1990s, elite associations experienced a renaissance. Many associations founded in the 1980s and 1990s are registered as 'socio-cultural and development associations'. They represent particular ethnic groups or specific regions, and aim at providing the necessary contacts and self-help to access resources for local development. Most associations assert political neutrality, but as their members tend to exploit personal party-political connections to the benefit of their group, they often are politically predisposed.⁹²

⁹¹ As an example, see Njeuma's (1987) description of the Record Club, a branch of the *alma mater* association of the Sasse College in Soppo, South West Cameroon.

⁹² As Hagberg (2004) explains, voluntary associations in Burkina Faso are not allowed to be recognised on the basis of ethnicity. Yet, as many Burkinabé experience ethnicity as a major uniting identity, voluntary associations tend to cloak their ethnic component in the legal frames and idioms of development and culture. In Ghana, on the other hand, ethnic elite associations are known

Over the past decades, not only the character or function of elite associations has changed but also the meaning of the term elite. In the writings of Bayart (1993) and Geschiere (1997), elite – and its French equivalent *évolués* – refers primarily to early generations of educated and qualified individuals who left their home villages, adopted an urban lifestyle, and occupied a position in the public service. In contemporary understanding and colloquial Pidgin English and English in Cameroon, the term elite has been disbanded. Everyone with a basic education who spent time in an urban environment and enjoys a slightly improved quality of life, claims the rank of an elite person. Thus contemporary elite associations often comprise educated individuals as well as labour migrants, businessmen, and local politicians. As Nyamnjoh rightly pointed out, “you do not have to be big to Yaoundé standards to be useful in the development of your home village” (e-mail communication, 20/08/2004).⁹³

In the Misaje Sub-Division there are four elite associations; three local Grassfields groups, namely the Nchaney, Bessa, and Kemezung have their own ethnic elite associations named NACUDA (Nchaney Cultural and Development Association), BECUDA (Bessa Cultural and Development Association), and KECUDA (Kemezung Cultural and Development Association). The fourth association is the Misaje Area Elite Association (MELA).

All three ethnic elite associations have been founded in the 1990s by labour migrants from the respective areas who consider themselves members of the external Nchaney, Bessa, or Kemezung elite. Since the 1940s many Bessa villagers have left for the economically prosperous region in the South West to work in the rubber, banana, and palm oil plantations.⁹⁴ By now they are well established; many have jobs in local industries or run small businesses. Nchaney labour migrants cluster mainly in the Douala region where they went to work in coffee and palm oil plantations. With regard to developing the Misaje area, NACUDA has not been very active over the past years, while BECUDA has successfully motivated its members both abroad and

mainly as ‘youth associations’ (Lentz 1995, 1998: 456-626). ‘Youth’ here refers to a socio-political category, and membership in these associations is defined by ethnic belonging. A distinction is made between ‘automatic members’ (by birth) and ‘active members’, with the latter paying contributions and being the main activists.

⁹³ A similar assessment is put forward by Englund (2002: 154) in his discussion of rural-urban migration in Malawi.

⁹⁴ On the topic of labour migration to the southwestern and coastal areas, see also Ardener et al. (1960: 211-229) and Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (1998: 77) who provide accounts for the neighbouring Bum and the Esu in Menchum Division.

at home to come together and discuss their issues. Moreover, Bessa elite members seem better organised than the Nchaney external elite.⁹⁵ The three ethnic elite associations are comprised in the regional association MELA. During the period of my research, MELA representatives actively participated in public occasions, such as national ceremonies, the investiture of the new Divisional Officer, and the burial of Misaje elite members. Besides its representative and advisory function, however, MELA has not been successful in generating economic support for the development of the Misaje area.

Most effective among the four associations with regard to local politics and political representation to the state and neighbouring groups is BECUDA. The following elaborations are based on interviews with BECUDA officials, the analysis of internal reports on the association's activities, and the participation of my assistant Jonathan and I in BECUDA meetings in the Bessa area.

The Bessa Cultural and Development Association was founded in the mid-1990s with branches in the South West, in the cities of Douala and Yaoundé, and in the Bessa home area. It claims to represent the Bessa 'clan' which it defines as the collective of nine settlements under the rule of the *fons* of Akweto, Kamine, and Mbissa.⁹⁶ Historically, the Bessa have been less centralised and unified than the Nchaney. But BECUDA effectively promoted a strong notion of belonging among Bessa individuals, emphasising cultural criteria such as their common language Nsari and shared socio-cultural practices, as well as the need for collective action and representation. They thus succeeded in uniting the population of the three politically independent chiefdoms into one ethnic category, namely the Bessa 'clan'. The three Bessa *fons* are automatically honorary members and patrons of the association.

Besides local group activities, BECUDA runs an elite circle whose members meet when required to give advice on current issues troubling Bessa abroad and at home. So far, BECUDA activities have focused on the conservation of Bessa culture, the encouragement of child education, the containment of witchcraft (see chapter 9), the resolution of land disputes and farmer-herder conflicts (see chapters 6 and 10), and the improvement of rural infrastructure in the home area. BECUDA members are

⁹⁵ As the Dumbo area is peripheral to the regional focus of this study, I have not investigated further into the activities of KECUDA.

⁹⁶ In BECUDA documents, the ethnonym Bessa appears in a variety of spellings: Bessa, Besaah, Bessah, Bessaah. The most common spelling is Bessa, also used in colonial documents and linguistic publications (e.g. Brye & Brye 2001: 3).

encouraged to contribute personal funds for self-help and development projects, and to lobby for support from the government. In the year 2000, for example, they collected more than 180,000 FCFA (€ 275) to sponsor ten Bessa children into secondary school. In 2002 they donated a computer and printer to the Misaje council to welcome the newly inducted mayor, a Bessa man from Kamine (The Herald 09/09/02).

This last gesture illustrates BECUDA's intention of channelling development aid via ethnic representation and good relations with the administration. As the previous mayor was an Nchaney, the Bessa felt it was their turn to get the mayorship. BECUDA encouraged Bessa candidates from both parties, the ruling party (CPDM) and the opposition (SDF), to stand for the municipal elections in 2001. Finally, the Bessa SDF candidate won; and despite a strong pro-CPDM faction within the association, BECUDA unanimously congratulated the new mayor. Thus, despite political differences, common ethnic identification was given priority.

Closely linked to the struggle for the mayorship is a surreptitious debate about the ownership of Misaje Town. Already in the colonial period Bessa and Nchaney competed for the seat of the customary court, based on the assumption that the group on whose territory the court was to be established would benefit most from administrative facilities, social infrastructure, and the anticipated economic boom. The same scenario was repeated in 1996, when the Misaje Sub-Division was created with Misaje Town as its headquarters. Subsequently, rumours emerged that the Bessa were to challenge Nchaney assertion to Misaje Town. Although never stated publicly, BECUDA officials in interviews claimed river Kimbeng as the natural borderline between Bessa and Nchaney territory, implying that only a fraction of Misaje Town was situated on Nchaney land, while the largest part was on Bessa territory. If they were to assert their territorial claims, the Nchaney *fon*'s political and physical presence in Misaje Town would be critically challenged. The concealed dispute about the ownership of Misaje Town and its resources surfaced in 2003 in a conflict between the Bessa mayor and *fon* Richard Chefon about the administration of vacant plots in Misaje. Eventually, the Divisional Officer stepped in and urged the two

parties to reconcile so as to stop the growing rumours of an ominous boundary dispute between the two neighbouring groups.⁹⁷

As these examples have shown, popular actors in contemporary politics of representation are not only local Grassfields chiefs, but also party-political activists and ethnic elite associations. However, as the case of Misaje also demonstrates, not all ethnic groups are necessarily represented in the same way. While currently Nchaney interests are represented primarily by their *fon*, the Bessa rely on their elite association and their Bessa mayor for political representation to the state. In the most favourable case, the different agents of representation collaborate and effectively contain party-political differences. Yet in attaining assistance from the government or international organisations, personal relations with influential individuals are a crucial prerequisite.

Although traditional authorities, external elites, and local politicians have been relatively ineffective in attracting external aid to the Misaje area, they have significantly contributed to the strengthening of ethnic identities and boundaries by portraying themselves as representatives of ethnic groups rather than regional units.

4.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to illustrate changing inter-group relations and corresponding transformations in Nchaney ethnicity in a historical perspective. In concluding the chapter I will summarise its main findings and discuss historical and current conceptions of Nchaney identity, integrating them in a single model.

The local accounts on Nchaney history that have been analysed above illustrate an ever widening radius of Nchaney political influence and self-understanding. In this process, three phases could be discerned: starting with the formation of the Nkanchi village, to the consolidation of the Nchaney chiefdom, to the recognition of the Nchaney 'clan territory' and its inhabitants.

The initial narratives on the origin and migration of the Nchaney culminated in the founding of Nkanchi, the nucleus of the contemporary Nchaney chiefdom. They focused on the seven founding families and the Che, the original inhabitants of Nkanchi. The list of Nchaney *fons* represented the emergence of the Nchaney

⁹⁷ The information on the conflict between the Bessa mayor and *fon* Richard Chefon was collected by my assistant Jonathan in summer 2002 (after my return to Germany).

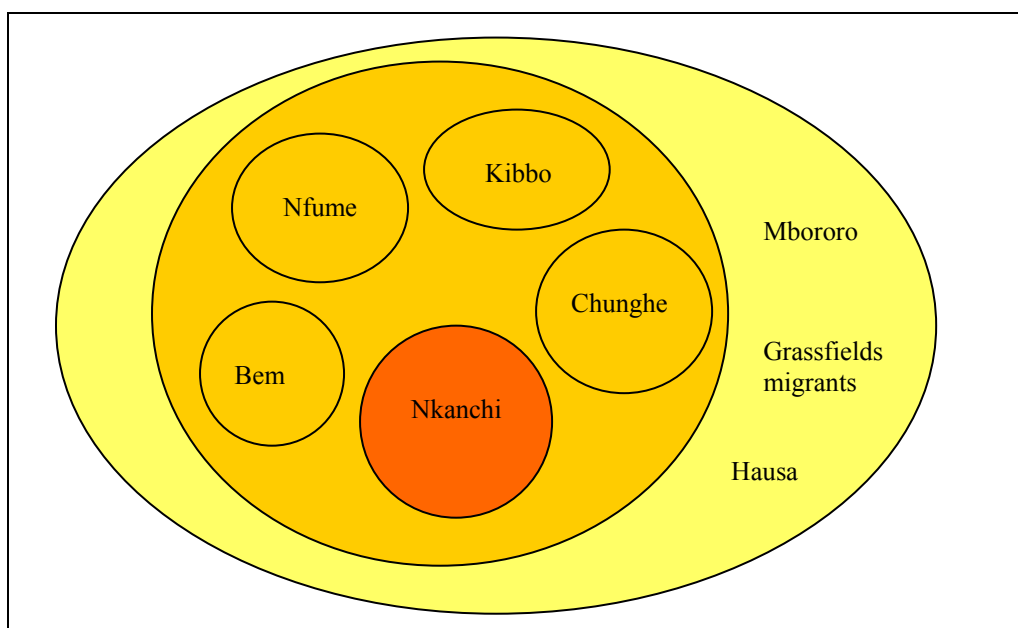
chiefdom and its subsequent expansion. Narratives on the successive *fons*' rules mainly dealt with internal affairs, such as the relationship between rulers and their subjects; yet they also showed the ways in which individual *fons* dealt with challenges from outside.

It is only with the reign of *fon* Fuma I (late 1800) that the historical narratives began to broaden and to address inter-group relations. They described the consolidation of the Nchaney chiefdom as comprising five villages under the supremacy of the *fon* of Nkanchi. Encounters with the German and British colonial authorities and inter-chiefdom disputes fell into the subsequent time period. They took a central place in the historical narratives particularly of *fon* Richard Chefon which, in my reading, signals that these encounters were perceived as a threat to Nchaney autonomy and ethnicity.

The integration of culturally different population groups was first mentioned in connection with the reign of *fon* Michael Fuma II (second half of 20th century), and featured relatively peripherally. This, to me, seems to indicate that, unlike inter-chiefdom disputes and the colonial encounter, the coexistence with Mbororo, Hausa, and Grassfields migrants has not been perceived as disruptive but rather as benefiting the Nchaney population, and as compatible with Nchaney self-understanding.

These three phases in the historical development of the Nchaney ethnic group are reflected in contemporary understandings of Nchaney identity. I will illustrate this with a three-layered model of Nchaney ethnicity which naturally is an abstraction and serves as a heuristic device.

Diagram 4.1: Layers of Nchaney identity



Layers of identity	members	criteria of membership						
		migration	descent	language	socio-cultural practices	religion	territory	acceptance of <i>fon</i> 's political authority
Nchaney village	descendants of eight families of Nkanchi	<i>shared by 7 of the 8 families</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nchaney chiefdom	five villages: Nkanchi, Bem, Nfume, Kibbo, Chunghe			x	x	x	x	x
Nchaney 'clan territory'	members of the Nchaney chiefdom, Mbororo, Hausa, Grassfields migrants						x	x

With the widening of group boundaries, the contents and meanings of Nchaney ethnicity have changed. Contemporary conceptions of Nchaney identity include three layers (Nkanchi village, Nchaney chiefdom, Nchaney 'clan territory'), and allow for single as well as multiple ethnic identifications.

The most confined understanding of Nchaney identity refers to members of the seven founding families and the original inhabitants of Nkanchi. Here Nchaney identity is based on shared migration history and religious responsibilities (with the exception of the Che), common descent, and a common body of language, and socio-cultural and religious practices. The next layer of identification refers more broadly to the Nchaney chiefdom made up of five villages. In this case, Nchaney identity is defined by residing on Nchaney territory, speaking Nchaney language, adhering to

Nchaney socio-cultural practices, and respecting the primacy of the *fon* of Nkanchi. Yet, each of the five villages is ritually independent; common descent is only claimed by the *fon* of Nkanchi for political reasons, while members of the four subordinate villages assert separate origins. The third and loosest conception of Nchaney identity refers to all population groups and individuals who reside permanently on Nchaney 'clan territory', a concept introduced by the colonial administration. In this case, criteria of common descent, shared migration history, common language, shared socio-cultural and religious practices no longer hold. Nchaney identity is defined primarily in terms of residency, and entails at least symbolic homage to the political authority of the *fon* of Nkanchi, the head of the Nchaney 'clan'.

Due to its fluidity, Nchaney identity provides a suitable frame for the accommodation of a heterogeneous population. Moreover, with the incorporation of colonial and post-colonial models of group classification, it serves as an effective tool of self-representation to the state.

As argued in the beginning, Nchaney identity is not singular but typifies Grassfielders' self-understanding in general. Furthermore, over the 1990s ethnic identification has become a vital strategy in addressing the state and international organisations. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, this strategy has been deployed not only by Grassfields peoples but also by the Mbororo and, to a lesser degree, the Hausa.

5 AKU AND JAAFUN IN THE MISAJE AREA

This chapter introduces the Mbororo who, after the local Grassfields population, are the second largest group in the Misaje area. The ethnonym Mbororo, as employed in this study, is at the same time an academic term and a term used locally to denote pastoral FulBe. The FulBe are a complex ethnic group whose members are dispersed over the Sahel and Savannah belt from West to East Africa (Boutrais 1994).⁹⁸ The Mbororo are a sub-section of the FulBe and are classically associated with cattle pastoralism. Their language is Fulfulde which they have in common with other FulBe sub-groups, although there are considerable dialect variations (Harrison & Tucker 2003).⁹⁹ Most Mbororo who settled in the Western Grassfields are agro-pastoralists and combine cattle husbandry with subsistence agriculture (see chapter 6). They belong to two sub-groups, Jaafun and Aku, who arrived at different periods and settled in distinct areas. Within the North West Province the Mbororo constitute 5 to 15% of the total population.¹⁰⁰ In the Misaje Sub-Division they comprise more than 400 (registered) graziers and constitute approximately 25% of the Sub-Division's population (see chapter 2).¹⁰¹

The Mbororo began to enter the Grassfields in the 1910s, driven by their continuous search for new pastures. They left northern Nigeria in the early 19th century, slowly migrating east and south, thereby following an established pattern of gradual

⁹⁸ The FulBe are known by various ethnonyms. They call themselves *FulBe* (pl., *Pullo* in the sing.). Furthermore, they are known by the Wolof term Peul (occasionally spelled Peulh or Peulh) in the formerly French administered area as well as in the French academic literature, and by the Hausa term Fulani in the formerly British administered area and in the English literature. In addition, they are known by regional appellations, such as Foulahs/Fulas, Fellata/Fulata, Halpulaar'en, and Toucouleur/Tukulor. The ethnonym Fulani has also entered common language use in the Western Grassfields and is often used by Grassfielders and administrators in referring to Mbororo as well as by Mbororo themselves when conversing in English or Pidgin English.

⁹⁹ If applying Fulfulde grammar correctly, it would be necessary to distinguish between *Mbororojo* in the singular and *Mbororo'en* in the plural. Due to the complexity of ethnic groups and categories represented in the study area, I will use Mbororo to denote both singular and plural. The same applies to the sub-ethnonyms Jaafun, Aku, and Huya.

¹⁰⁰ According to Boutrais (1984: 230, 1995/96: 548), the Mbororo population of the Western Grassfields in 1974 was 25,700 persons, while the region's overall population was 1.2 million. Duni et al. (2005: 6) estimate the current Mbororo population of the North West Province at 80,000 persons out of a total of 1.5 million inhabitants.

¹⁰¹ The numerical data is derived from the cattle tax statistics of 2000/2001 made available by the Misaje Council. The number of Mbororo graziers is probably considerably higher if we single out close relatives (e.g. father and sons or brothers) who group under one grazier's name for the purpose of tax collection. The term 'grazier' was introduced in the colonial period to denote cattle rearers. It will here be used synonymously with pastoralist and herder.

displacement that Stenning (1957) termed “migratory drift”. Their movements were informed by ecological and political considerations and geared towards sustaining their pastoral economy. On their arrival in the Western Grassfields, they encountered exceptionally favourable conditions that promoted the growth of their herds and their gradual sedentarisation. Consequently, many Mbororo families have stayed in their current locations for several decades and have become part of the local community. Nonetheless, they tend to perceive themselves as politically marginalised. In the 1990s committed Mbororo youths succeeded in establishing a collective voice, representing Mbororo interests to the state, neighbouring communities, and international organisations.

In the context of migration, settlement, political accommodation, and social change, emic conceptions of Mbororo identity have undergone a number of transformations, which are the subject of this chapter. Similar to my previous elaborations on Nchaney history and identity, I am less interested in reconstructing historical facts than in examining local uses of history in constructing Mbororo identity and in validating political claims. Concurrently, my focus is on processes of inclusion and exclusion and on the ways in which Mbororo perceive themselves in relation to internal and external ‘others’.

5.1 (Re)constructing Mbororo history and identity

Before engaging with Mbororo history and identity in the Grassfields, two vital issues should be discussed. These are firstly the sources and modalities of historiography among Mbororo, which are quite different from the Nchaney case explored in the previous chapter. Secondly, Mbororo belong to the complex ethnic category of FulBe, and individuals can choose among a variety of sub-ethnic categories of identification. It will thus be important to determine the categories that have emerged as most relevant in the historical and regional context of the Western Grassfields.

5.1.1 Sources and modalities of Mbororo historiography

The following elaborations on Mbororo history and identity in the Grassfields are based on two sources of information, namely academic publications and interviews with Mbororo individuals.

The anthropological literature on the FulBe is substantial, and there exists a number of publications addressing the theme of FulBe ethnicity.¹⁰² Against the background of my regional specialisation, I benefited significantly from the contributions of the French geographer Jean Boutrais (1977, 1984, 1995/96) and the Cameroonian historian Nicodemus Awasom (1984, 2003a) both of whom worked extensively on the establishment and socio-political integration of the Mbororo in the Grassfields. In reconstructing the history of the Mbororo in the Misaje area, I rely primarily on interviews with elderly Mbororo men and women, which I carried out in collaboration with my Mbororo assistant Haruna Kadiri. Unlike Grassfielders who deem group histories the monopoly of the palace, there are no socio-political restrictions on history-telling among Mbororo. However, individuals considered most conversant with Mbororo history and customs are elders of both sexes, while Mbororo youths are generally thought of as less interested and informed.

The history presented in this chapter differs significantly in content and style from the Nchaney history introduced in the previous chapter. Reconstructing the collective history of the Mbororo on the basis of oral accounts is a difficult task. The Mbororo, being a pastoral people and highly mobile, essentially produce migration histories that are confined to particular migration groups such as lineages or family units. Yet even compiling single migration histories can be complicated, as Mbororo historical memory is relatively superficial and generally limited to two or three generations. Moreover, Mbororo individuals hardly keep track of events that have no immediate effect on pastoral society, which renders dating their movements difficult. These methodological or structural predicaments have also been pointed out by Boutrais (1995/96: 43, 65) who came to the conclusion that Mbororo have no collective historical consciousness, and being a pastoral society are generally oriented to an 'immobile' or continuously reproduced present. Undertaking my fieldwork thirty years after Boutrais' research, I incurred similar experiences.¹⁰³ Yet as we will see in a later section of this chapter, certain Mbororo factions have developed a distinct

¹⁰² Seydou's (1977) bibliography, which is outdated by now, includes already more than 2,000 titles. Diallo (2005) provides an overview of the main thematic strands in FulBe studies. Among the authors addressing the theme of FulBe ethnicity are Bierschenk (1995), Boesen (1999a), Burnham (1996), Diallo & Schlee (2000), Dupire (1994), Eguchi & Azarya (1993), Oppong (2002), and Regis (2003), to name only relatively recent publications.

¹⁰³ Most of the data presented in Boutrais' (1995/96) seminal work on the Mbororo in northwest Cameroon is based on research carried out in the 1970s (Jean Boutrais, personal communication, Halle, 28/06/2000).

consciousness of their history and identity, mainly in response to changing political conditions in the 1990s.

Mbororo migration histories centre on pastoral movements guided by ecological considerations, the effects of natural catastrophes, and socio-political conditions. Among these I am primarily interested in the socio-political factors, and particularly in Mbororo encounters with neighbouring communities and the colonial and post-colonial government. This information is mainly derived from literature sources. Informants' historical accounts of their establishment in the Misaje area hardly deal with interethnic relations, but centre on intra-ethnic divisions, such as the relationship between Mbororo lineages, between cultural units or sub-ethnic factions, and between Mbororo across national boundaries.

The Mbororo population in the Misaje Sub-Division is diverse, including members of more than twenty lineages with complex inter-relationships. Since presenting the migration history of each lineage would exceed the focus and limits of this study, I will centre on two lineages, namely the Gamanko'en and Daneeji, who constitute the majority of Mbororo residing on Nchaney territory. To illustrate changing understandings of Mbororo history and identity, I will subsequently shift my regional focus to Sabga and the provincial capital Bamenda where educated and politically active Mbororo have come up with new strategies of representation and self-reflection.

In 2003 I sent an earlier draft of this chapter to two Mbororo friends, Jeidoh Duni and Buba Madaki, with the request to discuss it with Mbororo informants in Misaje and Sabga. Compared to the feedback on the Nchaney history, Mbororo interlocutors' responses were fewer, which is due to the fact that most Mbororo in the Misaje area are not English-literate. However, there are two major comments which reflect Mbororo self-understanding and intra-group relations. First of all, informants criticised my focus on only two lineages while omitting the migration histories of all other lineages represented in the Misaje area. This comment illustrates that their core category of identification is not the Mbororo sub-group but their specific lineage which cannot be substituted or represented collectively. Secondly, Mbororo informants in the Misaje area were fascinated by the history of Sabga. This interest reflects the celebrity and social prestige of the Sabga community, rooted in their historical primacy in the Grassfields. Moreover, it indicates that new trajectories of

self-representation – promoted by educated Mbororo – are also gradually spreading to the peripheries.

5.1.2 Categories of identification

The Mbororo belong to the ethnic category of FulBe whose members are represented in at least eighteen countries across the Sudanic belt (Boutrais 1994, Hagberg 2005b: 5). Despite significant divergences between FulBe groups regarding their socio-political organisation and economic specialisation, they share a common identity based on their language Fulfulde and a shared – albeit diverse – complex of moral values and social practices known as *pulaaku* in Fulfulde.¹⁰⁴ The antonym to FulBe is *haaBe* (sing. *kaaDo*). It has an inherent pejorative connotation, as it conveys FulBe superiority vis-à-vis all black African non-FulBe who are characterised by the absence of FulBe specific qualities (cf. Boesen 1989, 1994, Ogawa 1993).

Pulaaku is a topic widely discussed in FulBe studies.¹⁰⁵ There is no general agreement on the exact meaning or content of *pulaaku*. Despite informants' essentialising attitudes, it is a relative, contextual, and dynamic concept. In its most general application it denotes FulBe ideals of social and moral comportment. As Virtanen (2003: 27-36) points out, "*pulaaku* is essentially public – and conditional – behaviour as it is expected in the presence of defined social others" (see also Riesman 1998 [1977]). So far, most studies of *pulaaku* have focused on internal categories of social others. Little attention has been paid to the question of the degree to which *pulaaku* is performed towards a non-FulBe audience (notable exceptions are Boesen 1994, 1997 and Guichard 1996, 2000). This subject will be addressed in the chapter's conclusion.

The Mbororo in northwest Cameroon are agro-pastoralists, and distinguish themselves from other FulBe groups like the sedentary Town FulBe (or Huya) in northern Cameroon by stressing their pastoral identity. Mbororo and Huya are complementary terms applied by each group to denote the respective other; both have a somewhat derogatory connotation, particularly in their usage in northern Cameroon

¹⁰⁴ Oppong (2002: 29-39) provides a literature review of contested criteria of FulBe identity including shared language, common myths of origin, physical characteristics, livelihood strategies, *pulaaku* and adherence to Islam.

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. Boesen (1998, 1999a, 1999b), Breedveld & Bruijn (1996), Diallo (2005: 475-476), Regis (2003), VerEecke (1993a, 1996), and Virtanen (2003), to name only recent publications that explicitly engage with *pulaaku*. For a review of earlier literature on *pulaaku* see Boesen (1999a: 54-62), Oppong (2002: 35-37), and Virtanen (2003: 25-46).

(Dognin 1981, Walker 1980). As a particularity of the Western Grassfields, Town FulBe here are subsumed under the ethnic category of Hausa. Being numerically few, they are socially, economically, and spatially integrated into Hausa communities (see chapter 7). In northern Cameroon, on the other hand, they are a dominant majority and the primary object of Mbororo self-distinction (e.g. Burnham 1996).

Individuals in the Grassfields rarely use the generic term Mbororo in their self-identification. They tend to introduce themselves as Jaafun or Aku, referring to distinct sub-ethnic identities that developed as a result of diverging migration trajectories. Moreover, the appellation Mbororo is often used interchangeably with Jaafun. In order to avoid terminological confusion, I will use the sub-ethnic distinction of Jaafun and Aku and adhere to Mbororo as a generic term for (agro-) pastoral FulBe.

Beyond the distinction of Jaafun and Aku, Mbororo classify themselves into lineages (Fulfulde: *lenyol* sing., *lenyi* pl.) which serve as primary categories of identification and sociality.¹⁰⁶ The lineages represented in northwest Cameroon are numerous. Most are clearly identified as Jaafun or Aku; some allegedly have switched categories, and a few include both Jaafun and Aku factions. Lineage identification is mostly transmitted patrilineally, and is based on the idea of distant relation rather than descent from common ancestors known by name. Large lineages are generally subdivided into 'houses' (Fulfulde: *suudu* sing., *suudi* pl.). This is a rare phenomenon in the Grassfields, because the lineages here are relatively small.

Lineage organisation plays an important role in Mbororo social life. Members of the same lineage tend to congregate spatially and follow the same migration route. They exhibit a strong sense of lineage solidarity in terms of preferential marriage arrangements and mutual assistance. Furthermore, Mbororo understand lineages as socio-cultural units that, on the basis of shared moral norms and social practices, produce certain qualities common to their members (e.g. mobility, courage, or belligerence). Lineages are ranked according to a variety of criteria, including historical depth, anteriority, numerical importance, and wealth in cattle. As Boutrais (1995/96: 546-547, 557-629) argues, lineage hierarchy is particularly pronounced in northwest Cameroon, and is mirrored in their altitudinal dispersal. While the more

¹⁰⁶ On lineage organisation among FulBe in general see Dupire (1970, 1996 [1962]).

prestigious lineages have appropriated the highland pastures, late-comer and numerically minor lineages are found at the fringes of the Bamenda Highlands.

Among Mbororo in the Grassfields, sub-ethnic and lineage ascriptions constitute the two major categories of identification. Jaafun and Aku as well as many lineages represented in the research area are also found in other parts of Cameroon or neighbouring countries; yet their modes of identification are not necessarily the same.

As Virtanen (2003: 77) points out, pastoral FulBe in Adamaoua do not refer to themselves as Jaafun or Aku, but by their lineage names. Moreover, they emphasise their otherness from nomadic Wodaabe and sedentary Town FulBe or Huya, two FulBe categories largely absent in the Western Grassfields. As these differences in self-ascription between Mbororo in the Grassfields and the Adamaoua illustrate, respective categories of identification depend on the presence or absence of specific 'FulBe others'.

5.2 Mbororo migration and intra-group relations

Before proceeding with informants' accounts of their establishment in the Misaje area, I will first provide a more general historical sketch of the migration trajectories of those Mbororo who now constitute the agro-pastoral population of northwest Cameroon. In this context, I will focus on the historical emergence of the distinct 'sub-ethnic' identities Jaafun and Aku. In accordance with Boutrais (1995/96: 544), I suggest that the two categories are best understood as distinct cultural units rather than different sub-ethnic groups.

The subsequent historical reconstruction is based on literature sources, namely N. Awasom (1984, 2003a), Boutrais (1995/96: 15-210), Dognin (1981), Frantz (1986), and Njeuma & Awasom (1989, 1990). Authors occasionally diverge in dating pastoral movements or determining migration routes. Preference is given to Boutrais' interpretation due to its comprehensiveness; alternative versions are mentioned in footnotes.

5.2.1 The genesis of the categories Jaafun and Aku

The starting point of this historical reconstruction is the early 19th century when the Mbororo who later became known as Jaafun dwelled in northern Nigeria. As is

common practice among Mbororo, their lineage name is derived from the toponym Jafun, also spelled Jahun, a small agglomeration situated between Kano and Hadejia.¹⁰⁷ When in the first decade of the 19th century the FulBe *jihad* was declared, it had far-reaching consequences for Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in northern Nigeria and the Adamaoua. The Jaafun, like most pastoral FulBe, did not actively participate in the *jihad* movement, but the combined effects of political destabilisation, famine, and bovine disease provoked their departure from the Kano area.¹⁰⁸ They left for the Bornu region where they were badly received, and continued to Bauchi.¹⁰⁹ The majority moved on to Yola, attracted by the prospects of fertile pastures and political security under FulBe hegemony. As most families had lost large parts of their herds on the long and hazardous journey, they engaged in agricultural and trading activities in order to reconstitute their herds (Brackenbury 1923/24a: 209).

While initially the cattle of the Jaafun were white zebu (Fulfulde: *daneeji*)¹¹⁰, they now acquired red zebu (Fulfulde: *boDeeji*) from their Wodaabe neighbours. As Boutrais (1995/96: 142, 377-395) reports, the red and white zebu are distinct not only in colour but also in their grazing habits and character. While the white zebu are relatively docile and easy to conduct, the red zebu are apprehensive of strangers and obey only their owners, and thus are better suited to adversity.¹¹¹ Although the Jaafun's shift from white to red zebu was motivated by pragmatic reasons, it also had symbolic implications. The red zebu soon advanced to an icon of Jaafun identity (Boutrais 1995/96: 379, 387, Pelican forthc.).

In reaction to an outbreak of rinderpest in northern Nigeria and across Africa by the end of the 19th century, many Jaafun continued their journey from Bauchi and Yola to the Adamaoua Highlands. They settled around Banyo, Tibati, and Tignère where they benefited from fertile pastures. Yet they also encountered the hostility of the local population who denied them access to the salt springs and frequently

¹⁰⁷ On the correlation of lineage names and toponyms see Dognin (1981: 141).

¹⁰⁸ Dognin (1981: 142) dates the Jaafun's southward migration to the early 19th century, while unpublished British sources suggest the late 19th century (cited in Boutrais 1995/96: 43). Boutrais (1995/96: 43) comes to the conclusion that establishing a definite chronological framework for pastoral history is hardly feasible. He dates the Jaafun's departure to the second half of the 19th century.

¹⁰⁹ Following Dognin (1981: 141) most Jaafun migrated straight to Bauchi without passing through Bornu as indicated by Boutrais (1995/96: 43-44).

¹¹⁰ The Fulfulde term *daneeji* literally means 'white'. It is at the same time the term for white zebu and the name of an Aku lineage. The Daneeji thus are 'the people of the white cattle'.

¹¹¹ This characterisation of the two cattle breeds has been endorsed by my Mbororo informants. Similarly, in his novel 'Burning Grass' Ekwensi (1962) describes a FulBe herdsman commanding his cattle herd to disperse in order to repel attacking thieves.

attacked people and animals. It was only with the installation of the German colonial power and their forceful pacification of the region that the Jaafun were able to settle confidently at Lompta which was set up as an autonomous Mbororo district (cf. Pfeffer 1936).

By the end of the 19th century Jaafun – originally a specific lineage name – had become a generic term for all lineages that migrated from Kano to Yola. As Dognin (1981: 142) points out, besides their joint migration and their preference for red zebu, Jaafun lineages were recognised by practicing the *soro*, a contest in which groups of young men take turns at beating each other with sticks with the aim of demonstrating their courage, stamina, and self-control.¹¹²

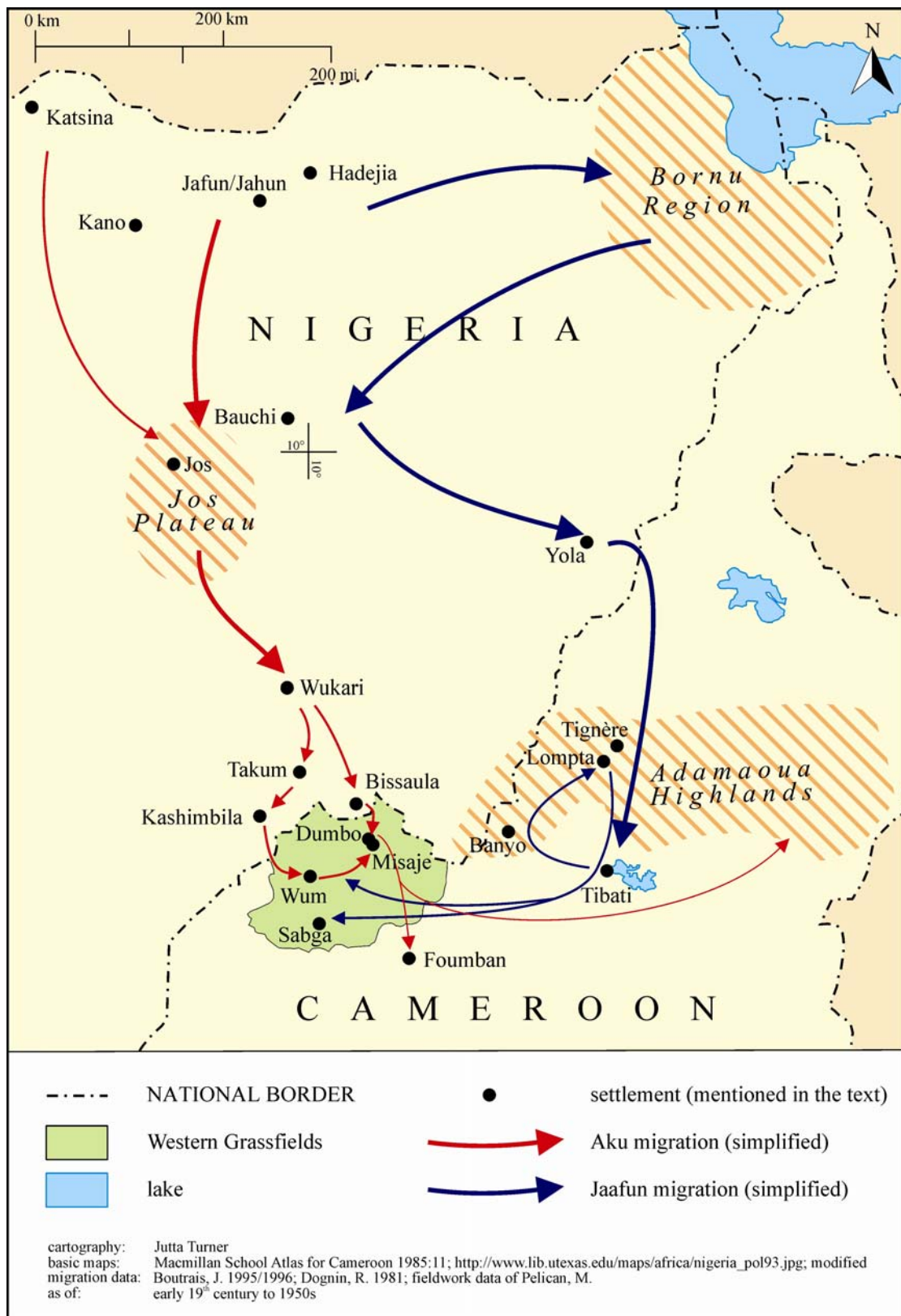
Similar to the Jaafun, the Aku initially settled in the Kano area from where they departed in the late 19th century due to the rinderpest. They followed a different migration trajectory than the Jaafun, taking them to the Jos Plateau (see map 5.1).¹¹³ There, they settled with their herds of white zebu, which later – analogous to the red zebu of the Jaafun – became a marker of Aku identity. The Aku as a conscious category emerged only when the two groups met again on the Bamenda and Adamaoua Highlands in the first half of the 20th century, and it became clear that, despite their common origin from Kano, they had culturally grown apart. It was in this context that the Jaafun applied the generic term Aku to the newcomers with the white zebu, deriving it from a greeting popularly used among the latter.

5.2.2 The Mbororo in the Western Grassfields

While the 19th century saw the southwards migration of Mbororo from the Kano region to the Adamaoua Highlands and the Jos Plateau, and the subsequent emergence of Jaafun and Aku as distinct cultural units, the 20th century witnessed the establishment of Mbororo graziers of both categories in the Western Grassfields.

¹¹² On the practice of *soro* see Bocquené (2002: 119-132), Bovin (1974/75), Brackenbury (1923/24b: 274), Virtanen (2003: 113-121), Whitting (1995).

¹¹³ Following Dognin (1981: 142) Jaafun and Aku separated not at Kano, but at Bauchi from where the Jaafun continued to Yola around 1840, while the Aku settled on the Jos Plateau.



Map 5.1: Aku and Jaafun migration to the Western Grassfields

5.2.2.1 Establishment of Jaafun on the Bamenda Highlands

The first Mbororo to enter the Grassfields were an offshoot of the Jaafun at Lompta. They were about thirty families under the leadership of *arDo* Sabga (also spelled Sawga) who left Lompta due to internal rivalries. They arrived on the Bamenda Highlands in the late 1910s, and established themselves in the Grassfields chiefdom of Babanki Tungo where they located four salt springs. Their settlement was named Sabga after its initiator, and later became the headquarters of the Mbororo community in the Western Grassfields. *ArDo* Sabga's authority was endorsed by the colonial administration who recognised him as Mbororo representative.¹¹⁴

Subsequently, more Mbororo were attracted to the Bamenda region. The 1920s experienced the influx of Jaafun of various lineages who dispersed to different areas congregating under their respective leaders. Those Jaafun residing in the northern parts of the Bamenda Highlands had no access to salt springs but relied on Hausa and Grassfields merchants supplying salt from the Benue region (see chapter 7).

The 1930s and 40s were characterised by ecological changes which affected pastoralists' strategies. The locust plague of 1930-31 badly affected the highland pastures. While some grass species valuable for cattle grazing disappeared, the aggressive weed *sporobolus africanus* (also known as Parramatta grass or African dropseed grass) began to spread on already overgrazed pastures (cf. Boutrais 1995/96: 315-322). In consequence, many grazing grounds never recovered their previous conditions. Pastoralists responded to the ecological changes by adopting a rhythm of seasonal displacement, or by descending to lowland pastures that had previously been deemed unsuitable for grazing.¹¹⁵ In 1940-41 an outbreak of blackquarter occurred. This epizootic was unknown to the area, and the colonial veterinary service managed to control it only by the second half of the decade.

The 1940s were also the period when individual Mbororo began to settle permanently. Their main motive was to secure their pasture grounds, since vacating an area, if only for seasonal displacement, gave way to occupation by other pastoralists. Also in the 1940s a last influx of Jaafun migrants reached the Bamenda Highlands. At the same time, the first Aku entered the Grassfields, most of them being on transit to the Adamaoua Highlands.

¹¹⁴ For detailed information on the establishment of the Sabga community see N. Awasom (1984: 72-74), Boutrais (1995/96: 81-83), and section 5.3.2. of this chapter.

¹¹⁵ On seasonal transhumance routes see Boutrais (1995/96: maps 9 & 10), Carter (1967).

So far, I have described ecological conditions influencing pastoralists' strategies in the Grassfields. Political factors, however, have been equally relevant. As Boutrais (1995/96: 84) points out, the Mbororo's establishment in northwest Cameroon would probably not have been successful without facilitation by the British colonial administration.¹¹⁶

The British supported the influx of Mbororo pastoralists as a means of diversifying the regional economy and augmenting its tax income. Concurrently, local Grassfields chiefs welcomed the pastoralists' establishment on their chiefdom's territory, as long as they paid tributes and acknowledged their hosts' territorial and political primacy. Even though population densities were relatively low, and farming and pasture lands abundant, crop damage was a recurrent problem, as the Mbororo's practice of extensive grazing and seasonal transhumance collided with the Grassfielders' system of shifting cultivation. In consequence, Grassfields farmers looked on the pastoralists' settlement with reservation, and occasionally responded with public protest and violence (see chapter 6).

The British colonial administration was faced with the predicament of implementing its policy of indirect rule and, at the same time, protecting the Mbororo against the hostility of Grassfields farmers and exactions by local chiefs. This dilemma resulted in frequently changing policies regarding the pastoral sector and the management of farmer-herder relations (Njeuma & Awasom 1989, 1990, Boutrais 1995/96: 115-118).

By the late 1920s the Mbororo were subordinated to Native Authorities, namely the local Grassfields chief and palace hierarchy. The position of *arDo* (Mbororo group leader), initially a socio-political role, was transformed into the administrative function of tax collector.¹¹⁷ Consequently, Mbororo *arDo'en* (pl. of *arDo*) became dependent on the approval of local Grassfields chiefs to qualify for administrative appointment. Moreover cattle taxes (also known by the Hausa term *jangali*) were used to sustain the local administration rather than being invested in the pastoral infrastructure (N. Awasom 1984: 218-226, Boutrais 1995/96: 89-90).

¹¹⁶ On French colonial policies in northern Cameroon towards FulBe pastoralists see Burnham (1996: 35-38), Virtanen (2003: 69).

¹¹⁷ Initially, the title *arDo* referred to the leadership of a migration group. It was a temporary position based on individual knowledge of migration routes, leadership skills, and political influence (Kintz 1985).

In the 1940s the Mbororo made an attempt to evade political subordination by appealing for autonomous representation to the British administration; they largely failed. The British headquarters in Nigeria denied them a politically independent minority status and classified them as ‘strangers’ rather than ‘natives’ (Boutrais 1995/96: 112-115, Njeuma & Awasom 1990: 219, 224). In response, Mbororo leaders formed the Fulani Council which, although its existence was never officially acknowledged, effectively acted as an intermediary between the Mbororo population and the British administration. Furthermore, the latter granted the Muslim community limited juridical autonomy, and in 1945 the first *alkali* court was established (N. Awasom 1984: 226-241, 269-303, 2003a; see also chapter 7).

In the same decade grazing rules were introduced to restrict and control pastoral activities. Pastoralists were required to obtain a grazing permit, a document that the Mbororo perceived as validating their claims to pasture land vis-à-vis the administration, neighbouring farmers, and rivalling lineages. With the imposition of the grazing rules, the British also encouraged sedentarisation. Many Mbororo successively altered their strategy from seasonal migration to transhumance, with part of the family remaining in the permanent rainy season camp. They subsequently invested in consumer goods, and also adopted a distinct identity in reference to more mobile Mbororo groups. As a colonial administrator put it,

[t]he Bamenda Fulani sometimes refer to themselves as ‘riga-wearing Fulani’, contrasting their clothing to the few skins of the Nomads in the northern part of the Cameroons and the Bornu. (Divisional Office, Bamenda, 30/03/1949, cited in Boutrais 1995/96: 126)

The imposition of the grazing rules, however, also had adverse effects, particularly on the Jos and Mambila Plateaux where they were implemented more rigorously than in the Grassfields. There the Mbororo unable to obtain grazing permits constituted a floating pastoral population and a potential factor of regional destabilisation (Boutrais 1995/96: 128-129).

5.2.2.2 *The fate of Aku pastoralists in the Grassfields*

By the mid-20th century the Jaafun in the Grassfields were spatially and politically established. A second wave of pastoral immigration started in the late 1950s. These were Mbororo who had left their initial settlements in Northern Nigeria in the early 20th century, and had sojourned for a considerable period on the Jos Plateau. They

were attracted to the Grassfields by the prospects of new pastures, as their previous settlement areas started to exhibit signs of overpopulation and overgrazing. They were grouped under the sub-ethnic category Aku on account of speaking a 'Hausa-ised' Fulfulde and rearing white zebu.

The influx of Aku pastoralists was facilitated by changes in colonial administrative policies. While in the 1940s the British aimed at reducing the pastoral population through grazing rules, they subsequently altered their assessment criteria and re-considered the northern lowlands of the Bamenda Province, namely Misaje, Fungom, Wum, and We as suitable grazing zones. The Jaafun avoided those areas due to tsetse infestation which their cattle could not endure. In consequence, the administration welcomed incoming Aku graziers whose white zebu were largely tsetse resistant and better adapted to lowland pastures.

Many Aku were drawn to the Grassfields by the request of *arDo* Mucolli, a popular and successful Aku leader who had settled at Wum. Most of them followed the established cattle-trade route from Kashimbila to Wum. Boutrais (1995/96: 137-139) impressively describes the difficulties and dangers entailed in that journey. Besides facing natural obstacles and climatic hazard, the migrants were confronted with the hostility of the forest population. When they eventually reached Wum, most herds were reduced to half of their initial size. While some Aku graziers settled at Wum, others continued to the Misaje area. In both regions, they met favourable grazing conditions that supported the rapid reconstitution of their herds and their permanent settlement. Moreover, they were welcomed by the local Grassfields authorities and the administration on account of their envisaged cattle tax contributions which significantly augmented the revenue of the Native Council (N. Awasom 1984: 124-127, Kaberry 1960: 22).

A few years later, the pastoralists were confronted with a situation of political insecurity to which many responded with flight.¹¹⁸ In 1961 the population of British Cameroon was given a chance to vote either for reunification with formerly French administered Cameroon, or for incorporation into independent Nigeria. The Mbororo were excluded from voting, because they were legally considered 'strangers'. Even among them, opinions differed. While most Jaafun were in support of reunification with the hope of attaining full citizenship, many Aku favoured the alternative of

¹¹⁸ Regarding pastoral trajectories during the early post-colonial period see Boutrais (1995/96: 143-185) and Frantz (1986).

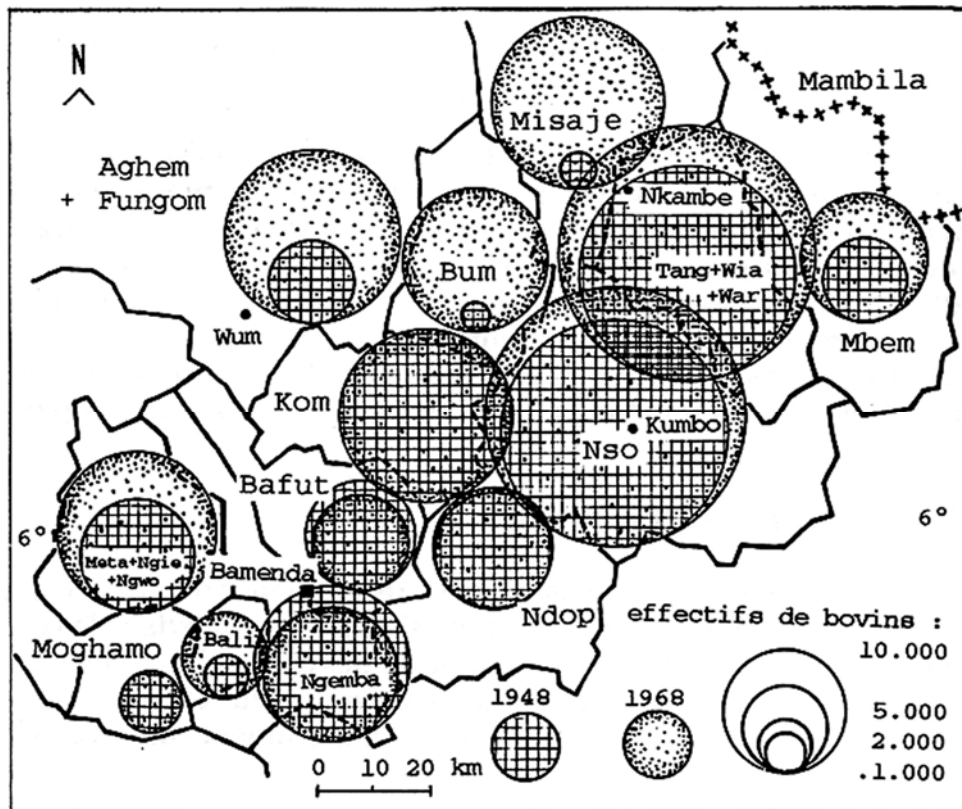
joining Nigeria, as they were already familiar with political and ecological conditions there. With the pendulum swinging towards reunification, Mbororo and Hausa became the targets of local Grassfielders' animosity against perceived foreigners from Nigeria.¹¹⁹

A violent rebellion in the Bamiléké area (known by the French appellation *maquisards*) eventually provoked pastoralists' displacement. Many Aku decided to take refuge in neighbouring Nigeria and returned via the Kashimbila route. Others followed the newly established cattle-trade route from Dumbo to Bissaula. Unfortunately, they encountered a new war zone in the Benue region. Consequently they continued their flight in different directions, and some even returned to the Grassfields.

In the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s Aku influx into the Grassfields was again considerable. Pastoralists' displacements were motivated by political instability in southern Nigeria, culminating in the Tiv revolts and Biafra war. Moreover, as a consequence of the Sahel drought lasting from 1969 to 1973, southward chain migrations were set in motion. In entering the Western Grassfields, migrant pastoralists caused a continuous flow of displacement among already established Mbororo. Many incoming pastoralists no longer followed the perilous cattle-trade routes, but sold their cattle in Nigeria and travelled by train or car. Upon their arrival in the Grassfields, they began to reconstitute their herds via cattle entrustment and the acquisition of new animals. Others entered Cameroon via the cattle-trade route from Bissaula to Dumbo. Their herds were severely affected by *bovine trypanosomiasis*; for their animals to recover, they needed to pause at Dumbo (Boutrais 1995/96: 199). In 1975 the SODEPA (*Société de Développement et d'Exploitation des Productions Animales*) cattle ranch was created at Dumbo, and pastoralists were expelled from the area. As their animals were still too weak to migrate, they grouped themselves around the fringes of the ranch, causing serious overpopulation and overgrazing. Consequently, many animals died and many graziers moved on in the direction of Fouban and the Adamaoua Highlands (Boutrais 1995/96: 199-209).

¹¹⁹ While, in the Grassfields, anti-Nigerian feelings turned against Hausa and Mbororo, in the southern part of British Cameroons, animosities were directed against Igbo traders (Bong 1990). On Igbo migrants in South West Cameroon see also Kleis (1980).

Map 5.2: Evolution of cattle population in the Western Grassfields (1948 – 1968)



Source: Boutrais 1995/96: 162

The map illustrates the increase of cattle population over the period from 1948 to 1968. Significant increase occurred particularly in the northern and peripheral areas due to the influx of Aku pastoralists from the 1940s to 1970s.

Statistical data on the Mbororo population in the Western Grassfields indicate that the number of families increased from 1,305 in 1946 to 2,276 in 1975 (Boutrais 1995/96: 610). In 1974 the ratio between Jaafun and Aku was 12,500 to 8,360 persons which roughly equals to 3:2 (Boutrais 1995/96: 548).

Cameroon's transition to independence and reunification in the early 1960s was accompanied by administrative changes that informed Mbororo economic strategies and altered their legal status. With the introduction of the French administrative and legal system, the Mbororo were released from their subordination to Native Authorities in collecting taxes. However, since Cameroon's entry into the French Central African Currency Union in 1963 and the adoption of the franc CFA, cattle taxes rose continuously. Because cattle could no longer be traded across the Nigerian border, the supply to the southern Cameroonian markets increased with the effect that cattle prices fell. Gradually, the fiscal burden on the Mbororo became onerous. Concurrently, administrative control over the pastoral sector increased, and pastoral movements were constrained. Government representatives encouraged Mbororo to

settle and to diversify their economic activities (see chapter 6). Eventually, in the context of constitutional changes in 1972, they were granted Cameroonian citizenship.

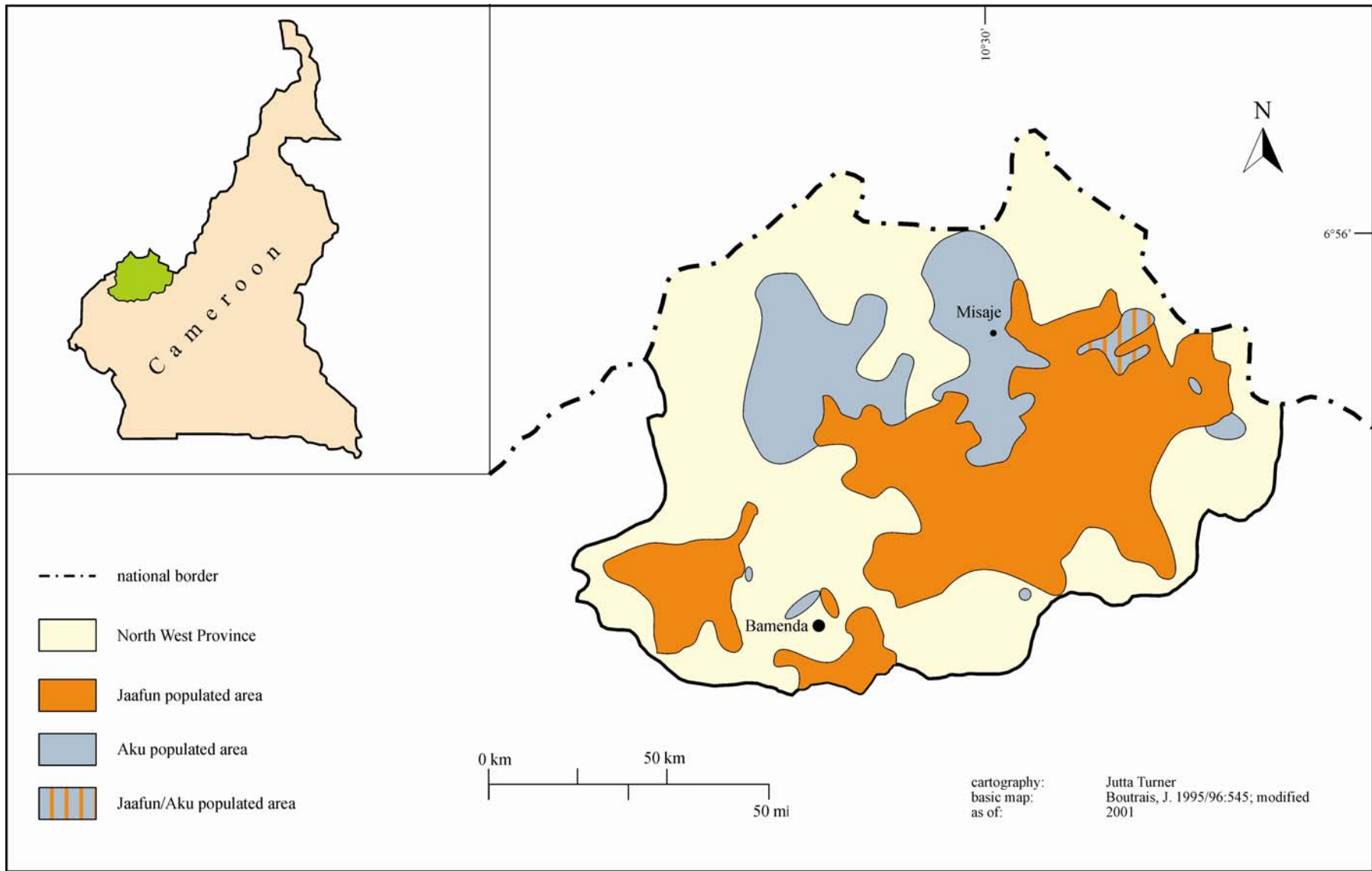
For most Mbororo in the Grassfields their migration trajectories ended in the 1970s. Many settled permanently even before then, and by now their children and grandchildren consider themselves 'locals' of the region (N. Awasom 2003a).

Before looking at the ways in which the Mbororo in the Misaje area portray their settlement and integration into the local community, I will elaborate on intra-ethnic relations, namely on the historical evolvement of the relationship between Jaafun and Aku, as both sub-groups are represented in the Misaje Sub-Division.

5.2.3 Jaafun – Aku relations

The historical pattern of Mbororo migration and settlement in the Western Grassfields gives an idea of the complex relationship between Jaafun and Aku (see map 5.3).

As first-comers, the Jaafun were in a politically advantageous position vis-à-vis the Aku whose establishment was limited to areas neglected by the Jaafun. The spatial divide between the Jaafun on the highlands and the Aku in the lowlands has become characteristic for their asymmetrical relationship (Boutrais 1995/96: 546, 557-629). Similarly, their divergent preference for cattle breeds is based on asymmetrical ecological prerogatives. The red zebu (*boDeeji*) are generally deemed finer than the white zebu (*daneeji*) and admired for their intelligence and beauty. Against the background that the highlands support all cattle breeds, the Jaafun's preference for *boDeeji* can be read as an expression of claiming cultural supremacy, and of disassociating themselves from the Aku. The Aku's choice of *daneeji*, on the other hand, is informed by the white zebu's better adaptation to the harsh conditions of the lowlands (Boutrais 1995/96: 378-395).



Map 5.3: Spatial dispersal of Jaafun and Aku over the North West Province

Despite ecological constrictions, the connection of Jaafun with red zebu and Aku with white zebu is primarily ideological. White zebu are also called *akuji*, meaning ‘Aku cattle’, while red zebu are called *mbororoji*, ‘cattle of the Mbororo’ (with Mbororo standing for Jaafun). Yet as early photographs of Mbororo immigrants in the Grassfields illustrate, diversification and experimentation with cattle breeds have been common since the early settlement period. Nowadays, pure-bred flocks are exceptional and it is only wealthy Jaafun graziers who can afford keeping a separate *boDeeji* group in addition to their main herd of cross-breeds.¹²⁰

Photograph 5.1: Early Mbororo grazier in the Grassfields



Source: Archives mission 21 / Basel Mission, E-30.85.003
 Caption: “A Mbororo man with his herd”
 Photographer: Wilhelm Zürcher
 Date: between 1932 and 1937

The cattle on this historical photograph illustrate the heterogeneity of Mbororo herds already in the 1930s. The four animals on the left seem to be cross-breeds with *gudaali* whereas the cattle on the right are of the red zebu breed.¹²¹ In the background we can see the Mbororo camp consisting of two beehive grass huts. Unfortunately, no further information is available on the identity of the herdsman or the exact location where the photograph was taken.

Jaafun and Aku tend to keep territorially and socially apart, and their relationship is coloured by unspoken grievance and rivalry. Due to socio-cultural conventions of restraint and modesty (*pulaaku*) informing FulBe comportment, conflicts of interests

¹²⁰ Similarly, Burnham (1996: 102) – working among Mbororo in the Adamaoua – reports about politically aspiring Jaafun individuals who, despite economic disadvantages, keep an additional herd of pure *boDeeji* stock.

¹²¹ *Gudaali* are stocky, short-legged zebu. The breed is from northern Cameroon where it was developed to suit intensive grazing methods (cf. Boutrais 1995/96: 395-400).

are rarely expressed openly. Instead, feelings of discord are generally concealed, and conflicts are resolved by acquiescence.

In the constrained relationship between Jaafun and Aku, Jaafun generally perceive and pride themselves as culturally and morally superior. They characterise the Aku as conservative, illiterate, poor, and ill-mannered. In contrast, they depict themselves as sophisticated, knowledgeable in Islamic practices and teachings, and open to economic innovations (Pelican 1999: 28-32). The Jaafun's stress on cultural and economic superiority can be read as a strategy to maintain their privileged position as first-comers. Concurrently, it indicates their resentment of the Aku's establishment in the lowlands, by which they were deprived of their transhumance areas. In accordance with *pulaaku*, most Jaafun withdrew from their former dry season pastures, but express their grievance indirectly by belittling the Aku.

Aku, on the other hand, are well aware of the Jaafun's resentment. They see themselves as closer to the pastoral ideal, and less spoilt by Grassfielders' socio-cultural influence, market economy, and Western education. Against the background of their marginalised status within Mbororo society in the Grassfields, they tend to be less concerned with their reputation than the Jaafun. Many Aku have expanded their settlement areas; some have even ventured into the privileged highland pastures monopolised by the Jaafun. Nowadays, individual Aku families are found dispersed all over the Grassfields (Boutrais 1995/96: 629-632).

5.3 History and self-understanding of Mbororo in the Misaje area

Having sketched out the historical background to Mbororo establishment in the Grassfields, I will now focus more specifically on the Mbororo in the Misaje area, their historical narratives, and conceptions of identity. Much of the subsequent information will help to substantiate the above, more general arguments. In addition, informants' accounts provide complementary data on processes of internal differentiation and social change.

The contemporary Mbororo population of the Misaje Sub-Division is composed of 21 lineages, comprising fourteen Aku and seven Jaafun lineages; some with only a couple of families.¹²² The Sub-Division is divided in six *ardorates*¹²³; these are

¹²² The lineages represented in the Misaje Sub-Division comprise Gamanko'en, Daneeji, Danagu'en, Joranko'en, Bogoyanko'en, Galeeji, NaatirBe, Gorkanko'en, Butanko'en, Jallanko'en,

administrative units, each headed by an *arDo* who operates as political representative to the administration and neighbouring groups.

The Aku settled in the lowlands around Misaje and Dumbo. They dominate four of the six *ardorates*, and constitute approximately 65% of the overall Mbororo population of the Misaje Sub-Division. The Jaafun are concentrated on the slope from Misaje to Nkambe and around Bebekette, and are in control of two *ardorates*. In comparing Aku and Jaafun in terms of cattle property, the Aku own approximately 60% of the cattle population in the Misaje Sub-Division in Mbororo possession. In the areas where the Jaafun constitute a majority, they generally have larger herds than their Aku neighbours. In those *ardorates* where they are represented only sparsely, they tend to be impoverished individuals.

In my research I focused on the two southern *ardorates* in the Misaje Sub-Division which largely overlap with Nchaney territory. They comprise approximately 140 Mbororo graziers who belong to thirteen lineages; ten Aku and three Jaafun lineages. The two *ardorates* are headed by *arDo* Adamu from the Gamanko'en and *arDo* Bala from the Daneeji, both dominant Aku lineages in their respective areas. The two lineages' local establishment and their relationship with other Mbororo lineages and non-Mbororo population groups constitute the focus of the following historical narratives.

My elaborations are based on conversations with 21 Mbororo informants belonging to seven different lineages. These included middle-aged and elderly men as well as elderly women. Vital information was also contributed by non-Mbororo, namely Nchaney, Pinyin, and Hausa informants for whom fragments of Mbororo history are part of their personal life or group history. Rather than presenting a wide array of settlement histories, I will concentrate on the life histories of three individuals, namely the late *arDo* Affang, the leader of the Gamanko'en and their *ardorate* until 2001, *arDo* Bala, the head of the Daneeji lineage and *ardorate*, and his former wife *hajja*¹²⁴ Maimuna of the same lineage.

Dauranko'en, Witi'en, Sisilbe, Ba'en (Aku lineages) and Ringimaji, Tukanko'en, Kesanko'en, Dabbanko'en, Bodi'en, Rahaji, Bawanko'en (Jaafun lineages).

¹²³ *Ardorate* is a local (slightly corrupted) derivate from *arDo* (leader), equivalent to sultanate from sultan, emirate from emir, or *lamidate* from *laamiDo*. It is commonly used in Pidgin-English and English by local informants and administrators.

¹²⁴ *Hajja* is the title for a women who undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is also a common Muslim women's name.

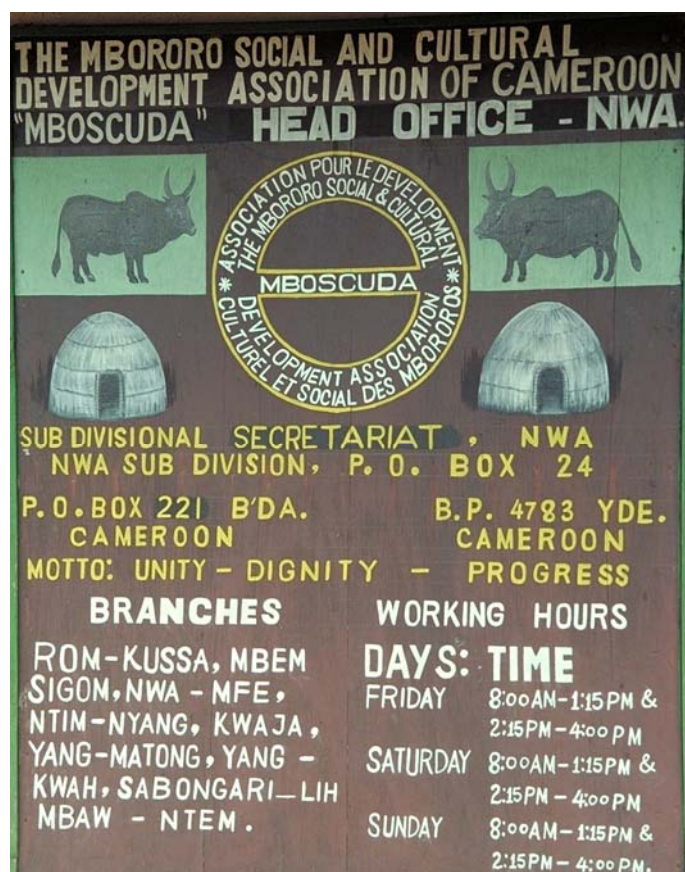
In a later section I will contrast modalities of history-making in the Misaje area with the emerging formalised historiography of the Mbororo community in Sabga. I will take evident divergences as an indicator of transformations in Mbororo self-understanding, and situate this development in its socio-political context.

5.3.1 Local accounts on Aku history

In recounting the history of the Mbororo in the Grassfields, informants occasionally started by telling a version of the FulBe myth of origin which is shared in slightly different variants by most FulBe groups across Africa (cf. Jeffreys 1946, 1966, Virtanen 2003: 85-96). In short, it tells how the FulBe ancestors received a gift of cattle from a water spirit who instructed them to lead a pastoral life.

Pastoral identity is an important aspect of FulBe identity in general, and Mbororo identity in particular. Analogous to Grassfielders who define themselves through their relationship with the land and their ancestors, Mbororo identity is rooted in the relationship with their cattle. The cow design is emblematic for Mbororo identity, and is pictured widely on handmade artefacts, furnishings, and Mbororo associations' banners.

Photograph 5.2: Cow design as emblem of Mbororo identity



The signboard of the MBOSCUA office at Nwa contains two pictograms popularly used in Mbororo representation, namely red (or occasionally white) zebu and 'traditional' grass huts built and used by nomadic or transhumant Mbororo (see also photograph 5.1).

MBOSCUA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association) is a national non-governmental organisation representing Mbororo interests with local branches throughout the country.

Photo: Michaela Pelican, Nwa, 12/10/01

Besides the pastoral connotation of Mbororo ethnicity, Muslim identity is a second essential component. Myths about Mbororo descent from Arab scholars, common among pastoral FulBe in other regions (e.g. Virtanen 2003: 86-99), are less popular in the Misaje area. Yet with the Mbororo and Hausa constituting a Muslim minority vis-à-vis Grassfielders who are predominantly Christians or adherents of African local religions, it is clear that their Muslim identity is a vital marker of ethnic and cultural difference (see chapter 3).

Another frequently narrated anecdote explains the origin of the appellation *Aku*. When the Jaafun encountered the first *Aku* entering the Grassfields, they overheard them greeting each other "*aku, aku, aku*" and henceforth used the expression in reference to the new-comers. Most *Aku* deem that appellation derogatory and inappropriate, arguing that the salutation *aku* has largely been replaced by the Hausa greeting *sannu*. Nevertheless, the term has been widely internalised, also by *Aku* informants who contingently refer to themselves as *Aku* or more generally as FulBe.

While these two tales are familiar to Mbororo as well as members of neighbouring communities, lineage histories are less formalised and mostly known to their own members.

5.3.1.1 *The Gamanko'en in the Misaje area*

The most influential Aku lineage in the Misaje area are the Gamanko'en. In the year 2000 they were represented by 26 (registered) graziers with more than 1,100 cattle.¹²⁵ Their leader was *arDo* Affang who died in November 2001. He is succeeded by his son Adamu whose official induction took place in spring 2002.

The history of the Gamanko'en was recounted by *arDo* Affang's sons *mallam* Raago and Gorawo. The following narrative is a selective and compounded version of their accounts and focuses on the establishment of *arDo* Affang and his followers in the Misaje area.

The Gamanko'en are from Jos. Some of their lineage members are still there [on the Jos Plateau], but the two groups have culturally grown apart with regard to their clothing, hairstyle, and dialect. *ArDo* Affang entered the Grassfields some 50 years ago, before Cameroon attained independence. He first came here to examine the place, and returned to Jos to sell most of his animals. He settled at Dumbo and reconstituted his herd with 25 animals which he bought in Binka and Dorofin [on the Nigerian side of the Mambila]. These were mainly cattle of the *gudaali* breed, because the white zebu (*daneeji*) were introduced to the market only later on. The *gudaali* turned out to be difficult to rear. Subsequently, many Aku cross-bred *gudaali* with *daneeji* which could better sustain the climate of the lowlands and were easier to handle.

By the time *arDo* Affang came to Cameroon, the area between Misaje and Dumbo was controlled by *arDo* Maguwa from the lineage of the NaatirBe. He was a wealthy grazier who had been established for some years and was surrounded by a large entourage of NaatirBe. The area was used for transhumance by the Jaafun from Nkambe; Dumbo was only a temporary settlement. The Jaafun did not like the arrival of the Aku. They suspected their herds of being infested with animal diseases, thus spoiling the pastures. They did not oppose the Aku openly, but withdrew themselves. They 'made *pulaaku*' [Fulfulde: *Be waDDi pulaaku*] and redirected their transhumance to Lassin and Konene.

¹²⁵ This information is based on the cattle tax statistics of 2000/2001, made available by the Misaje Council. However, the statistics do not indicate the lineage background of the registered graziers. This additional information was supplied by my Mbororo assistant Haruna on the basis of his familiarity with the local Mbororo population and by questioning knowledgeable individuals.

While *arDo* Maguwa was in charge of the Aku graziers, there was a second *arDo*, *arDo* Burti from the lineage of the Tukanko'en, who controlled the area between Misaje and Lassin and was mainly concerned with the Jaafun population.

After some years, *arDo* Affang transferred from Dumbo to Mbissa, and subsequently to Bridge Four [close to Misaje] where he settled permanently. His herd steadily increased and he was joined by a number of related families. About 40 years ago, he was given the *arDoship* of *arDo* Burti. He was put in charge of the graziers residing on Nchaney territory. By then, his cattle had increased to three *tokkere* [herds of 50-80 animals]. In the 1980s, *arDo* Affang was an active farmer. He participated in governmental programmes in mixed farming and animal traction. Together with his sons he cultivated food crops, cash crops, and fodder grass, and even received government certificates as 'best farmer'. With the decline of government subsidies, these programmes collapsed and *arDo* Affang focused again on cattle rearing. By the mid-1990s, the administration split the territory under *arDo* Affang's control and created another *arDoship* which was given to *arDo* Bala of the Daneeji lineage. While *arDo* Affang remained in charge of the area from Bridge Four to Chako, *arDo* Bala was put in control of the Mbororo graziers residing around Bem, Kibbo, Chunghe, and Nfume. When *arDo* Affang died in 2001, he left behind 226 children, grandchildren, and relatives, and 380 cattle. (*mallam* Raago, Bridge Five, 17/04/01; Gorawo Affang, Bridge Five, 23/11/01)

This positive image of the late *arDo* Affang was largely endorsed by informants of different lineages, but also by Nchaney and Hausa as well as government administrators. As many pointed out, he was a capable, wealthy, and innovative leader who cooperated closely with local and governmental authorities. He entertained friendly relations with *fon* Michael, the previous Nchaney chief, and was an age-mate and close friend of the Hausa chief *mallam* Mudi.

Photograph 5.3: *arDo Affang and mallam Mudi*



The photograph was contributed by the wife of the late *arDo* Affang who decorated the wall of her house with photographs of relatives and friends.

It shows *arDo* Affang (on the left) and the Hausa chief *mallam* Mudi (on the right), and was taken some 20 years ago, when they were in their 50s.

Both are dressed in the style of Muslim elders. Their sitting arrangement and posture reflects their relationship as friends and equals, both holding a leadership position.

The historical narrative of the establishment of the late *arDo* Affang and the Gamanko'en in the Misaje area contains a number of themes addressed in the previous, more general section on Mbororo history in the Grassfields. These include the (re)construction of pastoral history, the expression of (sub-)ethnic identities via cattle breeds, and the relationship between Aku and Jaafun.

As we have seen earlier, dating pastoral history can be difficult. This also applies to determining the year of *arDo* Affang's arrival in the Misaje area. Gorawo's estimate is relatively vague, approximating his father's advent to the Grassfields to the 1950s. Nchaney sources indicate 1952 as the date of *arDo* Affang's arrival in Misaje (see chapter 4). Boutrais (1995/96: 130-136) ascribes the entry of Aku graziers into the Dumbo and Misaje area to the second half of the 1950s. I have not come to a conclusion about the exact date of *arDo* Affang's advent in Misaje, and prefer to keep it open to the 1950s. This short excursus illustrates not only the difficulties in dating pastoral migration, but the differing approaches of Mbororo, Grassfielders, and

academics to historical (re)construction. While Nchaney situate historical events in a clear time frame that is still open to modification and manipulation, Mbororo are little concerned with dating movements. Academics, on the other hand, aim at (re)constructing a coherent historical account, which corresponds neither with Nchaney nor Mbororo approaches to historiography.

Informative is also the data about *arDo* Affang's herd composition and breeding strategies. Earlier, I argued that the association of cattle breeds with (sub-)ethnic identities is primarily ideological and not strictly followed, neither nowadays nor at the time of Mbororo arrival in the Grassfields. As *arDo* Affang's case illustrates, he was compelled to shift from white zebu to *gudaali*, probably not just because white zebu were not – or only scarcely – available; but also because the *gudaali* breed was promoted by the Cameroonian government as being more profitable and attuned to a sedentary lifestyle. In the end, *arDo* Affang opted for cross-breeding which has become a common practice among Mbororo graziers in the Grassfields (Boutrais 1995/96: 411-432).

Finally, *mallam* Raago and Gorawo described the first encounter of Jaafun and Aku at Dumbo. Initially, the grazing area around Misaje and Dumbo was frequented by Jaafun from Nkambe, Binka, and Nso who descended with their herds to the lowlands for seasonal transhumance. This arrangement pertained from the 1930s to the 1950s, when Aku graziers settled in the lowlands, and Jaafun herders stopped coming down for transhumance. The grazing area on Bessa territory, however, has remained under Jaafun control. Thus, in the Misaje Sub-Division, graziers of both groups live side by side. Despite competing interests over the same grazing zone, informants rarely mentioned this underlying tension. By comparison, *Mallam* Raago and a few other Aku individuals with whom I informally discussed this topic were relatively outspoken in their assessment of the relationship between Jaafun and Aku.

Besides the three topics discussed so far, the historical narrative on the Gamanko'en contains further information relevant to the subject of intra- and interethnic relations. In the following I will take up two themes and complement them with additional information. These include the Mbororo's political relations with neighbouring communities and the government, and emic comparisons of Mbororo socio-cultural practices across national borders.

Mallam Raago and Gorawo provided no information on the Gamanko'en's relationship with their Nchaney neighbours. According to *fon* Richard Chefon, it was his father *fon* Michael who drew Affang to the Misaje area and helped him to achieve a leadership position. This statement is obviously an exaggeration, intended to boost the Nchaney *fon*'s authority. Much more likely, *arDo* Affang was attracted by the rumour of fabulous pastoral conditions in the Grassfields, and by the request and reputation of *arDo* Maguwa.

The socio-political status of both *arDo* Maguwa and *arDo* Affang was based on their pastoral success (i.e. their wealth in cattle), and on their ability to attract a large following. *ArDo* Affang successfully sustained his leadership position until his death, by proving his competence to his people as well as to local and governmental authorities. He was a diligent tax collector, successfully mediated in farmer-herder conflicts, and actively participated in governmental programmes. This is reflected in his engagement in mixed farming and oxen ploughing where he also benefited from previous experiences while residing on the Jos Plateau. Gamanko'en, like many other Aku lineages, have been practicing agro-pastoralism for generations, while most Jaafun lineages pride themselves of a purely pastoral past, and display a rather contemptuous approach to agricultural tasks (Boutrais 1995/96: 615 *passim*, see also chapter 6).

Finally, *mallam* Raago and Gorawo addressed the subject of nationalised Mbororo identities. From their perspective, the history of the Gamanko'en started with their father's transfer from Jos to the Misaje area where they were born and grew up. They made no attempts to maintain the memory of their grandparents' generation, nor did they cultivate social links with their relatives in Nigeria. Their primary reference point was Misaje and *arDo* Affang's realm, which they aspired to maintain after his death. This attitude is common among Mbororo immigrants of the second generation who have no experience or memory of living in Nigeria, and consider themselves Cameroonian Mbororo; they tend to distance themselves from their Nigerian counterparts by referring to socio-cultural differences.

The argument of cultural estrangement was raised frequently by informants of different lineages. Nigerian Mbororo are generally seen as more traditional, adhering to a mobile lifestyle and outmoded cultural practices. Cameroonian Mbororo, on the other hand, are said to have adjusted to their new social and cultural environment where certain practices are considered inappropriate. Most frequently informants

alluded to differences in physical appearance, demeanour, and dialect; but also with regard to cultural practices, such as baton-beating contests (Fulfulde: *soro*) and abduction marriage (Fulfulde: *deetawal*), which are no longer practiced in Cameroon.¹²⁶

Photograph 5.4: Nigerian Mbororo



The photograph was contributed by *mallam* Ibrahim and *mallam* Egih of the Danagu'en lineage. It depicts two of their distant relatives who live on the Jos Plateau.

They showed me the photograph to point out differences between Nigerian and Cameroonian Mbororo in their hairstyle and clothing. As *mallam* Ibrahim and *mallam* Egih explained, Mbororo men used to wear braided hair like the two youngsters on the picture. Cameroonian Mbororo no longer do so but have short hair.

The style of the caps and the shirt worn by the person on the left were pointed out as typical for Mbororo on the Jos Plateau, while Cameroonian Mbororo wear longer shirts with long sleeves and slightly different caps.

For me, as a non-Mbororo, it was quite difficult to notice the indicated difference in clothing.

¹²⁶ Regarding the ban of *soro* in Cameroon see Burnham (1996: 99, 106) and Bocquené (2002: 130). On the practice of *deetawal* see Bocquené (2002: 173-177), Stenning (1994 [1959]: 140-146). In her study on performance and performativity among pastoral FulBe in Adamaoua, Virtanen (2003: 85-129) dedicated an entire chapter to her informants' recollection and comparison of their lives in Nigeria and Cameroon. In the eyes of pastoral FulBe elders in Adamaoua, the abolition of the *soro* in Cameroon has affected the pastoral community significantly. They have lost a central institution, teaching their youths the ideals of *pulaaku*, namely courage, self-possession, and self-control. Contemporary pastoral FulBe youngsters engage in alcohol and solvent abuse, and quarrels occasionally end in stabbings and accidental deaths. The point of Mbororo youths' unruliness and alcohol consumption has also been raised by Mbororo and non-Mbororo interlocutors in the Grassfields (see chapter 6), whereas I have not come across indications of solvent abuse. Yet, Mbororo elders in the Grassfields are less outspoken in relating their youngsters' misconduct to the absence of the *soro*, which most consider a truly outdated custom.

5.3.1.2 The Daneeji in the Misaje area

I will now introduce the second influential Aku lineage in the Misaje area, the Daneeji. In 2000 the Daneeji comprised a total of 32 (registered) graziers with approximately 750 animals.¹²⁷ Unlike the Gamanko'en who congregated around the late *arDo* Affang, the Daneeji are split in three clusters. The majority resides near Nfume, in the area now administered by *arDo* Bala. A second group stays near Chako in the *ardorate* of the late *arDo* Affang. A third group settled close to Bridge Five; they are under the direction of *arDo* Mubaba Kandamba, the third in line of *arDo* Maguwa.¹²⁸ The Daneeji are one of the few lineages in the Grassfields that differentiate between 'houses' (Fulfulde: *suudi*). In Nigeria they allegedly comprise 62 'houses', but only a handful are represented in the Misaje area (Boutrais 1995/96: 132-134).

ArDo Bala and *alhaji*¹²⁹ Yaroko are the two most respected and influential elders among the Daneeji in the Misaje area. They are both in their seventies and have entered the Grassfields in the second half of the 1950s. *ArDo* Bala settled near Nfume, while *alhaji* Yaroko first established himself on Bum territory and later moved to Chako. *Hajja* Maimuna was married to *arDo* Bala and accompanied him from Nigeria to Cameroon. She is a well respected elder and knowledgeable in Aku pastoral lifestyle and custom.

In the following I will recount the life histories of *arDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna, combining them into a single narrative with quotes from both interlocutors. Although they narrated their stories separately, their accounts overlapped to a large degree. I read this as an indication that – compared to the contemporary situation in the Grassfields – the life worlds of pastoral FulBe were previously gendered to a much lesser degree (Pelican 1999, 2004b). In their historical accounts, they focused on intra-group relations and experiences of social change.

ArDo Bala and *hajja* Maimuna are Daneeji from Kano where they were neighbours with other lineages, such as the Ringimaji and Tukanko'en (Jaafun lineages). *ArDo*

¹²⁷ The information was gained via personal inquiries based on the cattle tax statistics of 2000/2001 made available by the Misaje Council.

¹²⁸ A small group of Daneeji graziers settled near Sabongida, but they are outside the reach of this study.

¹²⁹ *Alhaji* is the courtesy title (in Fulfulde and Hausa) for a man who accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Bala fondly remembered his youth, moving back and forth between the dry season camp around Hadejia and their rainy season settlement near Kano. Towards the end of dry season, he and his brothers used to drive the cattle and sheep to the salt springs at Basansani (in Niger), while the majority of the family returned to Kano to engage in farming. They bartered milk for food crops and entertained good relations with their farming neighbours.

I enjoyed Hadejia, because there was a lot of good food. We exchanged milk for grains and people gave us a lot of yams. When you met a farmer harvesting yams, he would call you and give you. You were not even able to carry it all; the soil was so fertile. (*arDo* Bala, Nfume, 16/01/01)

By the age of 25, *arDo* Bala married Maimuna who was fourteen. Two years later, they transferred to Bauchi, leaving behind their parents. They spent six years around Bauchi and progressed to the Benue area. From Wukari they climbed the Mambila Plateau and later entered the Western Grassfields. While on the Mambila, they resided with NaatirBe. Around 1957 *arDo* Maguwa, who had moved to Cameroon three years earlier, invited his relatives on the Mambila to join him at Dumbo. As the Daneeji and NaatirBe entertain a joking relationship, members of both lineages followed his call.

We came under *arDo* Maguwa. He was a Naatiro [sing. of NaatirBe]. We always joke together. They take our things and we also take theirs. *ArDo* Maguwa sent news, and people went to see the place before they told him that they wanted to come. He and the veterinary doctor gave them money and made their papers. (*hajja* Maimuna, Misaje, 01/12/01)

Unlike most Gamanko'en who sold their animals prior to their departure and reconstituted their herds by buying *gudaali* in Cameroon, the migration group of *arDo* Bala moved together with their white zebu. They followed the cattle-trade route from Wukari via Takum and Kashimbila to Wum and Dumbo.

We were so many that I can't remember. We could have been more than one hundred. You see, all this area around Kibbo was occupied by Daneeji, but now only I alone of the Daneeji of east Kano am left in this place. Some have gone back to Kano, others moved on to the Adamaoua and the Central African Republic. I was tired of running up and down, so I settled. (*arDo* Bala, Nfume, 16/01/01)

ArDo Bala and his elder brother established themselves at Nfume. They encountered other Daneeji families who belong to different 'houses'. *Alhaji* Yaroko's family, for

example, originated from Katsina and they share no relations with the Daneeji from Kano. As *arDo* Bala explained:

I did not know them [family of *alhaji* Yaroko] before, I just met them here. When we settled here, we began to intermarry and we became one. They gave us their daughters and, I too, I gave them my daughter. (*arDo* Bala, Nfume, 16/01/01)

ArDo Bala and his family have stayed in the Grassfields for 43 years. Over that period, many things have changed. *ArDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna came to Cameroon with many cattle, but soon herds began to dwindle due to diseases and increasing cattle sales.

We did not know that somebody's cattle could all get finished. Only in Cameroon did we see it happening. The thing that decimated our herds was *pettoowu* [rinderpest]. We still work hard to bring them back [to their initial size]. So for now, whenever someone's cattle get finished, he can hardly reconstitute his herd. He just stays like a *kaado* [sing. of *haaBe*, non-FulBe, here farmer]. At first, when our cattle diminished, we women helped our husbands. We sold milk and made cotton thread. But here the women do nothing. They do not sell milk, they do not even carry water. That is what brought us poverty. Women have become queens! We see it, but they do not see it. The men sell cattle to solve all the problems of their women. (*hajja* Maimuna, Misaje, 01/12/01)

Soon after he settled at Nfume, *arDo* Bala engaged in farming and cattle trading to reduce the economic burden on the cattle herd. After some years the couple separated, and *hajja* Maimuna remarried at Ngaoundal in northern Cameroon. She spent 27 years at Ngaoundal before she returned to Misaje where she lives with her son Musa. However, she favoured life in north Cameroon over life in the Grassfields:

You cannot compare Ngaoundal and Bamenda. Enjoyment is of different kind here and there. Ngaoundal is better. It is not because of cattle, but because of the faith, clothes, and many other things. The area here is seen as a place where people drink alcohol and a place of the *haaBe* [non-FulBe]. But at Ngaoundal, you cannot see a Mbororo man drinking alcohol. They even build compounds with mosques! (*hajja* Maimuna, Misaje, 01/12/01)

While *hajja* Maimuna proceeded to Ngaoundal, *arDo* Bala remained at Nfume. When the government decided to split the territory under *arDo* Affang's control, he went in for the competition and attained the *arDoship*. As he framed it: "This is the sixth year, since I started counting cattle." (*arDo* Bala, Nfume, 16/01/01)

The historical account of *arDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna contains a lot of relevant information among which I will concentrate on three topics; firstly migration experiences, secondly the relationship between Daneeji ‘houses’, and between Daneeji and other lineages, and thirdly socio-economic and socio-cultural transformations within Mbororo society.

In contrast to the previous historical account narrated by the late *arDo* Affang’s sons, *arDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna recounted their own life histories. They belong to the first generation of Mbororo immigrants and have a good memory of their past in Nigeria and their trajectory to Cameroon. Both informants precisely remembered their migration routes, the years spent in each location, and the challenges encountered. As pointed out by Boutrais (1995/96: 65), however, pastoral memory is preoccupied with trajectories rather than motives of migration.

A second topic addressed in the above historical account concerns the relationship between Daneeji ‘houses’, and between Daneeji and other lineages. Throughout our conversations, *arDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna stressed their identity as Kano Daneeji, distancing themselves from Katsina Daneeji who dwelled on the Jos Plateau before coming to Cameroon. Both interlocutors emphasised the shared origin and initial proximity between Daneeji and Jaafun from Kano.¹³⁰ As *arDo* Bala noted, they entertain joking relations which, over time, have been forgotten or ignored. The only joking relationship the Daneeji still practice is with NaatirBe (Aku lineage), with whom they migrated from the Mambila to the Grassfields.¹³¹

Despite their emphasis on shared bonds between Daneeji and Jaafun from Kano, *arDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna clearly distinguished Aku from Jaafun lineages, and insisted that the two groups had culturally grown apart. As *hajja* Maimuna explained, in terms of dialect, clothing, and socialising Aku are closer to Hausa. Jaafun, on the other hand, are more similar to Huya (Town FulBe of northern Cameroon). Thus the cultural proximity between Jaafun and Daneeji from Kano has diminished. The latter now associate with other Daneeji ‘houses’ and Aku lineages from different areas with whom they co-reside and intermarry.

It becomes clear that over the two informants’ lifetime, their criteria of cultural alignment have shifted from shared origin to shared location. Secondly, it

¹³⁰ The two informants here refer to Jaafun as a specific lineage and not as a sub-ethnic category.

¹³¹ As Boutrais (1995/96: 614) mentions, a small faction of Daneeji settled at Meta on the Bamenda Highlands. They adopted red zebu and were subsumed into the Jaafun category. The majority, however, settled in the lowlands around Misaje and Fonfuka, cohabiting with Aku lineages.

demonstrates that in the Bamenda region, the sub-ethnic level of identification (Jaafun versus Aku) gained prominence over lineage identification. Here it is also noteworthy that Grassfielders often perceive Jaafun and Aku as two separate ethnic groups with distinct languages and cultural practices (see chapter 4).

Finally, besides shifts in identification, the two informants outlined significant socio-economic and socio-cultural changes that tie in with the above comparison of Nigerian and Cameroonian Mbororo. Moreover, the subject of social change is vital to understand recent transformations in Mbororo self-understanding and political representation, which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Among the most crucial factors shaping pastoralists' lives is their degree of mobility.¹³² *ArDo* Bala described his parents practising a transhumant, agro-pastoral lifestyle while residing in northern Nigeria. Together with his brother, *arDo* Bala adopted a more mobile lifestyle. They eventually decided to settle permanently upon their arrival in the Grassfields, arguing that they felt tired after many years of roaming. Their shift in mobility typifies many Mbororo graziers' strategies.

The adoption of a more sedentary lifestyle impacted on the pastoralists' socio-economic organisation, in particular their gender-roles. As *arDo* Bala and *hajja* Maimuna pointed out, Mbororo women usually assisted their husbands in supporting the family by selling milk. But once established in the Grassfields, they encountered a number of obstacles and eventually reduced milk sales to a minimum (Pelican 1999: 106-130, 2004b).¹³³ Since Grassfielders were not accustomed to milk consumption, the demand for milk products was limited. Furthermore, their animals' productivity reduced as an effect of their restricted mobility and veterinary medication. Moreover, adherence to Islamic rules has increasingly become a symbol of progress, wealth, and status, and is expressed, *inter alia*, in the restriction of women's mobility. *Hajja* Maimuna rightly emphasised the changes in Mbororo women's lives, but put the blame on women themselves.

In order to safeguard their pastoral resources, many Mbororo started to combine their herding activities with limited subsistence agriculture. While Jaafun relied

¹³² The existing literature on the subject of pastoral mobility is considerable. I here refer to a sequence of workshops held in June 2004 and June 2005 at the Max Planck Institute (MPI) for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (Germany) on *conditions of pastoral mobility*, organised by Günther Schlee and Anatoly Khazanov (see MPI homepage).

¹³³ Virtanen (2003: 198-220) describes similar developments among pastoral FulBe in Adamaoua.

primarily on employing local farmers to cultivate their fields, Aku tended to perform most tasks themselves. Economic diversification was also encouraged by the British colonial administration, and subsequently the Cameroonian state, both as a means of augmenting rural production and as a way of improving farmer-herder relations (see chapter 6). *ArDo* Bala grew up with both cattle grazing and farming. Retrospectively, he prided himself on being the first Aku in the Misaje area to build a house and cultivate crops. In addition, he ventured into cattle trade, driving and selling animals to Nigeria and southern Cameroon. Most of his sons have copied his attitude and have diversified their economic activities, running small shops, working as drivers or peripatetic photographers, cultivating crops for sale, and rearing cattle. Significant in this respect is also *hajja* Maimuna's comment that a person whose herd was depleted had to stay like a *kaado* (non-Mbororo), i.e. to make his living from farming. The more enterprising Mbororo, like *arDo* Bala, *alhaji* Yaroko, and *arDo* Affang did not engage in agriculture as a response to poverty but due to their relative wealth. Impoverished Mbororo, on the other hand, tend to be conservative in their economic activities and to capitalise on their pastoral expertise, working as paid herdsman or cattle drovers.

Changes in Mbororo mobility and economy affected also the socio-cultural sphere. With growing wealth, many Mbororo aimed at improving their living conditions by investing in consumer goods and Islamic education. Mbororo youths gradually adopted practices and consumption patterns of their Grassfields peers (such as frequenting local bars, attending Grassfielders rituals and festivities, or dating Grassfields partners) which their elders considered incompatible with their Mbororo and Muslim identity (Boutrais 1995/96: 967-970, Frantz 1986). In the same line, *Hajja* Maimuna complained that, while Mbororo women previously were ashamed of admitting a pregnancy, "they nowadays start buying clothes from the moment a child is in the mother's womb" (*hajja* Maimuna, Misaje, 01/12/01). She deemed this contemporary attitude a breach of *pulaaku* and a sign of moral decay. Furthermore, in comparing the situation in northern Cameroon and the Grassfields, she made clear that the manifold challenges to Muslim practices and Mbororo identity, resulting from the Mbororo's cohabitation with their Grassfields neighbours, made life complicated.

As Mbororo elders worried about their youngsters' acculturation as a result of living in a non-Muslim environment, they emphasised an Islamic lifestyle and encouraged Islamic education while refuting western or Christian schooling. Mbororo

individuals only later became aware of the practical advantages of Western education and began to send some of their children to school.

The two historical narratives on the establishment of the Gamanko'en and Daneeji in the Misaje area have illustrated two significant points raised in the beginning of this chapter; namely the absence of a collective history shared by all Mbororo in the research area and secondly, shifting categories of identification contingent on the historical context and the envisaged 'other'. Both features are rooted in the economic and socio-political organisation of the Mbororo as a pastoral, mobile, and decentralised or segmentary society. However, as the subsequent example will show, these features are not absolute. Prolonged sedentarisation and Cameroon's political liberalisation have promoted the emergence of new forms of historiography, self-identification, and ethnic representation.

5.3.2 A different setting: historiography and ethnicity in Sabga

I will now change sites and turn to Sabga, the oldest and most prestigious Mbororo settlement in northwest Cameroon. Sabga has been mentioned before in the historical overview of Mbororo establishment in the Grassfields. At this point, I will focus on contemporary practices of historiography and self-representation, discuss the ways in which they diverge from local practices in Misaje, and highlight the reasons that account for their different structure and significance.

With approximately 2,000 inhabitants Sabga is the largest Mbororo settlement in northwest Cameroon (Davis 1995). It is situated some 40 km northeast of Bamenda in the chiefdom of Babanki Tungo. It derives its name from *arDo* Sabga, the first Mbororo leader who settled in the Grassfields in the late 1910s. The Sabga community has retained its initial prestige as first-comers, and counts as the headquarters of the Mbororo in the Grassfields. Its leader is administratively classified as a second class chief and bears the title of *laamiiDo* (Fulfulde for paramount *arDo* or superior chief).¹³⁴ Thanks to its proximity to Bamenda, the provincial capital and centre of cattle marketing, the Sabga community has been exposed to pastoral

¹³⁴ In Cameroon there are only three Mbororo *lamidates*, namely Sabga in the North West, Didango in the West, and Lompta in the Adamaoua. All other *lamidates* are Town FulBe (Huya) *lamidates*.

development programmes more than any other Mbororo group in the Grassfields. This applies to the colonial and post-colonial period, and has become even more pertinent in the 1990s, an era coloured by national political liberalisation and increasing NGO activities.

Over the past decade, Sabga Mbororo have participated in a number of non-governmental development projects. Since 1992 members of the Sabga community have operated a dairy cooperative in collaboration with the American NGO Land O'Lakes. Exchange visits were organised, and individuals were trained in various techniques promoting the milk and meat productivity of their cattle. In 1996 Sabga graziers established a business relationship with Sotramilk, a commercial dairy processing company in Bamenda, supplying fresh milk on a regular basis (Pelican 2004b). Sabga individuals are also in contact with the pastoral development organisation APESS (*Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane*) based in Burkina Faso (cf. Hagberg 2004, 2005b, Kremling 2005, APESS homepage). APESS runs mainly educational and pasture improvement programmes, and is largely Swiss-funded. *Imam* Umaru¹³⁵ of Sabga attended several meetings in Cameroon and Burkina Faso. He adopted the Fulfulde scripture, developed by APESS on the basis of the Arabic alphabet, and began to organise classes for women and children.¹³⁶ Moreover, besides its involvement in various development programmes, the Sabga community has produced some educated Mbororo who have assumed 'white collar jobs' or become successful businessmen.¹³⁷

Sabga's success story also has its negative side which expresses itself in recurrent confrontations over land ownership and resource access with neighbouring communities and politically influential individuals. In 1999 an argument emerged between the *fon* of Babanki Tungo and the *laamiiDo* of Sabga concerning the territorial authority of the two community leaders. The *fon* of Babanki challenged the

¹³⁵ *Imam* is the title for a Muslim cleric or prayer leader. It originates from Arabic and is used in Fulfulde and Hausa.

¹³⁶ Following an APESS report of 2002, an *imam* in the Bamenda region, most probably *imam* Umaru, has written six books in the APESS scripture (cf. APESS 2002).

¹³⁷ My assessment of Sabga as a progressive and prolific community has been criticised by a Mbororo friend and colleague (S.S., e-mail communication 22/11/03). He argues that other Mbororo communities have participated in the same or related development projects, and have produced even more influential and educated Mbororo than Sabga. He attributes the eminence of the Sabga community primarily to historical circumstances. Furthermore, many well-to-do individuals have supported its symbolical significance by voluntarily identifying with Sabga. This critical comment clarifies that Sabga is not the only progressive Mbororo community in the Grassfields; however, it does not invalidate my general argument. See also the Village Aid homepage, Cameroon photo gallery, for a recent photograph of Sabga university students.

laamiiDo's status as a second class chief, arguing that Sabga was not an independent village but a quarter of Kejom Ketinguh, the capital of the Babanki chiefdom. The *laamiiDo* of Sabga responded by indicating his community's long-standing establishment, which qualified them as autonomous citizens of the area in their own right (N. Awasom 2003a). The most recent and serious incident happened in April 2002, when a powerful entrepreneur and supporter of the present political regime occupied part of the Sabga territory and drove away resident Mbororo families. Four Mbororo individuals who allegedly participated in a collective attempt to recuperate the territory were arrested by the gendarmerie, tortured, and condemned by a military tribunal to ten years imprisonment and a fine of 1.5 million FCFA (approximately € 2,300) each. Thanks to a dynamic network of dedicated Mbororo and sympathisers abroad, the case attracted international attention, particularly in the circles of human rights activists (afrol News 17/06/02, 07/01/03, 20/05/03). Eventually, in spring 2004 the four convicts were released. They successfully pressed charges against a gendarmerie officer for human rights abuses (icicemac 17/01/2004).

These developments illustrate the positive and negative challenges the Sabga community has faced over the past decades. Against this background and the community's long-standing establishment, it is not surprising that self-representation in Sabga takes a different form than among Mbororo in the Misaje area where such challenges have started to arise only recently (see chapter 10).

Among the most striking features of Sabga self-representation is the written codification of its history by *imam* Umaru, a dedicated and well-read Muslim scholar. The text is recorded in Fulfulde in Arabic script.¹³⁸ Against the modalities of constructing history among Mbororo in the Misaje area, it becomes evident that the codification of Sabga history is not just a case of preserving historical knowledge, but rather an example of "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), namely producing written historical accounts. *Imam* Umaru mentioned that he intends to rewrite the Sabga history in the Fulfulde script introduced by APESS, which would add another dimension of invention.

Sabga historiography not only stands out regarding its codification, but also in its content and structure. It claims to provide not just a historical account of one specific

¹³⁸ The use of Arabic script is not uncommon among Mbororo also in writing short notes or letters. Many have undergone a basic Islamic education and are familiar with the Arabic script, while only few acquired Western education.

lineage but to represent the history of all Jaafun in the Grassfields, starting with the FulBe's initial departure from Mali. In the following I will quote selected sections of the Fulfulde text in English translation to illustrate its structured and detached character.¹³⁹ The Sabga history herein resembles much more the Nchaney than the Aku style of history-telling encountered in the Misaje area.

[...] After the death of *arDo* Manya at Falkoumré, *arDo* Vami, also called Hoba, took over the *arDoship*. He left Falkoumré and went to Galim with his followers, to a place called Lompta. His son left Lompta and went to Banyo where he settled with his people. A disagreement arose between Hoba and Tonga, the son of *arDo* Manya. *ArDo* Hoba lost his support and the *arDoship* was given to Tonga. Hoba's son, Sabga, heard the news and returned to Lompta to take his father to Banyo. *ArDo* Hoba later retrieved the *arDoship*. By then it was still the colonial rule of the Germans, that is when the Germans and British fought over the control of Cameroon. The white men met them [the Jaafun] at Banyo. [...] Abdullahi Sabga ruled from 1916 to 1957. He was followed by Adamu Jaki *bi* [Fulfulde, son of] Sabga who ruled from 1957 till 1961. The third *arDo* of Sabga was *arDo* Buba *bi* Sabga.¹⁴⁰ He ruled from 1961 to 1990 and was followed by *arDo* Adamu Joro Bure who ruled from 12th August 1990 to 12th November 1998. The present *arDo* is *arDo* Ahmadou Sabga. He started his rule on 13th November 1998. He is the last *arDo* of Sabga for now, that is the fifth generation. [...] (*Imam Umaru, Sabga, 15/11/00*)

In comparison to the way history is told among the Aku in the Misaje area, this account stands out in many ways. The history of the Sabga community is structured strictly chronologically and focuses on internal power struggles and the establishment of a lineage hierarchy. Throughout the text there are references to external events – in the above case to the encounter with the British and German colonial powers – whereby Mbororo history is framed in time and space. The second part of the citation resembles the structure of the Nchaney king list. It serves the purposes of legitimising the authority of the Sabga community over other Mbororo lineages, and of validating their rights and claims vis-à-vis neighbouring communities and the government.¹⁴¹

In the same way as *fon* Richard Chefon used photographs and documents to illustrate and authenticate his account (see chapter 4), the Sabga community quickly produced photographs of their rulers when I asked for them. Regarding some of the

¹³⁹ My thanks go to Buba Madaki for his help with recording and translating the historical text.

¹⁴⁰ The text refers to the Sabga rulers by the title *arDo* instead of *laamiiDo*.

¹⁴¹ Similarly, Bierschenk (1993) documents the codification of the history of Borgou's Fulani chiefs in the style of their Bariba neighbours.

individuals depicted, informants were uncertain of their identity. After some discussion, however, they agreed on the respective *laamiiDo*, and eventually succeeded in producing photographs of all Sabga rulers. This is a selection of the pictures they came up with.

Photographs 5.5 – 5.10: Sabga rulers



These photographs were contributed by members of the Sabga community.

My Mbororo interlocutors considered this image the most authentic depiction of *arDo* Sabga. It is originally a painting that has been photographed. *ArDo* Sabga is wearing a *meetaleewol* (turban) which has become symbolic of the status of a *laamiiDo*. Also his gown is richly embroidered indicating his wealth and high rank.



This photograph shows *laamiiDo* Adamu Jaki who took over from *arDo* Sabga. He is wearing the characteristic hat of a Mbororo herdsman and holds a herding staff (*sawru*) in his hand. Horses are highly valued as a means of transport and do well on the highlands.



This image was identified by the Sabga elders as *laamiiDo* Jaki with his *kaigamma* (chief of slaves/serfs) standing to his right. The *kaigamma* is recognised by the shape of his cap, and Mbororo elders speculated that the boy had just taken over the position from his father.

Upon reading Boutrais' (1995/96) work on the Mbororo in the Grassfields, I noted that this very image is part of a larger picture reprinted in his book.

His caption says: "An *arDo* surrounded by his kin in the 1930s (*arDo* Adjì of Baleng, lineage of Kessanko'en). The long chair (*koroowal*), the sword (*kaafahi*) and the enormous turban (*meetaleewol*) symbolise the power of the FulBe chief while the women remained dressed in the Mbororo style (photo Christol)." (Boutrais 1995/96: 88b, my translation)



This image is a photo collage of two pictures: on the left we see *arDo* Sabga, on the right *laamiiDo* Buba, his son and third in line to the Sabga leadership. The stamp on the backside of the photograph indicates the date (06/11/1979) and the studio that produced the collage (Photos J.N. Akonsah, P.O.Box 7, Mankon).



On this photograph we see the *fon* of Babanki Tungo with his *nchinda* (palace stewards) on the left. On the right is the late *laamiiDo* Joro Bure, and next to him his brother Ahamdou who is the present *laamiiDo*. They are joined by *imam* Umaru (front row middle), the *kaigamma* (front right), and two elders who remained unidentified. The photograph was taken in the Babanki palace in November 1993.



To illustrate that Sabga is a true *lamidate*, the elders showed me this photograph of musicians and praise singers who ought not to be missing in a FulBe palace.

The *laamiiDo* of Sabga and his community are occasionally invited to participate in public events organised by the provincial or national administration in order to represent the Mbororo population of northwest Cameroon. Such occasions are usually intended at demonstrating the cultural and ethnic diversity of the North West Province and the Cameroonian nation.¹⁴²

In 2000 I witnessed the *North West Cultural Fair* in Bamenda in which the *laamiiDo* of Sabga was present together with many first and second class chiefs of the province. While these title holders represented political units co-existing in the North West Province, music and dance groups were invited to demonstrate the region's wealth in culture and tradition. The Mbororo were represented by horsemen from Sabga who displayed their skills in dressage and racing.

¹⁴² Likewise, national holiday celebrations (Women's Day, Youth Day, and National Day) provide a forum of cultural performance and ethnic representation on the village level, and the group's participation is highly encouraged by the local administration (see also chapter 3).

Photograph 5.11: North West Cultural Fair 2000, Bamenda



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Bamenda Stadion, 09/12/00

Thanks to its proximity to Bamenda, Sabga is also the Mbororo community most exposed to tourism, which admittedly is of very limited scale and economic relevance. Nevertheless, Sabga individuals are willing and interested in welcoming visitors from abroad and familiarising them with their cultural practices and pastoral lifestyle.

In looking at the many-dimensional participation of the Sabga community in historical reconstruction and cultural representation, it becomes clear that we do not only observe the proliferation of history, culture, and identity, but also their objectification and folklorisation (cf. Handler 1988: 55-79). Both are significant steps in strengthening ethnic consciousness and political awareness among Mbororo, an objective adopted more pronouncedly by MBOSCUDA, a Mbororo non-governmental organisation popular in the Grassfields.

5.4 Agents of Mbororo representation to the state and neighbouring communities

Significant changes in Mbororo self-understanding and political representation occurred in the 1990s in response to Cameroon's liberalisation. As seen in the previous chapter on Nchaney history and identity, the Mbororo are not the only group who adopted new strategies of political representation to the state and neighbouring

communities; yet their case is one of the most striking regarding transformations in their collective self-perception.

5.4.1 Mbororo responses to new political and legal avenues

Ndudi Umaru, a Mbororo from northern Cameroon and the protagonist of Bocquené's (2002) biography, portrays his people as homeless, marginalised, and without consciousness of their past.

No Mbororo can link himself either to a country or a flag that he would pass on from generation to generation. The Mbororo have no fatherland. So it isn't astonishing that everywhere they wander with their herds, the Mbororo are treated like people of no importance. They do not have the right to any consideration. The least of the farmers is not worried about saying to them, 'Why did you come here? You do not even have a country. And if you're chased from here, where will you go?' Because the Mbororo are without homeland, they are also without memories. None of them worry about knowing where their ancestors spent their lives. (Bocquené 2002: 95-96)

This self-perception of the Mbororo as an insecure and disadvantaged people was endorsed by many Mbororo interlocutors, particularly with regard to their relationship with their Grassfields neighbours and state agents.¹⁴³ In their view, local Grassfielders' attempts to integrate them into their socio-political community via patron-client or host-guest relations constituted a source of dependency and exploitation. In addition, the British colonial administration classified the Mbororo as 'strangers' and denied them autonomous political representation. Under Ahidjo's regime, they qualified as Cameroonian citizens, but were subsumed under the category of 'northerners' on account of their Muslim identity and FulBe ethnicity. Consequently, Mbororo who were born and grew up in the Grassfields still counted as 'strangers' to the area with limited rights to the region's natural and state resources.¹⁴⁴ It was only with Cameroon's political liberalisation in the 1990s that the Mbororo eventually obtained the opportunity to engage in the political arena and to express their interests and grievances directly to the state.

¹⁴³ On the collective self-depiction of pastoral FulBe as marginalised and feeble see also Boesen (1994, 1997) and Guichard (1998) for Benin, Dafinger & Pelican (2002, 2006) for Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁴ Following Hickey (2004a: 6) Mbororo informants in Sabga recollected that during a visit to the North West Province President Ahidjo actively discouraged them from engaging in politics.

The North West Province, being the seat of the principal opposition party SDF, constituted a centre of virulent struggles between the opposition and the ruling party CPDM (see chapter 2). Unlike the majority of Grassfielders, Mbororo generally distanced themselves from party-politics. During the presidential election in 1992, most Mbororo avoided taking sides and voted for the Muslim, northern Cameroonian candidate Bello Buba of the NUDP (Davis 1995).¹⁴⁵ In the same year, a group of Mbororo youths met in the capital Yaoundé and formed MBSOCUDA, the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association. Alternative associations were formed in the same period; yet over the years MBOSCUDA advanced to the most vocal and effective organ of Mbororo self-representation to the state, its resources, and neighbouring communities (see also Burnham 2005, Pelican 2005).¹⁴⁶

Subsequently, supplementary paths of political lobbying have been explored, often with the support or on the initiative of MBOSCUDA members. Analogous to the North West Fons Union (NOWEFU), Mbororo leaders in the Grassfields formed political associations, such as the Ardos Union and the North West Lamidos Forum (NWLFF) with its base in Sabga (N. Awasom 2003a). While the latter did not function for long, the demand for Mbororo leaders' forums continued to exist. In 2004, for example, MBOSCUDA organised a one-week workshop for Mbororo leaders of the North West Province to discuss their contemporary socio-political and administrative role within Mbororo society and in relation to the state. The participants agreed on the need for regular workshops and for a joint forum to pursue their communities' welfare.¹⁴⁷ Another strategy of endorsing Mbororo interests vis-à-vis the state is via the co-optation of high-ranking officials. In 2002 the Mbororo of the Grassfields counted two members of parliament as ambassadors of their cause, namely Peter Abety, Minister for Special Duties, and Manu Jaji Gidado, Attaché at the Presidency (The Herald 29/01/02).¹⁴⁸ In the meantime, Abety has been discharged from office but

¹⁴⁵ SDF stands for Social Democratic Front, CPDM for Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement, NUDP for National Union for Democracy and Progress (see also chapter 2).

¹⁴⁶ A rival organisation of MBOSCUDA is SODELCO (*Société de Développement d'Élevage et du Commerce*). It was formed in the early 1990s and is headed by the influential entrepreneur who prompted the detention of the three Mbororo individuals at Sabga, discussed above. While initially very active in campaigning and competing for members, SODELCO has become relatively inactive.

¹⁴⁷ My thanks go to Nuhu Salihu Jafaru for facilitating this information (personal communication, 04/02/2005).

¹⁴⁸ At the investiture of *laamiiDo* Ahmadou of Sabga in 2002, Minister Abety was given the title of messenger (Fulfulde: *wajjiiri*) while Manu Jaji was crowned as *wakiili* (chief's representative) (Sarri

continues to support Mbororo interests in his position as University lecturer in Yaoundé. In addition, new sympathisers have been won among current officials.¹⁴⁹

5.4.2 Transformations in Mbororo self-understanding

Two features are most noteworthy with regard to recent transformations in Mbororo self-understanding. Firstly, due to the efforts and activities of MBOSCUDA, a new consciousness of pan-Mbororo identity has emerged that transcends generational, gender, lineage, sub-ethnic, and regional divides. Secondly, Mbororo identity has been redefined in political and legal terms, which is reflected in the Mbororo's growing self-confidence in facing the state and neighbouring communities.

5.4.2.1 The emergence of MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association)

MBOSCUDA is a national, membership-based organisation with approximately 30,000 members and branches in nearly all provinces (MBOSCUDA press release, Bamenda, 16/03/05). Its formation was an initiative of young, mostly educated Mbororo individuals who were searching for answers to their shared experience of a crisis of Mbororo identity. Initial questions addressed included: "Who or what are we? Where do we come from? Where are we heading to? If let alone what will become of us as a people, our cattle herding culture and pastoral way of life? What can be done to improve our lives?" (Salihu 1999: 3).¹⁵⁰

MBOSCUDA founding members explicitly distanced themselves from Town FulBe (Huya) in northern Cameroon and stressed their identification with (agro-) pastoral FulBe. They argued that the two groups' interests and problems differed substantially and that the Mbororo in particular lacked efficient strategies of political representation to the state. To emphasise the distinction between Town FulBe and

Sardou Nana, e-mail communication 01/05/2002). On the role of Manu Jaji and Abety as state patrons of the Mbororo community see also Hickey (2004b).

¹⁴⁹ Thanks to Sarli Sardou Nana for this information (personal communication, 23/01/2005).

¹⁵⁰ MBOSCUDA had its predecessors, some of which emerged in the Western Grassfields (Salihu 1999). The earliest was a Mbororo group founded in Bamenda in 1987, which operated in the same way as local Grassfielders' rotating credit associations (called *njangi* in Pidgin English). A second group based in Northwest Cameroon aimed at finding possible solutions to the Mbororo's economic and socio-cultural crisis. They eventually met up with members of a third Mbororo association founded by university students and professionals living in Yaoundé. All three associations had a common goal of promoting the socio-political status and economic development of Mbororo in Cameroon, and eventually agreed to fuse into one national association.

pastoral FulBe, they deliberately opted for the ethnonym Mbororo in naming their association. They designed a number of objectives and programmes, aimed at the revitalisation of Mbororo cultural practices, the improvement of Mbororo women's socio-economic situation, the promotion of Mbororo children's education, and the improvement of pastoral conditions (MBOSCUDA flier 1994). These programmes were intended to be realised on a regional level with the support of local communities.

MBOSCUDA's most active branch is in the North West Province whose members have been influenced by the socio-political and organisational strategies (*Organisationskultur*) of their Grassfields neighbours. Here transformations in Mbororo self-perception are more evident than in other parts of the country. The following elaborations focus on MBOSCUDA activities and community responses in the North West Province; they are not representative for other regions.

5.4.2.2 MBOSCUDA activities in the Western Grassfields

The current influence of MBOSCUDA in the Western Grassfields was not a given from the beginning. One of its initial difficulties was to convince members of the Mbororo community of the advantages of joint action and collective political representation. As a result of their pastoral heritage, Mbororo were used to pursuing their interests via individual strategies, such as patron-client relationships. Their solidarity networks focused on the kin or lineage group. Moreover, interaction between Jaafun and Aku was limited. MBOSCUDA activists, however, encouraged collective strategies. In this context, the phrase "don't make *pulaaku*" or in Fulfulde "*taa waDDa pulaaku*" became a popular slogan among MBOSCUDA sympathisers (Davis 1995). In their view, *pulaaku* or the way of behaving like a *pullo* (sing. of FulBe) was an outdated strategy and no longer compatible with the requirements of their current economic and political situation. They thus called on individuals to transcend socio-cultural barriers and to express disagreement openly.¹⁵¹ Many Mbororo elders took offence and accused MBOSCUDA of eroding Mbororo morale and identity. Furthermore, as part of their cultural renewal programme, MBOSCUDA aimed at revitalising Mbororo youth culture by encouraging singing, dancing, and the

¹⁵¹ In a comparative essay on pastoral FulBe in Burkina Faso and North West Cameroon, Dafinger & Pelican (2002, 2006) phrase this dichotomy of strategies in Hirschman's (1970) terminology of 'exit' and 'voice'. Both pastoral FulBe in Burkina Faso and Mbororo elders in the Grassfields tend to adopt an 'exit' strategy, that is to escape conflict situations by moving away. Mbororo youths in the Grassfields, on the other hand, plead for 'voice', for taking an offensive course.

display of horse-riding skills during public meetings. This engendered the disapproval of Muslim clerics who reproached MBOSCUDA for promoting immoral and aggressive behaviour among Mbororo youths.¹⁵² Gradually, MBOSCUDA officials adopted a more inclusive strategy, involving Mbororo elders and Muslim scholars in the planning and execution of their programmes. Besides, they addressed the sub-ethnic divide between Jaafun and Aku and stressed awareness of an overarching Mbororo identity. During my earlier fieldwork in 1996, MBOSCUDA officials expressed their concern about the associations' uneven popularity among Jaafun and Aku; in 2000 MBOSCUDA had supporters and ran programmes among both communities.

By the second half of the 1990s MBOSCUDA was widely established among Mbororo in the Western Grassfields. In order to realise their community development projects, MBOSCUDA officials sought to collaborate with international NGOs. They secured the collaboration of the German Development Service (DED), and Village AiD, a UK funding-partner agency. Concurrently, international development discourses impacted on MBOSCUDA's programme orientation (Hickey 2002). In line with global discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights MBOSCUDA shifted its initial focus from redefining Mbororo identity to redefining Mbororo political and legal status. Its earlier focus on women's empowerment and children's education remained operational. Current projects included women's trainings in alternative income schemes, the establishment of Anglo-Arabic schools (co-educational schools that provide primary school education in English as well as instruction in Arabic language and Muslim religion), and the provision of legal advice in land disputes and in cases of human rights abuse and illegal extortion by government officials (Inades-Formation Cameroon 2001). On account of these activities MBOSCUDA is well-regarded among Mbororo in the Western Grassfields, many of whom have benefited from its ongoing projects.

As a quick internet search conducted in April 2005 revealed, MBOSCUDA was associated with a variety of transnational human and minority rights organisations, including Survival International, Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group International, and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (see corresponding

¹⁵² Mbororo elders' and Muslim clerics' complaints about the loss of *pulaaku* and their youths misconduct resonate with the objections of pastoral FulBe elders in northern Cameroon as reported by Virtanen (2003: 85-129) and discussed earlier in this chapter.

internet references). This international backing proved particularly instrumental in defying human rights abuses against Mbororo, such as in the case against the four Sabga individuals described above.

One of MBOSCUDA's most relevant programmes is *Ballotiral*, a partnership programme that is funded by Village AiD and involves the collaboration of representatives of three regional NGOs (Duni et al. 2005, Hickey 2002, Village AiD internet documents).¹⁵³ *Ballotiral* is a Fulfulde word and means 'working together'. The programme's main objective is to support the Mbororo's social and political integration into the regional community. Among other activities, it runs adult literacy circles and provides legal counselling to Mbororo individuals (see chapters 6, 10). The programme was initiated by two MBOSCUDA founding members from the North West Province who had been influential in the association's development throughout the early years and who established the contact with Village AiD. Subsequently, both left Cameroon for the UK where they have continued to support MBOSCUDA and the Mbororo community by facilitating international contacts and promoting Mbororo interests in global networks.

MBOSCUDA and *Ballotiral* promoted civil awareness among Mbororo in northwest Cameroon and redefined Mbororo political and legal status vis-à-vis the state.

In the course of Cameroon's political liberalisation its constitution underwent a number of changes, and Cameroonian citizenship became defined via membership of an indigenous ethnic group (see chapter 2). As stated in the preamble of the Cameroonian constitution of 1996, the state guarantees the protection of minorities and the preservation of the rights of indigenous populations. Mbororo thus share the same rights with local Grassfielders if they can prove themselves to the state as being indigenous or a minority. When in 2000 new computerised identity cards were issued, MBOSCUDA and *Ballotiral* encouraged the Mbororo population to register. While in the previous system Mbororo were generally registered as being born in northern Cameroon, the new identity cards indicate their actual birthplace. Mbororo hence qualify as regional citizens with claims and rights to natural resources and political representation in their home area.

¹⁵³ In its pilot phase from 1998 to 2003 *Ballotiral* operated only in Donga-Mantung. In the meantime, it has extended its activities to all seven Divisions of the North West Province (Duni et al. 2005).

A few years later, MBOSCUDA went a step further, and – in line with the UN proclamation of the decade of ‘indigenous peoples’ (1995-2004) – the organisation began to promote the Mbororo as an ‘indigenous minority’ whose cultural survival had to be protected (Cameroon Tribune 14/12/2004). Consequently, MBOSCUDA officials were enrolled to participate in government programmes for the development of indigenous minorities and autochthonous peoples (INDISCO et al. 2003). At the same time, the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation officially recognised the Mbororo and the so-called Pygmies as ‘indigenous peoples’ of Cameroon. Moreover, in 2005 MBOSCUDA was granted consultative status by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (MBOSCUDA press release, Bamenda, 16/03/2005).

Conversely, a few months after these events, dissent emerged within MBOSCUDA’s leading echelons concerning the association’s future programme orientation, and criticism was raised against the idea of the Mbororo collaborating and being grouped with southern Cameroon’s forest peoples (M.B., e-mail communication 12/04/2005). As a consequence, the two Mbororo individuals living in the UK, who had crucially facilitated MBOSCUDA’s international contacts, quit the association. As one of them explained (personal communication, 15/02/2006), they could no longer cope with their colleagues’ “complex of Mbororo superiority”, nor tolerate the misuse of MBOSCUDA to advance the personal interests of the Mbororo external elite. In the same line, Mbororo *arDos* submitted a petition to European institutions, accusing Mbororo intellectuals of misappropriating international aid (The Post, 03/05/2005).

As these developments show, MBOSCUDA’s international connections and their recourse to global discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights have been instrumental in redefining the political and legal status of the Mbororo community. At the same time, they have given rise to internal rivalries and the Mbororo’s dissociation from other minority groups. However, the message that Mbororo have rights and claims has been conveyed on the local, national, and international level and has impacted on Mbororo self-understanding. As Mbororo informants in Misaje pointed out, they no longer see themselves as disunited and marginalised pastoralists, but as an empowered Cameroonian minority whose members can defend themselves

against illicit infringements and the venality of state officials (see also Duni et al. 2005).

The consolidation of Mbororo identity and their growing self-confidence have impacted not only on their relationship with the state, but also on interpersonal relations both with members of neighbouring communities and between Mbororo. In chapter 10, I will analyse a case in which a Mbororo individual's condescending attitude towards his Grassfields neighbours has added to the deterioration of their social relationship. A second example of the potentially negative impact of Mbororo 'overconfidence' has been portrayed by Nuhu Salihu, the Africa programme co-ordinator of Village AiD. In a critical essay on Ballotiral's counselling programme, he describes a case in which the Ballotiral staff was asked to mediate a conflict between rivaling Mbororo leaders. Unfortunately, Ballotiral's involvement contributed to the conflict's intensification and culminated in a generally unsatisfactory ending. Salihu suggests that alternatively to legal action, mediation by Muslim clerics was more sustainable and cheaper (Village AiD homepage).¹⁵⁴ So far, only a few Mbororo have pursued their claims and rights through legal action, since a successful lawsuit requires significant financial input and socio-political leverage.

5.4.2.3 Pastoral FulBe associations across Africa

Pastoral FulBe associations like MBOSCUDA exist in many other African countries (Diallo et al. 2000: 236-238). The best documented case is one in Benin where in the mid-1980s educated FulBe formed the *Comité Fulfulde* with the objective of representing pastoral FulBe interests to the state (Bierschenk 1989, 1992, 1995, Guichard 1990, 1992). Similar to Cameroon, Benin underwent a phase of political transition in the 1980s, which resulted in the opening of political space for ethnic self-representation that previously had been banned as a form of tribalism (Bierschenk 1995: 464). The literature on the *Comité Fulfulde* focuses on the initial years of its formation. There is no information if it still exists or what its contemporary activities are. Likewise, FulBe migrants in Ghana have organised themselves in *suudu baaba* (father's house) associations which represent their members according to home

¹⁵⁴ Concerns about potentially negative effects of legal action on interethnic relations are also expressed by Duni et al. (2005).

countries (Oppong 2002: 161-182). Allegedly, such *suudu baaba* associations also exist in the migrants' home countries including Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

In October 2005 Andreas Dafinger and I organised a workshop on 'strategies of inclusion/exclusion and political representation among pastoral FulBe across Africa' held at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Salle.¹⁵⁵ Many of the workshop participants (Boesen 2005, Burnham 2005, Hagberg 2005b, Kremling 2005, Loftsdottir 2005, Moritz et al. 2005, Pelican 2005) noted the emergence of pastoral FulBe associations in different parts of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Niger. As their contributions illustrated, there is a general trend towards a bolstered self-confidence and ethnic awareness among pastoral FulBe communities that cross regional and national precincts.

Regarding MBOSCUDA's interest in international connections, a shift in orientation can be observed. By the mid-1990s MBOSCUDA officials were interested in linking up with other FulBe associations across Africa, such as *Mi yetti Allah* (I thank Allah) in Nigeria or *Tabital Pulaaku* (FulBe tradition) in Mali. This was part of their search for a new Mbororo identity and implied the vision of a transnational umbrella association of pastoral FulBe. By the late 1990s MBOSCUDA no longer sought the collaboration of other FulBe associations, but focused on contacts with international development and human rights organisations. Furthermore, Mbororo individuals deployed global discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights to promote Mbororo interests on a national and international scale. In consequence, the Mbororo have been classified in the category of 'indigenous peoples', and have been clustered with other ethnic groups with whom they share the status of an 'endangered minority'. So far, this strategy has proven instrumental for Mbororo in the Western Grassfields, as their ideas of development seem largely compatible with the notions of the Cameroonian state and international organisations. The latest disagreements within the MBOSCUDA leading echelons, however, may once again result in a change of strategies.

¹⁵⁵ My thanks go to the Max Planck Institute and Günther Schlee in particular for the crucial support they lent to the workshop.

5.5 Conclusion

In concluding the chapter I will summarise my findings with regard to Mbororo approaches to history, transformations in Mbororo identity in response to encounters with other FulBe groups, neighbouring communities, and the state, and with regard to the relevance of *pulaaku* in interethnic relations.

Let me take up Boutrais' (1995/96: 65) observation that the Mbororo's preoccupation with the present and the limitedness of their collective historical consciousness is a characteristic of pastoral society. A similar approach to history is also reflected in the accounts of Mbororo informants in Misaje. However, as more recent developments among urban-exposed Mbororo communities like Sabga illustrate, long-standing sedentarisation combined with the emergence of new political and legal avenues have facilitated a change in their approach to history. Sabga historiography, indeed, reflects the current strategies of a sedentary Mbororo community that legitimates its claims to political representation and economic resources in roughly the same terms as Grassfields chiefdoms.

Mbororo historical accounts in the Misaje area generally focus on group-internal developments and the socio-cultural divide between lineages, sub-ethnic categories, and Mbororo groups across national boundaries. Although encounters with 'the ethnic other' and the government hardly feature in their narratives, they have implicitly impacted on their self-understanding.

As we have seen in the previous chapter on Nchaney history and identity, Grassfielders' understanding of their ethnicity is multilayered and inclusive, and enables multiple ethnic identifications along the criteria of shared migration and descent, linguistic, socio-cultural, and religious commonalities, common territory, and acceptance of Grassfields rulers' political authority. Mbororo notions of ethnicity, on the other hand, are exclusivist and essentialising. Becoming a Mbororo through intermarriage, religious conversion, or by practicing cattle pastoralism is virtually impossible (see chapters 6, 8). To be recognised as a Mbororo, one has to be born as a Mbororo and have internalised the ideals of *pulaaku*. Transformations in Mbororo identity, thus, refer less to shifting boundaries, than to shifts regarding the content and components of Mbororo ethnicity.

Their focus on the self, on ethnic and cultural integrity, is an expression both of the Mbororo's (provisionally) mobile lifestyle which exposes them to continuously

changing ‘ethnic others’ or host-communities, and of their resultant socio-political marginality as a migrant minority. However, changes in Mbororo identity as a consequence of their interaction and cohabitation with other groups are reflected, for example, in the contemporary sub-ethnic divide between Jaafun and Aku. While the Aku were influenced by their coexistence with Hausa in Nigeria, the Jaafun adopted a lifestyle similar to their Town FulBe (Huya) neighbours in northern Cameroon. The effects of residing in the Grassfields are mirrored, among other things, in cultural features, such as clothing, hairstyle, and comportment, which distinguish the Mbororo of the Grassfields from Nigerian or northern Cameroonian Mbororo.

Another crucial variable shaping Mbororo self-understanding is the presence or absence of ‘FulBe others’. In northern Cameroon Mbororo distinguish themselves from sedentary Town FulBe (Huya) by stressing their pastoral identity and their mastery of *pulaaku* (see e.g. Burnham 1996, Virtanen 2003). In northwest Cameroon the category of Town FulBe is largely absent. Here the primary criterion of ethnic distinction is not *pulaaku* but Islam. With regard to internal categories of identification, historical and situational shifts from the lineage category to the sub-ethnic to the Mbororo category are observable. Contemporarily, the sub-ethnic divide between Jaafun and Aku is pertinent in individuals’ self-identification. Yet against the background of recent political strategies of self-representation, identification with the overarching Mbororo category has gained popularity.

The impacts of state policies and administrative impositions on Mbororo identity have become most noticeable in the past fifteen years as a result of the opening of political space for Mbororo self-representation. The recent emergence of a kind of frail Mbororo nationalism resonates with Anderson’s (1983) notion of “the imagined community”. The newly gained political and civil self-confidence of Mbororo in the Grassfields is mainly the result of the joint efforts of national and international NGOs and has been facilitated by their use of the printing, audio-visual, and virtual media. The long-term effects on interpersonal and inter-group relations and on conflict management are still to be observed (see also chapter 10).

In concluding, I will address the question of the contemporary relevance of *pulaaku* in interethnic interaction. *Pulaaku* commonly denotes a complex of social values, such as modesty, self-control, common sense, courage, etc. that are supposed to guide public interaction between FulBe (see e.g. Bocquené 1981). With regard to non-FulBe (or *haaBe*), *pulaaku* serves as an indication of ‘otherness’ and socio-

cultural distance. As Boesen (1994, 1997) and Guichard (1996, 2000) describe, pastoral FulBe in Benin treat their non-FulBe (*haaBe*) neighbours neither in the same way as their FulBe companions, nor do they make any effort to respect their rules of comportment. The *haaBe* generally comply, tolerating the FulBe's oddness as an expression of their 'otherness' (see also Hagberg 1998: 72-75).

In the contemporary Grassfields, the responses to *pulaaku* as a strategy of aloofness and constraint are different. First of all, Grassfielders are less likely to accept the Mbororo's 'otherness', but urge them to participate in village life and to comply with general social rules. More importantly, the slogan "don't make *pulaaku*", popular among Mbororo youths in the 1990s, demonstrates that many Mbororo have come to consider *pulaaku* as obstructive with regard to their interaction with Grassfields neighbours and state representatives. Mbororo in the Grassfields no longer want to stress their 'otherness' vis-à-vis their Grassfields neighbours, but demand their integration as local and national citizens with valid rights and claims.

6 FROM ECONOMIC COMPLEMENTARITY TO COMPETITION? FARMER-HERDER DISPUTES AND CATTLE THEFT IN THE WESTERN GRASSFIELDS

Having provided some historical background to the coexistence of Grassfielders and Mbororo in the Misaje area, I will now turn to their socio-economic relations. In particular, I will consider the ways in which processes of economic diversification have impacted on interethnic relations. Furthermore, I will address two sources of public contention, namely farmer-herder disputes and cattle theft, and analyse them in their practical and discursive scopes.

As described in the previous chapter, the Mbororo came to the Grassfields as cattle pastoralists. They met the local Grassfields population who made a living from farming and hunting. In the initial phase of their coexistence, the two population groups occupied distinct economic niches. At a later stage, members of both groups began to diversify their economic activities, a process encouraged by the colonial and post-colonial administration. Most Mbororo have become agro-pastoralists. They combine cattle husbandry with limited subsistence agriculture in which they partially rely on the assistance of their Grassfields neighbours. Conversely, a number of enterprising Grassfielders decided to invest in cattle husbandry. While for some it was only a temporary venture, others succeeded in building up considerable herds which they tend to entrust to salaried herdsmen.

Despite these processes of economic diversification, the two groups are still associated with distinct economic activities; Grassfielders count as farmers, and Mbororo as cattle herders. These identifications reflect individuals' self-understanding as well as their perception by others, including neighbouring groups and state agents. These are complex ethnic-occupational identities that are rooted in the groups' economic practices at the time of their establishment in the Grassfields, but no longer correspond to current economic practices. Moreover, they shape emic assessments of interethnic relations. Many Grassfields and Mbororo interlocutors described the relationship between their two groups as generally amicable, though overshadowed by frequent farmer-herder disputes which result from incidents of crop damage and mutual encroachment. Current discourses of farmer-herder relations integrate a number of ethnic stereotypes regarding the role of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and state

agents in the resolution – or perpetuation – of farmer-herder disputes. Even in the Misaje area where farmer-herder disputes are relatively few, as compared to the densely populated Bamenda Highlands, and where cattle theft seems to be a more pressing issue, this perspective is prevalent.

My elaborations on economic diversification and its impact on interethnic relations are based on participant observation and on interviews with Grassfields and Mbororo interlocutors who are both experienced farmers and cattle graziers. In considering farmer-herder disputes and cattle theft, I will differentiate between practices and discourses, herewith referring to the management of actual incidents on the one hand, and their popular depiction in public discourse on the other. I will base my analysis on a variety of sources. In assessing the relevance of farmer-herder disputes in the Misaje area, as compared to other regions of the Grassfields, I will draw on similar studies, in particular the work of Harshbarger (1995) who studied farmer-herder conflicts in two Grassfields villages, namely Tugi and Wum. While her study is somewhat farmer-biased, it provides rich quantitative and qualitative data that supports further regional comparison. In analysing administrative procedures of dealing with farmer-herder conflicts and cattle theft, I will rely on statistical and interview data which I obtained from the Divisional Office in Misaje. Regarding discourses of farmer-herder dispute, I will make use of a drama performance of the non-governmental organisation Ballotiral that was presented in 2001 at a public seminar on farmer-herder conflicts in the Donga-Mantung Division. In examining discourses on cattle theft, I will draw on an administrative meeting held in January 2001 that was addressed to cattle graziers in the Misaje Sub-Division.

6.1 Farming and herding in the Misaje area

The two main production systems practiced in the Western Grassfields are shifting cultivation and extensive grazing. My descriptions are limited to the Misaje area, as there are slight variations in farming and herding practices in different regions of the Grassfields.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ See e.g. Kaberry (1952: 53-88) and Ottiger (1996: 48-53) on Grassfielders' farming practices in Nso and Mmen; see Boutrais (1995/96: 246-289, 874-900) on diverging grazing practices of Jaafun and Aku in the Grassfields.

6.1.1 Grassfielders' farming practices

The majority of Grassfielders in the Misaje area make their living from farming. The main crops cultivated are maize, coco yams, sweet potatoes, beans, sugar cane, and a variety of vegetables. Like in many areas of the Grassfields, maize replaced the initial staple crop sorghum, locally known as *Guinea corn*, which nowadays is only cultivated by a few individuals as a dry season crop.¹⁵⁷

Ecologic conditions and crop preferences vary slightly within the Misaje Sub-Division. The Nchaney area is known for its coffee and palm oil plantations. The Bessa territory extends uphill to the Bamenda Highlands; it supports the cultivation of groundnuts and fruit trees, such as plantain, banana, and mango. Dumbo is renowned for its red groundnuts, a particularly oily species preferred for the production of groundnut oil and snacks. Around Misaje Town cassava is cultivated, a perennial crop introduced by migrants from the Bamenda area. Among Grassfielders the cultivation of food crops is generally considered the responsibility of women. Men concentrate on cultivating tree and cash crops, such as palm trees, fruit trees, kola nut trees, and coffee (cf. Goheen 1996: 71-100, Kaberry 1952: 69-88, Ottiger 1996: 39-124, Ritzenthaler & Ritzenthaler 1962: 73-105).

The climatic conditions and soil quality in the Misaje lowlands render farming quite a challenge. Most of the soil is stony and sandy and the temperature is generally higher than on the Bamenda Highlands. Grassfields farmers prefer to cultivate along the valleys which are cooler and moister than the hilltops. They practice shifting cultivation and enhance the soil fertility via mixed cropping (cf. Vabi 1991: 155-165). The majority of local farmers cultivate only rainy season crops. Dry season farming is relatively rare and limited to riversides and swampy areas.

¹⁵⁷ Kaberry (1952: 20-21) and Warnier (1984: 402-403) provide the Latin nomenclature for the crops cultivated in the Western Grassfields; yet they indicate slightly different names.

Photograph 6.1: Grassfielders' farming practices



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Bridge Five, 04/04/01

Christina is in her 70s and still an active farmer. Here she is renewing the ridges at the end of the dry season to plant maize, coco yams, and groundnuts. The farm is situated at the bank of a small stream that keeps the area humid and fertile. In the back of the picture, surrounded by palm, mango, and guava trees, is her son's compound where she lives with a number of close relatives.

Maize is the main food crop. It is consumed on a daily basis as maize porridge (Pidgin English: *fufu*) which is the staple dish of the area. Moreover, it is processed into maize beer (Pidgin English: *shah*) which is extensively consumed during social gatherings and in drinking places (so-called *shah houses*). Frequently, Nchaney and Bessa farmers are not able to cultivate enough maize for home consumption and beer brewing to last throughout the year. During the months before the new harvest, families rely on alternative crops, such as sweet potatoes and coco yams. As the corresponding meals are considered of lower quality and nutritional value than maize porridge, this period is generally experienced as one of scarcity and hunger. The predicament of seasonal scarcity has also coloured local Grassfielders' reputation among neighbouring groups. Informed by Muslim doctrine, Hausa and Mbororo tend to view their Grassfields neighbours as drunkards because of their high consumption of maize beer.¹⁵⁸ In the eyes of migrants from the Bamenda area, local Grassfielders are lazy because they cultivate only once a year. From the perspective of Nchaney and Bessa farmers, however, it is more reasonable to complement their farming with

¹⁵⁸ A similar perspective is adopted by Ndudi Umaru, the Mbororo protagonist of Bocquené's (2002: 137) biography, in assessing local farming communities in northern Cameroon.

alternative economic activities, such as working for their Mbororo neighbours, than cultivating dry season crops that run the risk of being eaten by cattle.

6.1.2 Mbororo grazing system

Animal husbandry is practiced by members of all population groups. While many Grassfielders tend poultry, goats, and occasionally pigs, the Mbororo constitute the majority of cattle rearers in the Western Grassfields. They live with their families and herds 'in the bush' (Fulfulde: *ladde*). Their compounds are situated in their animals' grazing area and within walking distance (30 min. to 3 hrs.) to the nearest farmers' hamlet.

The majority of Mbororo in the Misaje area are Aku. As explained in the previous chapter, they rear mainly white zebu (*daneeji*), *gudaali* (a cattle breed introduced from northern Cameroon), and cross-breeds that are well adapted to the hot and humid climate of the Misaje lowlands. The area offers good pastures and extensive grazing land, though herders have noticed signs of pasture degradation, such as the vanishing of certain grass species or the spread of shrubs and trees.¹⁵⁹ During dry season, most Mbororo in the Misaje lowlands graze their animals in swampy areas and along riverbanks. A few herders undertake a short-distance, seasonal transhumance mostly within the Sub-Division.

Pastoral duties are shared among family members (Pelican 1999: 41-53). Cattle herding is the domain of the youths (cf. Boesen 1996). During the day, boys and occasionally girls¹⁶⁰ take the animals to alternating pasture grounds and watering points within their grazing area. In the evening, they drive them back to the compound where the cattle spend the night in a paddock, often just a fenced plot, so as to prevent them from straying into neighbours' farms. Calves and cows are kept apart at night, and dams are milked in the morning. The processing and selling of milk is considered the women's domain. Aku women in the Misaje area are generally accustomed to selling milk, but often the yields are low and just enough for home consumption. Among Jaafun, the practice of selling milk has become stigmatised as a sign of backwardness and poverty and as contradicting Islamic rules of modesty (cf. Pelican

¹⁵⁹ Bassett & Koli (1999) describe similar developments for northern Côte d'Ivoire.

¹⁶⁰ Among many pastoral FulBe groups it is common that only boys engage in cattle herding, while their sisters are exempted. As informants explained, their sons are their principal herdsmen; but in the absence of herding boys, girls may replace them (Pelican 1999: 43-45).

1999: 118-125, 2004b). The overall responsibility for the animals' health and the herd's management lies with the household head. He regularly checks on his animals, provides them with salt and medical treatment, and frequents the nearby cattle markets to keep informed about cattle prices and pastoral developments (cf. Pelican forthc.).

Photograph 6.2: Mbororo grazing practices



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Bridge 5, 11/04/01

As every morning, Riskuwa inspects the herd and removes ticks that can transmit deadly illnesses. The cattle are all cross-breeds of *gudaali* and *daneeji* (white zebu), with a little *bodeeji* (red zebu) mix. In the back is Riskuwa's family compound where he lives with two brothers and their families.

Mbororo generally do not produce for the market, though sporadically they are required to sell single animals to cover their living expenses (cf. Pelican 2004a: 69-70). Almost all herders are agro-pastoralists, complementing cattle husbandry with subsistence agriculture. Many Mbororo herders in the Misaje area have relatively small herds with 30 to 50 animals. However, there are also very wealthy herders with many hundreds of cattle who entrust their animals to hired herdsmen.

6.2 Mediating farmer-herder relations

As Grassfielders are generally associated with farming and Mbororo with herding, their economic relations are commonly perceived in terms of farmer-herder relations. There is a substantial body of academic literature on this subject. At the same time, many governments and international development organisations are interested in

applied studies on which they may draw in devising economic policies (cf. Hussein 1998). In the following I will give a brief overview of academic research on farmer-herder relations in western Africa. Secondly, I will outline administrative policies shaping farmer-herder relations in the Western Grassfields.

6.2.1 Academic research on farmer-herder relations in western Africa

Researchers differ in their assessments of farmer-herder relations. The general frame of reference, however, is defined by the poles of economic complementarity or symbiosis, on the one hand, and competition or conflict, on the other (cf. Hussein 1998). In the classical literature on FulBe in West Africa, the relationship between pastoral FulBe and their farming neighbours is often depicted as symbiotic, and characterised by economic complementarity and interdependence (e.g. Dupire 1970, Stenning 1959). This perspective is upheld by current research; according to Diallo (2001a, 2001b), for example, FulBe in western Burkina Faso and northern Côte d'Ivoire integrate into the local society by virtue of their economic specialisation, and take part in a system of ethnic division of labour. This interpretation also ties in with Schlee's (2001a) model of "integration through difference". However, in much of the recent literature on farmer-herder relations, an alternative assessment prevails. Their relationship is no longer described as inherently symbiotic and complementary but as overshadowed by competition and conflict over natural resources. Among the examples of problematic farmer-herder relations are case studies on FulBe pastoralists who migrated southwards into the humid areas of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Cameroon (cf. Bassett 1988, Blench 1994, Boutrais 1995/96, Diallo 1996, Harshbarger 1995, Tonah 2002, Vabi 1991, Waters-Bayer & Bayer 1994).

As Breusers et al. (1998) rightly pointed out, farmer-herder relations – potentially everywhere and at any time – entail competition and conflict over natural resources. Concurrently, they include friendly and mutually beneficial relationships. The stress on either symbiotic or conflictual properties of farmer-herder relations is thus partly the result of emic and academic discourses (Breusers et al. 1998: 379-380). At the same time, it is virtually impossible to provide a general assessment of farmer-herder relations, as they are embedded in their respective historical and regional contexts. I thus believe that a comparative approach, as Andreas Dafinger and I have pursued elsewhere (Dafinger & Pelican 2002, 2006), is most fruitful in producing new

insights. As we have argued, some of the most significant factors in shaping farmer-herder relations – besides ecological, demographic, and political conditions – are the duration of the groups' coexistence and different administrative and legal frameworks. In many parts of West Africa FulBe presence dates back to the pre-colonial period, and disputes between farmers and herders are normally resolved on the local level, i.e. between the conflict parties themselves or via the mediation of local institutions (see also Hagberg 2001). In other areas, such as northwest Cameroon, FulBe pastoralists are relative newcomers. Here, from the very start, farmer-herder relations have been mediated by the colonial and later post-colonial administration with the aim of securing government interests. Consequently, state agents are a relevant third party in dispute settlement.¹⁶¹ As we will see later, their involvement is generally considered to be driven by self-interest and corruption, and to perpetuate and aggravate farmer-herder disputes (see Bassett 1988, Diallo 1996 on a similar situation in Côte d'Ivoire).

In the following I will outline changing policies of the colonial and post-colonial administration in Cameroon and discuss their impact on farmer-herder relations in the Western Grassfields.

6.2.2 Administrative policies shaping farmer-herder relations in the Western Grassfields

The coexistence of farmers and herders in northwest Cameroon coincided with the advent of the British colonial period. In the 1930s British administrators firstly addressed the issue of recurrent confrontations between Grassfielders and Mbororo. They, however, faced difficulties in reconciling their interests and liabilities vis-à-vis the two population groups. On the one hand, they endorsed the presence of the Mbororo and their herds as a means of diversifying the regional economy and of augmenting their tax income. On the other, they were obliged to consider Grassfielders' concerns who constituted the population majority. The British subsequently experimented with varying approaches, but never succeeded in eradicating the sources of farmer-herder disputes (cf. Boutrais 1995/96: 772-802, Chilver 1989, Frantz 1986, Njeuma & Awasom 1989, 1990).

¹⁶¹ Despite historical differences, state agents and NGO representatives have become influential players in shaping farmer-herder relations in most African countries (see e.g. Hagberg 2005a on Burkina Faso).

During the first half of the 1940s the British administrator J.W.D. Jeffreys introduced a demarcation scheme, dividing the Western Grassfields into separate farming and grazing zones. Certificates of occupancy were handed to Mbororo leaders; a measure that triggered the opposition of Grassfields chiefs, as they disapproved of the idea of formally acknowledging land rights to Mbororo. In the second half of the 1940s Jeffrey's successor C.J. Mayne abolished the demarcation of farming and grazing zones, and introduced a scheme of rotational agricultural and pastoral land use. His integrative approach failed, because farming practices in the Grassfields, such as intercropping and the cultivation of perennial crops, did not support seasonal grazing on farming plots. In the 1950s the administration returned to the approach of keeping farms and cattle apart by providing farmers with barbed wire to fence their farms. The barbed wire scheme eventually died off due to insufficient cooperation and mismanagement.

Most consequential among these varying policies was the idea of spatial separation. By allocating farmers and herders separate user zones, the colonial administration diminished not only the potential for conflict, but also the possibilities for social interaction and mutual integration (cf. Dafinger & Pelican 2002, 2006 for a more detailed analysis). Moreover, by encouraging the coexistence of economically specialised entities that corresponded to distinct ethnic groups, the British endorsed complex ethnic-occupational identities.

In the French administered zone of Cameroon, the situation was different. The French colonial administration adopted a relatively lax attitude regarding the administration of the pastoral sector and farmer-herder relations (Boutrais 1995/96: 176-185). By contrast, the British tended to overemphasise the potential for conflict in farmer-herder relations. They thus endorsed corresponding discourses and shaped farmers' and herders' perceptions of each other. Moreover, with their shifting policies that favoured graziers and farmers alternately, they influenced both groups' expectations towards the post-colonial government.

With Cameroon's independence the French administrative system became more influential in the design of contemporary state policies; however, regional variations have endured. In the North West Province the spatial division of farming and grazing zones has remained operative, and the administration is still charged with the mediation of farmer-herder disputes. The entitled institution is the farmer-grazier commission which consists of seven members, including four representatives of the

local Grassfields and Mbororo communities (i.e. the *fon* with two assistants and the *arDo*), two state agents of the departments of agriculture and animal husbandry, and the Divisional Officer who is the head of the farmer-grazier commission (cf. Boutrais 1995/96: 799-801, Harshbarger 1995: 125-131). The prescribed administrative procedure is relatively complicated, and individuals frequently explore alternative legal avenues. As a result, cases occasionally remain pending with the consequence that conflicts are perpetuated and reinforced (see chapter 10).

In the field of economic policies, there has been a shift towards encouraging economic diversification across ethnic-occupational groups (see also Moritz 2006a). These policies are informed by the idea of economic growth via rural development and market production. At the same time, they rest on the assumption that economic diversification contributes to the improvement of farmer-herder relations. As the Divisional Officer of the Misaje Sub-Division explained, herders who are accustomed to cultivating farms are sensitised to crop damage. Concurrently, farmers who rear cattle are aware of the practical difficulties entailed in cattle herding. Comprehensive knowledge of both economic systems and a better understanding of each other's predicaments are thus thought to enhance mutual sympathy and cooperation. Moreover, the Divisional Officer was convinced that the presence of a substantial number of Grassfields graziers facilitated the containment of cattle theft, as Grassfielders' monitoring and sanctioning systems (i.e. vigilante groups and cult associations) are regarded as being fairly effective.

6.3 Economic diversification in the Western Grassfields

In the Western Grassfields the process of economic diversification started in the colonial period. For farmers this meant the introduction of new production means, primarily cash crops and cattle. For herders it entailed incentives to a sedentary lifestyle, as outlined in the previous chapter. Yet legal entitlement to cultivate within the grazing area was provided only in 1962; furthermore, the size of farming plots was restricted to 0.4 ha (1,619 m²) per family (Boutrais 1995/96: 797-798).

In the 1980s many governmental and non-governmental organisations ran programmes to improve farming and grazing methods. Among them was WADA (Wum Area Development Authority), a para-statal organisation that trained extension workers in animal traction, tree crop nursery, cattle husbandry, and technical

professions (Fonjong 2004). A number of residents in the Misaje area were involved in WADA trainings, among them my collaborator Bah Jerome.

Photograph 6.3: Oxen ploughing as an example of economic diversification



This photograph was contributed by Bah Jerome and was taken in Misaje in 1989. Jerome was recruited as an extension worker and conducted workshops for farmers and herders in the use of oxen ploughs. Here we see him ploughing with his friend Halidu, a Mbororo herder from the neighbouring village Kamine. As we have seen in the previous chapter, *arDo* Affang also participated in such training programmes. Later on, WADA disintegrated. By the time of my fieldwork, no one any longer practiced animal traction in Misaje.

Several of these governmental and non-governmental programmes failed in the long run. Most were not sustainable, and did not significantly change local perspectives on farmer-herder relations. Nonetheless, attempts at facilitating rural growth and economic diversification have persisted. For example, in 2000 the Divisional Officer conducted a ‘best farmer competition’ in the Misaje Sub-Division, awarding individuals who excelled in rural production, such as agriculture, cattle husbandry, and craftwork. Among the winning farmers was also a Mbororo man who received a bucket and a hoe for his exceptionally large sweet potatoes.

6.3.1 Mbororo agro-pastoralism

Mbororo have long been identified by their Grassfields neighbours and the administration as cattle rearers. They generally stress their pastoral identity and consider alternative economic activities, such as farming or trade, subsidiary. Nowadays, most Mbororo in the Grassfields are agro-pastoralists. However, Jaafun and Aku differ in their attitudes to agriculture and in their farming practices.

Among Jaafun lineages, agricultural engagement is attributed rather low esteem. Upon their establishment in the Grassfields, many Jaafun families benefited from the favourable ecological and climatic conditions of the highlands. Thanks to the productivity of local farming communities, they were able to supply themselves with food crops via barter and acquisition. In conjunction with increasing wealth and sedentarisation, many Jaafun families invested in Islamic scholarship; farming became stigmatised as non-Islamic and as emblematic of Grassfielders (non-Mbororo).¹⁶² Aku herders, on the other hand, entered the Grassfields only in the second half of the 20th century and missed the era of pastoral success. They have a different attitude to farming. Many Aku lineages' familiarity with agriculture dates back far into the past. As we have seen in the previous chapter, individuals like *arDo* Bala and *arDo* Affang's sons pride themselves with their farming expertise and successfully bolster their pastoral activities with agriculture.

A significant difference between Aku and Grassfielders' farming practices lies in their respective systems of division of labour. While, among Grassfielders, women are the primary farmers, Aku women are exempted from heavy tasks and only participate in planting and harvesting. The majority of farmwork is done by men and children and by hired farm labourers (Pelican 1999: 45-46, 113-115).

¹⁶² Many Jaafun tend to exhibit a rather resentful attitude towards physical labour; thus looking down on their Grassfields neighbours who appreciate physical robustness and stamina. In return, Grassfielders tend to assess Mbororo – particularly their women – as lazy, weak, and conceited (see also Goheen 1996: 84).

Photograph 6.4: Aku compound surrounded by maize farms



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Chako, 09/05/01

The compound of Adamu, the eldest son and successor of the late *arDo* Affang is surrounded by large maize farms that are encircled by a cattle-proof fence. With four wives, more than 20 children, a dependent sister, and frequent visitors, Adamu has a sizeable following to support. His yearly maize harvest is large enough to cover the needs of his family and to sell surpluses.

Many of the Aku herders residing in the Misaje area grew up on the Jos Plateau where they actively engaged in farming. As they pointed out, farming techniques in the two regions differ. Grassfields farmers make broad ridges for inter-cropping; a system that helps to maintain the soil fertility, economise labour, and ensure a large harvest. Conversely, many Aku herders are accustomed to making narrow ridges, using smaller hoes than their Grassfields neighbours, and planting just one line of crops. Their understanding of healthy plant growth is coloured by their pastoral background.

Plants are like animals and humans, they need sun and air to grow. If crops are planted densely, they cannot breath and grow properly. That is why the Mbororo maize produces larger heads [cobs] than of the local farmers'. (*mallam* Karbura, Chako, 30/03/01)

The distinct Aku style of farming is disappearing. Many youths who have grown up in the Misaje area have adopted the farming techniques of their Grassfields neighbours. This development has been facilitated by the widespread practice of employing local Grassfielders for the more laborious tasks, such as tilling the soil and making ridges.

Due to increasing economic hardship over the past twenty to thirty years, farming has generally become more popular among Mbororo in the Western Grassfields (cf. Pelican 1999: 113-115). Consequently, many Mbororo families cultivate larger plots

than the officially acknowledged 0.4 ha. My assistant Haruna recalled the historical development of his father's farm as follows: *mallam* Kadiri settled in the present location in 1972 and began to farm a small plot of about 0.75 ha just next to his compound. He cultivated mainly maize and coco yams, and employed local Grassfielders to do most of the farmwork. Over the subsequent 15 years, he extended his farm to comprise approximately 1.5 ha. When *mallam* Kadiri died in 1994, Haruna and his brother-in-law Husseini took over the responsibility for the household, herd, and farm. Over the following six years, they further expanded their farm to the size of 3 ha. Up to 1990 Haruna, who was born around 1973, never fully participated in farmwork. As a child he assisted in light tasks, such as planting, weeding, and harvesting. He only learned tilling the soil and making ridges in the 1990s, when the men in the family began to work alongside hired labourers in their farm. According to Haruna's calculations, they spend between 40,000 and 60,000 FCFA (€ 60 – 90) yearly on paying local Grassfielders for ridging and weeding. In return, farm produces have been plentiful enough to feed the family and sell surpluses. In 1999/2000 they sold pumpkin seeds, coco yams, and maize for almost 60,000 FCFA, thus covering their farming expenses. Surplus maize also serves as payment for local Grassfielders who frequently prefer maize to cash.

The practice of employing local farmers to cultivate their farms or refurbish their compounds is common among pastoral FulBe, and contributes to their socio-economic integration into local communities (e.g. Waters-Bayer & Bayer 1994: 222, Vabi 1991: 225). Aku interlocutors explained that they often hire the same men and women over consecutive years. Over time, some of the work relationships have developed into friendships (Pelican 2004a, see also chapter 8). Emmanuel, a Bessa man, who makes his living as a builder and workman for Mbororo in the Misaje area, described the work relationship between local Grassfielders and Mbororo as follows:

Country-people [Pidgin English for local Grassfielders], especially women, are very interested in working the farms of Mbororo, because they pay well. They [the farm labourers] come and indicate the portion they want to work and agree on the payment before they start. The Mbororo man sells at least one cow to pay the workers. Sometimes, all the work is already distributed; so the Mbororo man asks the farmer to come another time. If he is very used to the farmer and does not want to disappoint him/her, he might ask him/her to cut sticks, collect grass for fencing or roofing, or do some other work. (Emmanuel, Misaje, 03/01/01)

Local farming women frequently work for Mbororo when they need cash for specific occasions (for example church contributions, group meetings, celebrations) or when they lack maize for home consumption or the production of maize beer (*shah*). Since they are busy cultivating their own farms, they take only small plots which require a few days of work. Conversely, men are more reluctant to work in Mbororo farms, as they consider it beneath their dignity to cultivate other people's farms. A few younger men, however, engage in farmwork as a form of seasonal labour. They arrange for a number of larger consecutive contracts, working different people's farms and making a considerable amount of money. In March 2001, for example, I met two men (one from Nkanchi, the other from Nso) working a plot in a Mbororo grazier's farm for which they jointly were to be paid 32,000 FCFA (€50), and which would take them approximately eight to nine days. Before that, they had earned 70,000 FCFA (€105) working in a Mbororo neighbour's farm for three weeks. Most farm-labourers I talked to were quite happy and satisfied with their current work arrangements. But they also recalled negative experiences with Mbororo who paid low salaries or treated them badly; e.g. refusing them fresh drinking water. Some claimed they would rather give someone a helping hand than work for "a slave's salary".

The practice of local Grassfielders working for Mbororo is occasionally politicised by Grassfields chiefs or members of the local Grassfields elite who see it as a source of inequality and potential conflict. *Fon* Richard Chefon, for example, claimed that herders did not initially cultivate farms, but bought food crops from Grassfields farmers and herewith supported the local economy. Conversely, by exploiting Grassfields women's labour, they contributed to the creation of poverty and hunger. As he argued, women were seduced to spend money on luxury items instead of cultivating food for their families. Yet due to his meagre financial background, *fon* Richard was unable to prevent Grassfields women from working for Mbororo or compensate them for their incurred losses. Nonetheless, Grassfielders consider their collective refusal to collaborate with graziers, i.e. neither working in their farms nor selling crops to them, an effective strategy to express their discontent with their Mbororo neighbours (see chapter 10).

6.3.2 *The emergence of native graziers in the Misaje area*

In the same way as Mbororo became agro-pastoralists, Grassfields farmers ventured into cattle husbandry. Initially, Grassfielders only knew semi-feral dwarf cattle that were kept at chiefs' palaces and were consumed exclusively during important celebrations (Boutrais 1998, Chilver & Kaberry 1967: 38).¹⁶³ With the arrival of the Mbororo, zebu cattle entered northwest Cameroon.

In the early 20th century cattle husbandry was the exclusive domain of the Mbororo. Yet, as Grassfielders and Mbororo got accustomed to each other, and Grassfields individuals successfully accumulated capital through trade or cash crop production, they developed an interest in cattle husbandry. A new category of cattle rearers emerged, known as native graziers.¹⁶⁴ Grassfields chiefs were amongst the first to build up their own cattle herds on the basis of gifts and tributes demanded from Mbororo immigrants. They were followed by well-to-do Grassfields individuals who invested in cattle husbandry as a means of augmenting their wealth, and by Grassfields individuals who worked as herdsmen for Mbororo and were paid in calves (Njeuma & Awasom 1990: 229-230).

Among all Grassfields groups, the Pinyin earned the reputation of being skilled graziers and cattle traders (Boutrais 1995/96: 658-659). Their affinity for cattle husbandry may be rooted in their pre-colonial specialisation in rearing small livestock (Warnier 1985: 36-47). Many are farmers as well as cattle graziers and entertain close economic and social relations with their Mbororo neighbours. Before the introduction of public education, Pinyin boys frequently stayed with Mbororo families for an apprenticeship in cattle rearing.¹⁶⁵ The Pidgin English-Fulfulde derivation *boy na'i* or *boyjo*, meaning 'cattle boy', is generally used in referring to a Grassfields (often Pinyin) herdsman, while a Mbororo herdsman is called by the Fulfulde term *gaynaako* (pl. *waynaaBe*).

¹⁶³ Nowadays dwarf cattle are nearly extinct, but have retained their status as symbols of chiefly power. During one of my field visits to Lakabum, the palace of the neighbouring Bum chiefdom, I was told that they still had a few animals. They were rather wild beasts that only returned at night and caused a lot of damage to farms. I never got to see one but only its excreta.

¹⁶⁴ The term 'native grazer' is based on the colonial categorisation of Grassfielders as 'natives' of the Western Grassfields. The term is commonly used both by administrators and the general public in referring to Grassfields graziers. I will henceforth use it in the text with the same meaning.

¹⁶⁵ Frantz (1981: 216) reports close socio-economic relationships between Mbororo pastoralists and rural Mambila farmers in Nigeria, which include the fostering of farmers' children.

Photograph 6.5: Pinyin grazier



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Bridge Five, 16/04/01

Dan Teneng is a Pinyin man living in Misaje. At the age of twelve he began to learn the work of a cattle trader by assisting his uncle. Later, he worked as hired herdsman for Pinyin and Mbororo herders. He settled in Misaje in the early 1980s and is a successful businessman, farmer, and cattle rearer. He has entrusted his herd of cross-breeds (*gudaali* and *daneeji*) to Suaibu, a Huya herdsman from northern Cameroon.

Over time, individuals across all ethnic groups engaged in cattle husbandry, which has become an accepted economic activity among Grassfielders.¹⁶⁶

The following chart illustrates the ratio of cattle ownership among different categories of graziers in the Misaje Sub-Division. The calculation is based on the *jangali* (cattle tax) statistics of 2000/2001 made available by the Misaje Council. On account of additional information supplied by Haruna on the ethnic background of individual graziers, I was able to group them into ‘ethnic’ categories, a set of data generally ignored in cattle tax statistics.

¹⁶⁶ Vabi (1991: 179-180) carried out a comparative study on farmer-herder relations in southwestern Nigeria and northwestern Cameroon. In his sample, 20.7% of the Grassfields farmers are also cattle rearers; 66% of the Mbororo herders are also crop farmers, and 46% out of these have been involved in crop farming since birth. I am a bit sceptical of the representativeness of Vabi’s results, as the percentage of Grassfields farmers involved in cattle grazing seems a bit high, while the percentage of agro-pastoral Mbororo seems a bit low – at least with regard to the Misaje area.

Table 6.1: Mbororo and native graziers in the Misaje area

Misaje Sub-Division	total		Mbororo		local Grassfielders		Grassfields migrants		Hausa/Huya	
registered graziers	469	100%	407	87%	29	6%	23	5%	10	2%
cattle owned by	20,300	100%	17,734	87,5%	902	4,5%	1,279	6%	385	2%
average herd size	43 animals		44 animals		31 animals		56 animals		38,5 animals	

Local Grassfielders in the Misaje area developed an interest in cattle rearing as a result of the permanent establishment of Aku herders in the second half of the 20th century. With the emergence of neighbourhood and friendship relations between the two groups, a few adventurous individuals began to rear their own cattle; among them was the father of Bah Jerome.

Jerome: My father was a cattle rearer. In the early days he bought kola nuts and salt to sell in Nigeria. He began to rear cattle when he saw it in Nigeria. He was a mixed farmer; he was rearing cattle and cultivating land. He cultivated coffee, banana, plantain, and palm trees. My mother cultivated the food crops on the large farm near to our compound. We used to help her when we came back from school.

Michaela: Where did your father keep his cattle?

Jerome: At the beginning my father kept the cattle behind our compound in that fence. The fence is still there because he used trees. During the day, we took the cattle up to the hills near Chako. By then, there were only a few coffee farms. Then my father became afraid that the population of Misaje became too much, and the cattle had to stay at Chako. We have a grazing permit for that area. My father was working in the coffee farm. He asked me to bring the cattle back from the hill after school. But, at times, the animals would come back by themselves because of the young ones that stayed in the compound. We also had a place to give salt to the animals. And for drinking there were places up the hill. But during dry season the animals had to come down to the stream. My father would watch and control them. When I returned from school, I would take over from him and bring them home in the evening. We locked them in the fence, and that was the work of the day. We did not milk the cattle. That is why they grew very healthy. It was said, if you milk the cows, they become slim. My father could not care about milking. Instead, the animals and the calves were growing healthy, and we could sell them for a lot of money. My mother carried dry cow dung to the farm for the cultivation of vegetables. (Bah Jerome, Misaje 24/12/01)

Like most native graziers, Jerome's father undertook a variety of economic activities, including tree and cash crop farming and cattle husbandry. His contribution to the household economy was complemented by his wife's subsistence farming.

Cattle rearing is generally considered a male enterprise (cf. Chilver 1989).¹⁶⁷ Compared to farming, it is a relatively new and only supplementary activity for Grassfielders, and hence occupies a subordinate position in their value scale. As *fon* Richard Chefon explained, it is considered "a borrowed culture; that is, to have cattle is just a means of investing money" (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje 13/01/02). The decision to engage in cattle husbandry is taken individually, and there is generally no correlation of economic activities between related households.

Native graziers differ to some extent from Mbororo herders in their aims and practices of cattle rearing. As most Grassfielders are not accustomed to consuming milk or milk products, native grazier generally do not milk their cows. Cattle are not kept for milk or meat supply, but with the aim of reproducing and thus augmenting their owners' wealth. Furthermore, native graziers tend to practise less extensive grazing than Mbororo, keeping their animals close to their compounds or within a delimited grazing range. While Mbororo herders fence their farms, native graziers prefer to enclose their grazing area so as to prevent cattle from straying into their own and other people's farms.

Native graziers learned the handling of cattle from their Mbororo neighbours. Jerome described some of the tasks, such as taking the animals to drinking points, occasionally feeding them salt, and locking them in the night paddock. In a later section of the interview he stressed that he knew most technical aspects of cattle herding. Furthermore, he prided himself in communicating with his father's cattle in Fulfulde, which he learned from his Mbororo friends.

From childhood I was grazing. A person like Ja'o, we usually joined our cows in the bush. They were grazing and we were sitting. We were beating sticks and playing football close to the grazing site. We established a small football field near Chako. I was not only playing with them but also exchanging the language. Like Ja'o, he has a bit of an idea of our own language and I know a bit of their Fulfulde. That is how I became used to the Mbororo and I gradually learned their language. I also brought cattle to the market together with my father. We mixed the animals with the ones of the Mbororo people and

¹⁶⁷ In the context of my research, I came across one single Grassfielders woman who owned cattle and was also a trader in the Bamenda cattle market.

we moved together. They were talking in their own language and we could learn from each other. The control commands for the animals are in Fulfulde. So I could hear and learn it. (Bah Jerome, Misaje, 24/12/01)

Local Grassfielders' engagement in cattle rearing impacted positively on interethnic relations; pre-existent friendships were intensified and new relationships emerged. The integrative property of Grassfielders' economic diversification was most effective in the initial phase, when native graziers depended on their Mbororo neighbours for professional instruction and assistance. At a later stage, however, Nchaney graziers decided to detach themselves from Mbororo herders for administrative purposes. While farmers were required to pay poll tax, graziers were taxed according to the number of their animals. Native graziers were asked to pay *jangali* (cattle tax) to the Mbororo *arDo* charged with its collection. This arrangement worked out until the late 1970s, when Nchaney graziers felt that Mbororo *arDo'en* (pl. of *arDo*) treated them unfairly, and suspected them of misusing their tax money. Consequently, they asked the administration for the appointment of an Nchaney *arDo* whose post, at the time of my research, was held by Benjamin Kokila.

ArDo Luca was our first *arDo* from 1982 to 1985. [...] When the Fulani [Mbororo] counted their own cattle for the *jangali* tax figure, they hid some. But they urged us to indicate all our cattle. We went to the SDO [Senior Divisional Officer] in Nkambe and asked to have our own *arDo* to count our cattle. They later agreed and we decided to present Luca as our *arDo* to the DO [Divisional Officer]. I was made his secretary and did all the *jangali* calculations. When the cattle of Luca finished, James took over. He was Luca's brother, while I remained the secretary. When James died, I was asked to take over. We used to hold meetings, but only for *country-people* [Grassfielders]. In the beginning, that is in 1983, we were 28 members. The Fulani [Mbororo] wanted to join our meeting; but we refused because we knew they would bring us problems. (Benjamin Kokila, Nfume, 03/01/02)

At the basis of this split was the considerable pastoral success of Nchaney graziers. *ArDo* Luca, for example, allegedly had several hundred animals which, in the eyes of the Nchaney and the administration, qualified him for the post of *arDo*. In the administrative understanding, an *arDo* is not a political leader but the person representing cattle herders, their liabilities, and interests to the state. Thus an *arDo* functions as a tax collector, supervises inoculations, and is involved in the

administration of grazing land. In case of his herders' misconduct, the *arDo* is held liable, including the payment of their *jangali* tax.

Photograph 6.6: The current Nchaney arDo Benjam Kokila



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Nfume, 03/01/02

Benjamin (second from left) is the third Nchaney *arDo* in succession. In 2001 he represented a group of twelve Nchaney graziers resident in Misaje, Nkanchi, Bem, and Nfume. Here we see him with his two wives and his eldest son George in his cattle fence in front of their compound at Nfume.

The photograph was taken during the dry season, when the cattle have to walk a considerable distance to find enough grass to feed on. *ArDo* Benjamin has employed a Mbororo herdsman (Fulfulde: *gaynaako*) to take care of the animals. While the herd is out grazing, the calves that are too young to accompany their mothers stay in the fence (here tied to a calf rope).

Another factor that overshadowed the relationship between native and Mbororo graziers were frequent incidents of cattle theft; a source of discontent and friction that has pertained till today. Native graziers bemoaned that, in case of cattle theft, Mbororo herders did not help in searching for stolen animals of native but only Mbororo graziers. Because of this lack of solidarity, Nchaney graziers no longer deemed it rewarding to consolidate with their Mbororo neighbours, and opted for an administratively independent status.

The separation of native and Mbororo graziers occurred in such a pronounced way only in the Nchaney area. In all other regions of the Misaje Sub-Division, native graziers pay their taxes to their respective Mbororo *arDo*. A possible explanation for the divergence in native graziers' strategies may be that the Nchaney achieved the

critical mass in number of graziers and cattle for such a move, while native graziers in the other areas were too few or ethnically too diverse to unify successfully.

The 1980s were the heydays of native cattle grazing in the Misaje area. Subsequently, herds gradually began to diminish (see table 6.1 for current herd sizes); individuals became disheartened and gave up. The number of Nchaney graziers, for example, reduced from 28 in 1983 to 11 in 2000. Informants mentioned cattle theft as the primary source of their losses. Besides that, a couple of internal factors contributed to the decline of native cattle grazing. In the beginning, native graziers were interested in learning all details of cattle rearing, including herding practices and communicating with their animals. After some time, however, they realised that successful cattle husbandry required the herders' familiarity with animal needs and a profound knowledge of cattle diseases. With rising cattle numbers, many native graziers turned to employing Mbororo herdsmen to take care of their animals. Around the same period the reputation of school education as a road to so-called white-collar jobs (government jobs) reached the countryside. Consequently, parents preferred to send their children to school than to do an apprenticeship in cattle grazing. Concurrently, cattle herding received a bad reputation to the point that no Grassfielder wanted to be identified as a *gaynaako* (Fulfulde for herdsman). Benjamin, himself a longstanding and experienced native grazer, expressed these considerations most pointedly:

The *country-boys* [Pidgin English for local Grassfields youths] do not like to do cow work. They fear the appellation *gaynaako*, because people look at you like a useless man. If you are called *gaynaako*, you will not find a woman. *Country-people* do not like it because when the *gaynaako* returns to his house at night, he is always dirty. And women do not like that. About the Fulani people [Mbororo] I can say, they are dirty because of the *gaynaako* work, but they are used to the work. The dirtiness comes from the bush. Also, *country-people* admire those who come from the city in good clothes. Hence, they hate to be called *gaynaako*. The *country-people* who go to their farm cannot be considered dirty people because they cultivate their farms. They are called farmers. [...] All my children are in school. They do not have the time to look after the cattle. When I do not have a *gaynaako*, I take care of the cattle myself. At times, I look after them for about ten months. But when I want to do work elsewhere, I need a *gaynaako*. Generally, I do not like my children to stay in the compound to look after the cattle. The world has changed; today, there is civilisation. One day, people might laugh at my children that their father

has cattle, but they are not educated. That would be a shame and disgrace to me. I do not like it. (Benjamin Kokila, Nfume, 03/01/02)

This shift from cooperating with Mbororo neighbours – in order to learn the practicalities of cattle rearing – to employing Mbororo herdsmen includes not only a change in the moral assessment of cattle grazing, but also in the perception of interethnic relations. While native grazing became an expression of individual affluence, Mbororo graziers have increasingly been associated with paid herdsmanship and living ‘in the bush’. Furthermore, by employing professional herdsmen, the responsibility for the herd has shifted from the cattle owner to the *gaynaako* (herdsman) who most often is a young man and receives only a small salary. The *gaynaako*, on the other hand, considers himself just a workman and has no interest in the well-being of the herd other than getting his payment.¹⁶⁸ This predicament is not particular to native graziers but to all graziers employing herdsmen.¹⁶⁹

Other factors limiting the success of native graziers emerged from within Grassfields communities. Envy is generally considered a crucial negative social factor and is thought to be at the roots of witchcraft assaults and related attempts at thwarting individual success (see chapter 9). Among Grassfielders, the family and close social environment count as the prime source of occult aggression. Native grazing, commonly perceived as an expression of individual affluence, is thus liable to attract the envy of relatives, friends, and neighbours. *ArDo* Benjamin, for example, described his earlier success in cattle husbandry as causing friction among his relatives, which eventually resulted in the ritual separation of his and his brother’s compounds. Furthermore, jealousy is also thought to colour the relationship between farmers and native graziers, particularly in the face of crop damage. Jerome described the situation as follows:

When you have farm damage issues, some people are not considerate at all; they do not care if you have to sell all your animals to pay for the damage. They know that they do not want to see the animals again. They will even insult you that, if you are not able to

¹⁶⁸ According to Moritz (2006b), FulBe in the Far North of Cameroon distinguish between herders with sticks (Fulfulde: *gaynaako bee sawru*) and herders with families (Fulfulde: *gaynaako bee saare*). Herders with sticks are free-wheelers with little interest in their herds and frequently change jobs. Conversely, herders with families have more responsibilities and are more likely to take good care of the entrusted animals.

¹⁶⁹ Bassett (1994) describes similar predicaments resulting from the entrustment of cattle to paid herdsmen by FulBe and non-FulBe graziers in Côte d’Ivoire.

take proper care of your animals, why then keeping them?! (Bah Jerome, Misaje, 24/12/01)

Native graziers see themselves confronted with the envy of their relatives and friends as well as their Mbororo neighbours whom they hold responsible for frequent incidents of cattle theft (see below). Against the background of these multiple adversities, for many Grassfielders cattle husbandry has become an economic and social burden rather than a source of status and wealth.

6.3.3 Transformations in interethnic relations

As the above elaborations have shown, the process of economic diversification has impacted significantly on socio-economic and political relations between Grassfielders and Mbororo in the Misaje area. Informants recognised both positive and negative effects regarding their own situation and the coexistence of the two population groups.

The majority of Grassfielders approve of Mbororo cultivating their own farms. It is considered fair and normal that every individual should have the opportunity to produce enough food to support his/her family. However, queries arise when the Mbororo's farming activities exceed the subsistence level and individuals begin to sell their food produce in the market. As interlocutors occasionally remarked, Mbororo not only sell animals and animal products, such as cattle, sheep, horses, and cow milk, but also goats, fowl, guinea fowl, and eggs; goods initially provided by Grassfields farmers. Moreover, their farms seem to produce so well that Mbororo are able to sell maize, coco yams, sweet potatoes, and *gari* (grated, dried, and fried cassava) as well as vegetables and spices, such as okra, huckleberry, onion, and hot pepper, which are also the main produces of Grassfields farmers. Over and above Mbororo competition in the market, Grassfields farmers are concerned that the government privileges graziers' claims to land over farmers' needs (see chapter 10).

In the perspective of many Mbororo, the positive effects of graziers' and farmers' economic diversification prevail. In contrast to the conviction of many Grassfielders and administrators that Mbororo herders dislike native graziers and attempt to discourage them by stealing their animals, Mbororo interlocutors generally accepted the presence of native graziers and some entertained friendly relations. Many herdsmen, however, considered work arrangements with native graziers more of a

nuisance than a benefit. Taking into account the generally low rate of remuneration and the risk of cattle theft and animal disease, they expressed their reluctance to assume the responsibility for native graziers' animals. Moreover, among well-to-do Mbororo, paid herdsmanship is attributed low esteem; working for native graziers is regarded even more degrading than working for fellow Mbororo.

By cultivating their own food, Mbororo have not only modified economic but also political relations with their farming neighbours. In the initial phase of their establishment in the Grassfields, Mbororo herders were dependent on Grassfields farmers for food supply and access to grazing land. Grassfielders, on the other hand, relied on the Mbororo for providing meat which, before their arrival, was available only through hunting and rearing small livestock. With growing self-sustainability, Mbororo dependency has not only decreased but also changed in character. Mbororo no longer rely on local Grassfielders for farm produce but labour; that is, they have switched from customers to employers. This shift in socio-economic status has impacted on the power balance between Grassfielders and Mbororo and is one of the reasons that Grassfields chiefs do not like their people to work for Mbororo. This consideration was expressed most dramatically in a paper on farmer-grazier problems presented by a Bessa elite member at a meeting of the Bessa Cultural and Development Association (BECUDA) in Douala in 2000.

No clear thinking person will admit that the Bessa man who toils throughout the year on his farm, using crude tools and method, should be seen playing the role of a timekeeper every morning to the Fulani man [Mbororo] because he wants a daily bread. But this is the bitter truth, because the Bessa man has become a servant for the Fulani man. He fetches firewood, cleans his compound, works his own farm, fetches water for the Fulani man in return for milk, meat and some widow's mite. We are reduced to Ethiopians and even worse we are beggars.¹⁷⁰ (N.P., Bessa Elite Circle, Douala, 2000)

In a later section of the paper, the speaker appealed to dialogue and good neighbourliness between the two parties, so that the relationship of "master – servant should be reconsidered and the parties should be equal." From a Mbororo perspective, however, the situation reads differently: the less they depend on their Grassfields neighbours' benevolence, the more their political and legal status is secured.

¹⁷⁰ The comparison with Ethiopians is based on the media image of the Ethiopian population suffering from poverty and draught. In Cameroonian Pidgin English it has become a common expression when referring to the worst possible situation one may incur in life.

In assessing the impact of economic diversification on inter-group relations, a shift from economic complementarity to competition is observable, particularly in the field of commerce, and over limited natural resources such as land. At the same time, economic relations between Grassfielders and Mbororo continue to entail various forms of interdependency, though no longer on the production but service level. In consequence, socio-political relations have changed as well. While Grassfields chiefs and elite members expressed their concern that the interethnic power balance has swayed to the farmers' detriment, Mbororo are increasingly confident of their integral economic and socio-political position within the local and regional society (see chapter 5).

In the following section I will look at economic and socio-political relations between Grassfielders and Mbororo in the face of rivalry over natural resources and property in land and cattle. My focus will be on the apparent ethnicisation of discourses of farmer-herder dispute and cattle theft, and the disjunction of corresponding discourses and practices.

6.4 Farmer-herder disputes and cattle theft: economic conflicts and discourses

Farmer-herder disputes and cattle theft are both current issues of public contention in the Western Grassfields. Farmer-herder disputes date back to the early 20th century and have been a persistent concern of colonial and post-colonial governments. Similarly, incidents of cattle theft have occurred since the introduction of cattle to the region (cf. Boutrais 1995/96: 764-766). In its current extent, however, cattle theft is a feature of the 1990s.¹⁷¹

As we will see in the following, there is a tendency among Grassfielders, Mbororo, and administrators to draw on established discourses and stereotypes in describing farmer-herder disputes and cattle theft, and to portray both issues as conflicts between ethnic groups. Yet in taking a closer look at actual incidents in the Misaje area, it becomes apparent that the situation is much more complex, and that popular

¹⁷¹ While among many pastoral groups in East Africa animal raids are part of social relations between groups and constitute an established and socially accepted strategy of accumulation (see e.g. Schlee 1997), there is no such understanding of cattle theft in Cameroon; here the abduction of animals is generally considered a criminal act.

discourses of farmer-herder dispute and cattle theft should not be taken at face value, but as idioms of economic rivalry that are rooted in their respective historical and regional contexts.

6.4.1 Farmer-herder disputes in the Western Grassfields

As mentioned above, farmer-grazier conflict is a popular subject in the study of farmer-herder relations in western Africa (e.g. Bassett 1988, Bernadet 1999, Breusers et al. 1998, Diallo 1996, Diarra 1975, Hagberg 1998, Hussein 1998, Tonah 2002, Waters-Bayer & Bayer 1994 to name only a few). Moreover, there are a number of studies specifically on northwest Cameroon (Boutrais 1995/96: 679-803, Chapnkem 1998, Chilver 1989, Fisiy 1992: 224-228, Haman 2001, Harshbarger 1995, Ottiger 1996: 149-194, Vabi 1991).

Farmer-herder disputes have been a common feature of the coexistence of Grassfielders and Mbororo in the Western Grassfields. Particularly on the densely populated Bamenda Highlands, incidents of crop damage, blockage of water points, and mutual encroachment have been frequent and have strained the relationship between the two population groups. At the roots of these conflicts is a complex interplay of ecological, demographic, economic, and political factors. In the following I will briefly outline some of these factors, basing my elaborations on the more detailed studies of the above mentioned authors.

The Bamenda Highlands are very fertile and support agriculture as well as cattle husbandry. Grassfielders and Mbororo both practice extensive economic systems that require access to large plots of land and are not compatible in a system of mixed farming. Thus with increasing population density, competition over land has increased as well. As some authors (Boutrais 1995/96: 696-721, Chilver 1989, Kaberry 1952: 89-90, Ottiger 1996: 149-152) have argued, gender differences within Grassfields society are a factor promoting farmer-herder conflicts. Moreover, they have largely been ignored by policy makers who effectively, though inadvertently, contributed to the deterioration of farmer-herder relations. Since the colonial period economic programmes, such as the introduction of cash crops and mixed farming schemes, have generally been addressed to the male population who are also in charge of almost all political decisions. Conversely, women who are the main food producers within Grassfields society have been sidelined, and their need to secure farmland has been

ignored. In consequence, competition over natural resources has increased both within Grassfields society and between Grassfielders and Mbororo. In addition, with the institution of the farmer-grazier commission, administrative procedures have been further complicated, if not obfuscated. Subsequently, farmers and herders have become frustrated with widespread practices of corruption and pending cases. Grassfields farmers reacted to this situation with public protest, demanding that the administration limits Mbororo graziers' access to land. Occasionally, demonstrations have culminated in violent altercations.

One of the Grassfields regions where farmer-grazier conflicts are most acute is Wum. Here the majority of the population are Aghem farmers, while Mbororo graziers entered the area in the late 1940s (see chapter 5). Conflicts first arose when women farmers, after many years of fallowing, claimed back their fields which Mbororo herders had mistaken as uncultivated land suitable for grazing. The situation was exacerbated by officials sympathising with Mbororo herders and attempting to control women's access to land. In 1973 Aghem women organised a public protest, boycotting all market activity in Wum and two neighbouring villages. They demanded that Mbororo herders should keep their animals in three demarcated grazing zones, or be expelled. They argued that Mbororo continually damaged their farms and endangered their livelihood by appropriating more and more land. Moreover, Aghem women blamed their husbands for occupying the nearby fields and displacing women's farms farther in the bush where they are more exposed to crop damage. Finally, they accused traditional and state authorities of partiality and of prioritising their personal gain over the farmers' well-being. Thus the structural imbalance between men and women, chiefs and commoners aggravated farmer-herder conflicts, and women's frustration was channelled against Mbororo graziers (Boutrais 1995/96: 712-764).¹⁷² In 1981 Aghem women again mobilised in response to excessive crop destruction. This time, Aghem farmers and Mbororo herders confronted each other violently; property was destroyed and eighteen individuals were injured. The security forces intervened and eight people were shot (Harshbarger 1995: 54-55). The latest protest occurred in 2003, when 6,000 women besieged the *fon's* palace in Wum,

¹⁷² Similarly, in his play 'Lake God' the Cameroonian playwright Bole Butake (1999: 14-23) dramatised conflicts over crop damage between women farmers, Mbororo herders, and Grassfields chiefs. In his story women farmers report a Mbororo herdsman to the *fon* because of crop damage. Yet the *fon* sides with the herder, as he is the original owner of the cattle he has entrusted to the Mbororo herdsman.

boycotting all social and ritual activity. As BBC News (10/11/2003) reported “the immediate cause of the protest was an attempt by the Divisional Officer to enforce an order expelling about 600 women from a piece of land where they are cultivating food crops.” More than a month later, BBC News informed that the strike was called off, after a commission was set up to investigate the matter and propose solutions (BBC News 16/12/2003).

As the Wum case clearly shows, farmer-herder conflicts are not only about crop damage and access to land, but also about local power relations and the role state agents play in their negotiation. Moreover, Wum is not the only place in which farmer-herder relations are acted out antagonistically; nor is aggression restricted to one side.¹⁷³ Similar incidents have been reported for the Donga-Mantung Division, in particular the densely populated Nkambe region. There are, however, regional differences in the degree of altercations between Grassfields farmers and Mbororo graziers.

In the Misaje area, farmer-herder conflicts have been less frequent and severe than in most parts of the Bamenda Highlands. Factors supporting a lower rate of crop damage and land disputes are primarily ecological and demographical. Compared to the Bamenda Highlands, the population density in the Misaje area is relatively low, and as informants generally asserted, there is abundant land for farmers and herders. Moreover, the cultivation of dry season crops, which due to the seasonal scarcity of fresh grass are prone to be eaten by cattle, is limited. In consequence, farmer-herder disputes centre mainly on riverine areas that are of interest to both economic groups.

Unlike on the Bamenda Highlands, the topography of the Misaje area does not allow for a clear distinction of farming and grazing zones. Though Grassfielders tend to cluster in villages, many have built their compounds ‘in the bush’ where they cultivate crops and keep animals such as fowl, goats, or cattle. Grassfielders’ and Mbororo compounds are thus interspersed, and farms and herds coexist. In our joint paper (Dafinger & Pelican 2002, 2006) we suggest that spatial separation of farmers and herders may contribute to the intensification of farmer-grazier conflict, as it limits social interaction and mutual integration of the two population groups. With regard to regional differences within the Western Grassfields, this situation applies mainly to

¹⁷³ For example, in 2003 in the Belo Sub-Division, Mbororo graziers were reported to have attacked Grassfields women farmers with tear gas due to conflicts over crop damage and access to land (The Herald 06/01/03).

the Bamenda Highlands, while the proximity of farmers and graziers in the Misaje lowlands favours the settlement of farmer-herder disputes on an interpersonal level.

Photograph 6.7: Interspersed compounds of Mbororo and local Grassfielders in the Misaje area



Photo: Michaela Pelican, Misaje, 08/01/00

Haruna converses with Grassfielders girls from the neighbouring compound. The compound of the Mbororo grazier Ya'u (front) and his Grassfielders neighbours (back) are situated close to each other. They rarely have problems with crop damage. At night Ya'u keeps his animals in a safe paddock and during the day the herdsboys make sure the animals do not cross the stream that separates their two compounds.

6.4.1.1 Ethnicisation of farmer-herder disputes

I will now address the subject of the apparent ethnicisation of farmer-herder disputes. The subsequent explorations are based on comparative material derived from the study of Harshbarger (1995) on farmer-herder conflicts in Wum and Tugi, and the analysis of administrative files on farmer-grazier conflicts in the Misaje Sub-Division that were made available by the Divisional Officer.

Given that different ethnic groups are associated with different economic activities, there is a tendency in many parts of the Grassfields to read farmer-grazier disputes as interethnic conflict. However, as I have outlined above, Grassfielders and Mbororo have diversified their economic activities. Throughout the Grassfields, the Mbororo are the main cattle graziers. Yet the category of native graziers cannot be ignored, as their animals are prone to cause crop damage as much as Mbororo cattle.

Furthermore, as Harshbarger's (1995) study shows, it is important to distinguish different categories of native graziers. On the one hand, there are small-scale cattle rearers who integrate farming and cattle rearing. On the other, there are Grassfields ranchers, i.e. wealthy and influential individuals who own large cattle herds which they entrust to paid herdsmen. Most native graziers in the Misaje area fall into the category of small scale cattle rearers; only a few Grassfields migrants and one Nchaney grazier may be classified as ranchers.

As Harshbarger (1995: 132-139) illustrates, native graziers' attitudes to crop damage impact significantly on local perceptions of farmer-herder and interethnic relations. In Wum native graziers are few but have sizeable cattle herds. Most of them are 'big men' involved in business and local politics. They can afford to graze their cattle on Grassfielders' farms and pay for the damage, a strategy locally known as 'graze and pay'. Moreover, wealthy Mbororo graziers tend to pursue the same strategy. Farmers do not distinguish between damage caused by native and Mbororo graziers, and their anger expresses itself in a general anti-herder and anti-Mbororo stance. In Tugi, on the other hand, the situation is more relaxed and farmers have a more complex understanding of the grazier category. A number of local men rear cattle on a small scale, grazing them on the fallow fields of their wives and female relatives. Women farmers argue that native graziers cause more crop damage than Mbororo herders, since they lack the devotion and skills to take proper care of their animals. Moreover, by setting an example they also encourage Mbororo to trespass.

The Misaje case comes closer to Tugi than Wum. Here most native graziers rear cattle on a small scale and cannot afford to 'graze and pay'. In order to assess the degree to which farmer-herder disputes in the Misaje area are correlated to ethnic units, I have analysed the respective administrative files stored in the Divisional Office in Misaje. It should be kept in mind, however, that only a fraction of incidents are officially reported.

In 2001, over a period of one year, 111 complaints were registered with the Divisional Office in Misaje. They included 88 charges of crop destruction and 23 of trespassing.¹⁷⁴ 95 complaints were submitted by local Grassfielders; 74 of them were charges against Mbororo and 21 against native graziers and Grassfields farmers. 16 complaints were submitted by Mbororo, comprising ten charges against local

¹⁷⁴ The information is extracted from the files E27.04/25/vol.4/farmer-grazier problems and E27.04/93/vol.2/crop damage kept at the Divisional Office in Misaje.

Grassfielders and six against other Mbororo. This data somewhat supports the assumption that, in the Misaje area, farmers and herders are not entirely polarised along ethnic lines. Charges of crop destruction, for example, were raised by Grassfields farmers against both Mbororo and native graziers for damage caused by cattle, sheep, and pigs. At the same time, Mbororo arraigned each other over their own interests in grazing land. Yet it is surprising that so many farmers registered complaints and invested the registration fee of FCFA 5,000 (€7.50), given that the Divisional Officer at the time had the reputation of favouring herders' over farmers' charges.

The majority of complaints concerned crop damage. In 2001 they constituted 79% of all registered charges. In those cases where the conflicting parties could not agree on an amicable solution and were willing to pay for the administrative costs, a civil servant (the agric officer) was sent to assess the farm damage. The Divisional Officer summarised the ensuing procedure as follows:

When the report is forwarded to me, I try to negotiate for them. I ask the farmer what he wants as compensation. The farmer makes his demand and usually there is some bargaining with the grazier. In most cases, the amount agreed on is less than that made by the evaluation team. If negotiations do not work out, the report is kept in a file. When those reports accumulate, the commission meets to deliberate. It is like a court. If the farmer and grazier still cannot come to an agreement, a report is made and forwarded to the SDO [Senior Divisional Officer] who issues a prefectorial order that can be executed by the court. (Divisional Officer of the Misaje Sub-Division, Misaje, 03/10/01)

Over the year 2000 29 incidents of crop damage were inspected.¹⁷⁵ In 17 cases farmers and herders ended up negotiating an amount far below the sum calculated by the agric officer. Seven cases remained pending, as no agreement was achieved; five had to be called off because of the grazier's death. As the Divisional Officer explained, he encouraged both parties to co-exist peacefully and to resolve problems amicably among themselves. He did not approve of sending unresolved farmer-grazier conflicts to court, but pleaded for a compromise. His reconciliatory approach may have been influenced by state policy as well as by personal experiences from his home area Nso and his previous placement in Wum, where farmer-grazier disputes are more frequent and potentially disastrous.

¹⁷⁵ The information is extracted from the file E27.04/C16/crop evaluation reports, Divisional Office in Misaje.

Obviously, it is difficult to assess the impact of individual administrators on the occurrence and resolution of farmer-grazier conflicts in the absence of a long-term or comparative study framework. Nevertheless, such a micro-analysis on the level of individual actors helps to make clear that the Cameroonian state is not an abstract entity and that legal frameworks and administrative policies only reach the grassroots by mediation of civil servants and more recently NGO representatives.¹⁷⁶

6.4.1.2 Established discourses of farmer-herder dispute

My focus in this section is on discourses of farmer-herder dispute which, despite regional variations in the frequency and intensity of actual farmer-herder conflicts, are popular throughout the Western Grassfields. These discourses are characterised by the deployment of formulaic arguments and ethnic stereotypes that are rooted in the colonial period and are shared by all population groups in the Grassfields.

In the following I will explore current discourses of farmer-herder dispute on the basis of a role-play presented by Ballotiral. Ballotiral is a partnership organisation that focuses on the improvement of the socio-economic and political situation of Mbororo in northwest Cameroon (see chapter 5). It involves the collaboration of three regional NGOs and counts Mbororo and Grassfielders among its staff. Many of them are experienced in using ‘Theatre for Development’ in their community work.¹⁷⁷

The benefits of basing my analysis on a stage play, rather than exclusively on observational or interview data, are rooted in the nature of drama and performance. Drama as a theatrical form uses the expression of conflict as a way of communicating its content. Moreover, in contrast to everyday life, a staged performance allows for mockery, criticism, and the candid expression of conflicting views and practices, as it has no immediate effects on actual social relations. Finally, in assessing the accuracy of a staged performance, it is important to take into account the presenters’ intentions and the context in which the play is performed. Thus, in addition to analysing the role-play, I will also discuss Ballotiral’s aims and the audience’s responses to the drama presentation.

¹⁷⁶ Hagberg (2005a) provides a comprehensive analysis of the involvement and role of state agents in the mediation of farmer-herder conflicts in south-western Burkina Faso. Similar to my approach, he proposes to assess local government officials as crucial actors in the resolution and generation of conflict. In Burkina Faso, however, corruption is less pronounced than in Cameroon, as government officials receive regular payment (Hagberg 2005a: 43).

¹⁷⁷ Regarding ‘Theatre for Development’ see also Breitingner (1994) and Frank (1995).

In January 2001 Ballotiral convened a one-day-seminar on 'farmer-grazier conflict: awareness and transformation' in Nkambe, the divisional headquarters and neighbouring town to Misaje, to which representatives of the administration and the different population groups were invited. The motive for this initiative was no recent predicament, but a general attempt to improve interethnic relations by alerting farmers, herders, and civil servants to their rights and duties. 103 participants attended the seminar. More than 60% of the workshop participants were officials representing government services and non-governmental organisations, roughly 30% were representatives of the Mbororo community, and 15% represented local Grassfields communities. The meeting included a number of instructional speeches by administrators and resource persons, a short role-play by the Ballotiral drama group, general discussions, and the formulation of resolutions.

For the purpose of this seminar, the Ballotiral staff devised a role-play in which they portrayed a farmer-herder dispute in its most simplistic form, pitting Mbororo graziers against Grassfields farmers and state officials. As members of Ballotiral explained, it was their intention to confront the audience with their own stereotypes and predicaments, and to generate reflection and discussion about possible solutions to the farmer-herder problem. They partially succeeded in their endeavour, as workshop participants responded to the drama presentation and acknowledged their own contribution to the perpetuation of farmer-herder disputes. Yet, at the same time, participants tended to reiterate stereotypical allegations, giving little room for compromise and reconciliation. The resultant discussion of possible solutions remained on a hypothetical level and ended in administrative resolutions with limited practical implications. Thus despite their ambitions to the contrary, by reproducing rather than reversing popular discourses of farmer-herder dispute, Ballotiral may have contributed to their reinforcement.

With this critical remark in mind, I will analyse the Ballotiral role-play and include complementary arguments derived from further observational and interview data.

Photographs 6.8 – 6.12: Farmer-grazier conflict, role-play of the Ballotiral staff, Nkambe, 29/01/2001 (original length approximately 30min., edited clip 2:46min; accessible via <http://corpora.eth.mpg.de/>)



The first act portrays the complaint of a Grassfields woman whose crops have been destroyed by trespassing cattle. We see the woman farmer arriving at the Grassfields chief's palace in tears, claiming that cattle have destroyed her entire farm and that she has been attacked by the Mbororo herdsman. The news of the incident reaches the local schoolmaster who attempts to reconcile the two parties.



The second act portrays the attempted resolution of the conflict by the two parties' representatives, the Grassfields chief (*fon*) and the Mbororo leader (*arDo*), mediated by the schoolmaster. The *fon* claims that his people came first and hence are the landlords of this place. Mbororo herders arrived only later; but now they want to occupy the land so that nothing will be left for the farmers and their future generations. The *arDo*, on the other hand, argues that his family has stayed in the area for many decades. They have always tried to be in good terms with the Grassfields chief, supporting him with gifts. He cunningly asks the schoolmaster "Would you bring your bicycle to the petrol station?" implying "Would you pay for crop damage, if you had no benefit from it?"



The third act portrays the Mbororo leader negotiating legal action with the state counsel (state lawyer). The latter promises to send the farmer to jail, but concurrently warns the *arDo* of potential consequences, if he does not reward his services. The *arDo* is scared, but gains self-confidence in view of his wealth in cattle. He leaves the scene with the words "I have you all in my pocket!"



Photos and video footage: Michaela Pelican, Nkambe, 29/01/2001

The play takes up common stereotypes and arguments shared by Grassfielders, Mbororo, and civil servants in their assessment of farmer-herder conflicts.

In the first act the stereotype of the over-emotionality and over-reactiveness of Grassfields women is portrayed. Women farmers are generally reputed to exaggerate and dramatise damage done to their farms. This assessment suggests underlying gender issues within Grassfields society (cf. Goheen 1996, Kaberry 1952, Ottiger 1996). While women are the principal victims of crop damage, the negotiation of financial compensation is generally a male affair and may be guided by men's rather than women's interests.

A second stereotype introduced in the first act refers to the allegedly aggressive behaviour of Mbororo herdsman. A woman farmer who encounters cattle in her farm has the alternative of searching for the herdsman, while the animals diminish her crops, or of chasing the cattle off by force. The herdsman who perceives the woman abusing his animals with a cutlass or stick gets upset and attacks the farmer in turn. In consequence, a fight develops. Mbororo herdsman are regularly blamed for unjustly attacking Grassfields farmers and exhibiting a generally belligerent attitude. In the view of many Grassfields informants, individuals who wear a knife while performing their religious duties must be aggressive. In the light of September 11 (the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001), single informants even went as far as associating alleged Mbororo aggressiveness with Muslim terrorism. However, Mbororo reputation of being rough refers predominantly to youths whose unruliness is also regretted by their elders. Stories about accidental stabbings among enraged, drunken youths circulated within and without Mbororo society. Rarely, however, were Mbororo youths accused of killing non-Mbororo.¹⁷⁸

Primary suspects of violent behaviour are hired herdsman who tend to be more concerned about their jobs than good relations with their farming neighbours. In the Grassfields the general rule holds that herd owners take responsibility for nightly crop damage, while herdsman are held responsible for daytime damage. This arrangement puts additional pressure on the hired herdsman not only to avoid farm damage, but to find a quick way out in case it happens. In the very moment of tension, aggression and

¹⁷⁸ While in the Grassfields Mbororo youths have the reputation of being violent, the situation appears to be different in south-western Burkina Faso. Here local farmers seem to be associated with a more violent approach than their FulBe neighbours. As Hagberg (2005a: 49) notes, it is not uncommon that farmers wound or kill cattle straying into their fields. Moreover, significantly more FulBe herdsman than local farmers were killed during two violent confrontations in 1986 and 1995 (cf. Hagberg 2005a: 173-193).

intimidation may seem a promising tactic. Yet most often violence aggravates the conflict. Both Mbororo and native graziers were aware of this problem and did not approve of their herdsmen's offensiveness.¹⁷⁹

At this point, I want to introduce an additional argument that has not been explored in the Ballotiral role-play, but ties in with the analysis of farmer-herder conflicts on an interpersonal level. As observational and interview data suggest, native and Mbororo graziers tend to differ in their ideas regarding appropriate strategies in response to farmers' complaints. While native graziers tend to favour a reconciliatory approach by seeking pardon and compromise, Mbororo prefer evasive or confrontational strategies. Many native graziers argued that farmers were more willing to compromise and reach an amicable solution, if they felt that the herder sympathised with their losses. For example, *arDo* Benjamin recounted his negotiations with a Nkanchi woman whose farm was destroyed by his cattle. She reported the matter to him, and he promised to inspect the damage the next day. Early in the morning he went to see her. She was positively surprised and asked for 5,000 FCFA (€7,50) compensation for the damage. Benjamin pleaded with her and they agreed on 2,000 FCFA (€3).

She took the 2,000 FCFA and said she accepted it because it was me. When you stick to your word and plead with the farmer, they will be fine with you. If I was not in good terms with them, I would probably have to pay higher and the case could even go to the Divisional Officer. (Benjamin Kokila, Nfume, 03/01/02)

Similarly, Harshbarger (1995: 180-182) argues that Grassfields farmers and native graziers in her two field sites make a case for humbleness, sympathy, and negotiability. In Grassfielders' perspective, arguing and negotiations are part of a standard process that renders the two parties equal; concurrently, they perceive refutation as insulting and as rendering them powerless.¹⁸⁰

Many Mbororo and some native graziers have a different understanding of appropriate responses to farmers' complaints. They argued that farmers generally think graziers are rich, with their capital vested in cattle, and thus should pay dearly.

¹⁷⁹ Bassett (1994) describes a similar situation for the Northern Côte d'Ivoire where many graziers employ hired herdsmen. He establishes that much of the crop damage is caused by hired herdsmen due to their unfamiliarity with the territory and their disregard for friendly relations with neighbouring farmers. For the role of hired herdsmen in farmer-grazier conflicts in northwest Cameroon see also Harshbarger (1995: 163).

¹⁸⁰ Similarly, Hagberg (2005a: 49) reports for Burkina Faso that farmers often are willing to once or twice forgive graziers who ask for pardon, but then claim financial compensation.

Some Mbororo informants considered it beyond their dignity to dispute publicly with agitated Grassfields women, arguing that the latter tended to demand outrageous sums of money for a damage whose perpetrator was not clearly identified. Besides economic considerations, this argument reflects diverging ideas of the appropriate comportment with regard to ethnicity and gender. According to *pulaaku* (the ‘Mbororo code of conduct’), Mbororo herders are supposed to restrain their emotions in public; thus open conflict should be avoided. In the past, spatial displacement was a common strategy to evade socio-economic or political confrontation. Nowadays, under the conditions of a sedentary lifestyle and administrative impediments, mobility has been replaced by insouciance or active indifference, attitudes that obviously clash with Grassfielders’ approach to conflict resolution.

Both Grassfielders and Mbororo were aware of differences in their social comportment and moral standards. In an official setting, like the Ballotir seminar on farmer-grazier conflicts, both parties tended to stress cultural differences to excuse their own shortcomings and to channel the blame to the other side. Yet on a more personal level individuals were more willing to compromise their ideals.

I will now return to the second act of the farmer-herder role-play: As the farmer and grazier have not been able to resolve their differences on a personal level, the matter is brought to the next higher authority, namely their community leaders. The case has thus advanced to a political matter, in which not only personal but group interests are at stake.

The staged confrontation between the Grassfields chief (*fon*) and the Mbororo leader (*arDo*) illustrates the formulaic charges commonly exchanged between representatives of the two parties. The *fon* claims political and economic ascendancy on the grounds of his group’s anteriority and his relationship with the land. Grassfielders entertain strong economic and ancestral links with the land, and their chiefs act as custodians of the group’s territory (see chapter 4). Most *fons* argue that they welcome and accept Mbororo as permanent residents in their chiefdom, but primacy should be given to people and not cattle. As *fon* Richard Chefon explained,

[g]razing area is an area where cattle can graze without problems, where there are no houses and no farms. When the population grows and the village extends, this becomes difficult. Yet the Mbororo are also ‘natives’ of the place. When the village develops, their residence area will remain part of the village, but their animals have to shift. (*fon* Richard Chefon, Misaje, 13/01/02)

From the herders' viewpoint a spatial separation of the herd and the family is not viable. Most family members are involved in herding and milking duties on a daily basis and entertain close relationships with their animals (cf. Pelican forthc.). Furthermore, with increasing population and expanding agricultural activities, many herders are afraid that their grazing land will be diminished, with the effect of limiting herd growth and endangering the economic basis of their future generations.

Here another issue comes up which has not been addressed in the Ballotiral role-play, and which concerns the reputation and credibility of Grassfields chiefs. As we have seen, farmers and herders compete for land as a basic resource for their respective economic activities. Most often, farmer-grazier disputes arise from crop damage caused either by the herdsman's negligence or by the farmer's encroachment. Farmers occasionally provoke crop damage by cultivating along cattle tracks or riverbanks that serve as animal drinking points. In arbitrating such cases, the *fons* find themselves in an ambiguous situation. Grassfields chiefs who judge in favour of the grazier are often suspected of being corrupted.¹⁸¹

While in popular perception Grassfields chiefs are occasionally suspected of corruption, Mbororo leaders are generally viewed as arrogant to their Grassfields neighbours and as flaunting their economic and political influence (cf. Harshbarger 1995: 149-153). In the Ballotiral role-play the *arDo* is portrayed as a shifty and sly person. He responds to the *fon*'s claims not by querying the Grassfielders' anteriority, but by emphasising the Mbororo's lengthy presence and their significant economic contribution to the chiefdom's development. The *arDo* thus reminds the *fon* that his power rests on Mbororo financial support, in exchange for which he should consider Mbororo interests. Thus the *arDo*'s wily question to the schoolmaster "Would you bring your bicycle to the petrol station?" could also be interpreted as "Would you invest in good relations with the *fon* if he cannot offer you anything in return?" In the play the *arDo* is also portrayed as speaking mainly Fulfulde and only rudimentary

¹⁸¹ Harshbarger (1995: 154) shows that in the Wum area, where farmer-herder conflicts are frequent and at times vicious, local chiefs are accused of encouraging herders' trespassing and occupation of farmland by renting out land, accepting the method of 'graze and pay', and taking bribe. Conversely, in her second field site Tugi farmers tend to trust their chiefs. Harshbarger (1995: 136-139) explains this divergence in terms of different land tenure systems among farmers in the two locations. In Tugi land is perceived as abundant and access is regulated via patrilineal inheritance. Everybody knows who is entitled to specific tracts of land and there is no misunderstanding or scramble for farmland. In Wum farmers' land tenure system is much fuzzier. Large parts of the clan territory are under the custody of the chief, and farmers acquire land by occupation or negotiation with previous occupants. As a result, farmers experience a shortage of land and lay blame both on the *fon* and Mbororo intruders.

Pidgin English. Grassfields informants and administrators often interpreted the Mbororo's lack of mastering Pidgin English as a sign of their contempt for Western education and as an impediment to progress. This point links up with the role of the schoolmaster in the second act of the Ballotiral role-play. He represents members of an educated, liberal elite who attempt to bring the two community leaders together in order to facilitate viable solutions. This is the role administrators and non-governmental organisations like Ballotiral seek to fulfil. Yet in the view of many civil servants and NGO workers, the rural population – in their backwardness and their unwillingness to collaborate – frustrate all attempts towards conflict resolution and progress.

In the last act of the Ballotiral play we observe a third dimension of negotiating farmer-herder relations by appealing to external institutions, namely state officials, here represented by the state counsel. It is a popular conviction that Mbororo herders prefer bribing civil servants over compensating farmers. Mbororo tend to portray themselves as exposed to constant rivalries over access to resources and to assert their long-term insecurity. In the view of many Mbororo herders, appealing to administrative or judicial institutions is a more promising and effective strategy than negotiating farmer-herder relations on the local or individual level. Civil servants are generally aware of the herders' predicament. They tend to perceive them as an uneducated, insecure, yet wealthy minority in need of their services and protection. That Mbororo clients are supposed to pay for those services goes without saying. Following Harshbarger (1995: 155-156, 159-161), civil servants are inclined to support herders; firstly, because the latter have the capital to remunerate them; secondly, because they pay higher taxes; and thirdly, because some civil servants are cattle owners themselves. Nevertheless, all parties are aware that state officials' backing is conditional on their generous remuneration. They are thus widely suspected of corruption and extortion, and held responsible for exacerbating farmer-herder conflicts.

The Ballotiral role-play ends with the Mbororo leader's triumphant words "I have you all in my pocket!". Yet everyone in the audience is aware of the decline of Mbororo wealth and the *arDo*'s self-delusion, which benefits third parties like government officials, while the occurrence of farmer-herder conflicts is perpetuated.

In basing my analysis of discourses of farmer-herder dispute on the drama performance of the Ballotiral staff, I have been able to incorporate the perspectives of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and state agents in a fairly balanced manner. Although the Ballotiral role-play was devised primarily on behalf of the Mbororo population, it entailed a portrayal and social critique of the attitudes and comportment of all three parties, as it was designed to appeal to a mixed audience, including government officials, Grassfielders, and Mbororo. The play condensed a number of popular stereotypes, such as the hysterical Grassfields woman farmer, the aggressive Mbororo herdsman, the opportunistic Grassfields chief, the conceited Mbororo leader, the well-intentioned but ineffectual schoolmaster, and the corrupt state counsel. Furthermore, it reflected the different stages entailed in farmer-herder disputes, namely negotiations on the interpersonal level, on the group level, and on the level involving government officials.

While Ballotiral had organised the seminar with the intention to generate possible new solutions to the persistent issue of farmer-herder disputes, the debate that followed the drama presentation remained trapped in established discourses. State agents, farmers, and herders who participated in the discussion mainly reiterated the stereotypes suggested in the role-play. Moreover, rather than reflecting their own shortcomings, they tended to emphasise the responsibility of the respective other parties. Finally, the inherent ethnicisation of farmer-herder disputes remained largely unquestioned, as farmers were generally identified with Grassfielders, and graziers with Mbororo. The seminar thus yielded no alternative solutions to managing farmer-herder conflicts.

6.4.2 Cattle theft in the Misaje Sub-Division: practical and discursive dimensions

In the Misaje area graziers and administrators seemed more concerned with frequent incidents of cattle theft than farmer-grazier disputes. Cattle theft firstly became an issue in the 1980s and was one of the factors that contributed to the socio-political split of Nchaney and Mbororo graziers. In the 1990s the scale of cattle theft increased significantly, not only in Misaje but the Grassfields in general as well as in other parts of Cameroon (cf. Moritz et al. 2002: 134-136). This development is largely related to the nationwide economic crisis of the late 1980s, followed by the process of political liberalisation in the early 1990s. This period of radical economic and political change,

accompanied by the decline of the civil state, facilitated the upsurge of criminal activities of which cattle theft is just one expression besides other forms of robbery and occult aggression (see chapter 9).

In the following I will first examine the extent to which Mbororo and native graziers in the Misaje area have been affected by cattle theft. Secondly, I will analyse popular discourses of cattle theft and their apparent ethnicisation. I will base my elaborations on an administrative meeting organised by the Divisional Officer for graziers in the Misaje Sub-Division. In addition, I will complement my analysis with information obtained in conversations with graziers and administrators.

In January 2001 the Divisional Officer was alarmed by the frequency of cattle theft reported for the period over Christmas and New Year. He invited herders and civil servants to a public meeting to deliberate on possible causes and solutions. 103 people attended the meeting, and it was established that 223 animals were stolen from 29 victims. Participants were invited to contribute their perspectives on the problem, and a set of recurrent arguments crystallised. The first speaker, a Mbororo man in his early 40s, stood up in rage and laid blame on Mbororo, Grassfielders, and state agents. He called Mbororo youths thieves, blamed local Grassfielders for collaborating with the thieves by demanding and buying stolen meat, and accused palace hierarchies and law enforcement officers of complicity by accepting bribes and releasing thieves. As I later learned, he was an alleged cattle thief himself who had been caught and imprisoned in the early 1990s. Subsequent speakers bought into his argument, stressing one or the other side's responsibility.

6.4.2.1 Mbororo and native graziers in the face of cattle theft

When the statistics of cattle theft were established during the above mentioned meeting, no distinction was made between Mbororo and native graziers. On the basis of my notes, however, I was able to group victims along ethnic lines: out of the 29 victims, 11 were native graziers who had experienced a total loss of 157 cattle; 18 were Mbororo graziers who had lost 66 animals.

It is generally acknowledged that native graziers tend to experience higher losses through cattle theft than Mbororo herders. Pertinent explanations refer to inter-ethnic

rivalry between Mbororo and native graziers, intra-ethnic solidarity among Mbororo, and to the frequent maltreatment of hired herdsmen by native graziers.

Many native graziers are convinced that Mbororo herders are envious of their success and view them as rivals over shared resources. Grassfields interlocutors complained about Mbororo herders' reluctance to assist them in pursuing stolen animals, and accused them of encouraging stealing from native graziers. Moreover, they assumed that Mbororo youths felt morally and socially less restrained from robbing native graziers than their own *country-people* (ethnic fellows).

Mbororo interlocutors agreed with these suppositions to some extent. Yet, even within Mbororo society, solidarity is limited to the family group and social control is relatively weak. If Mbororo cattle are stolen, only close relatives and friends are expected to assist in the follow-up. A number of Mbororo in the Misaje area are known or suspected cattle thieves and apart from denouncing them to the gendarmerie there are no internal social institutions or mechanism to discipline and restrict them. Furthermore, Mbororo interlocutors explained that cattle theft has advanced to a means of settling interpersonal animosities and competition between Mbororo. As they pointed out, even better-off graziers partake in cattle theft – not just to enrich themselves but motivated by jealousy, anger, and vengeance against “their own brothers”.

Another explanation for the higher losses of native graziers through cattle theft referred to the bad treatment of hired herdsmen. It is generally assumed that hired herdsmen show less commitment to their animals than the herd owners. Thus graziers who employ herdsmen run a higher risk of being robbed than those who take care of their animals themselves. Besides, low payment and maltreatment of hired herdsmen further increase their frustration and may prompt their misdemeanour. Native graziers and Mbororo herders differ in their remuneration systems for hired herdsmen. Mbororo herders usually employ a herdsman to take care of 50 to 80 animals. The standard salary for five months ranges between 40,000 and 60,000 FCFA (€60 to 90) in addition to feeding and housing. Most native graziers have fewer cattle, which they entrust to a herdsman to join with his own animals. They remunerate the herdsman according to the number of cattle, paying a standard rate of 1,000 FCFA (€1,50) for each animal for a period of five months. In addition, they provide catering on a weekly basis, i.e. either a bucket of maize and additional food items or 1,000 FCFA. In comparing the two remuneration systems, it becomes clear that the salary paid by

native graziers constitutes only a supplementary income for hired herdsmen and is insufficient to live on. Thus hired herdsmen who have no alternative to augment their income may be tempted into cattle theft.

The argument that native graziers promoted the occurrence of cattle theft by maltreating their herdsmen was also raised during the administrative meeting on cattle theft in the Misaje Sub-Division. In addition, blame was laid on anxious Mbororo parents, ravenous Grassfielders, and corrupt state agents for preventing the successful prosecution of cattle thieves.

6.4.2.2 Ethnic stereotypes and discourses of cattle theft

Administrators and meeting participants conceived of cattle theft as a well organised chain of individuals who fulfil complementary functions; starting with the ringleader to the thief, to the middleman, to the butcher, trader, and consumer. All these roles are considered complementary and essential for the functioning of cattle theft in the Misaje area, and are ascribed to different population groups. While the act of stealing is generally attributed to Mbororo youths, Grassfielders are associated with the consumption end, and state agents with facilitating illegal transactions.

Meeting participants elaborated on the various ways Mbororo are thought to partake and contribute to the occurrence of cattle theft. Mbororo youths are generally held responsible for the act of stealing, as they are perceived to possess the required skills. Mbororo adults are blamed for failing in their parental duties and thus facilitating cattle theft. As one participant put it:

The youths come to the village and get drunk, whereas they are not used to drinking alcohol. On the other hand, youths have to be together with other youths from the bush, town or village. We, the villagers, cannot take care of Mbororo children in the village like of our own. This you [Mbororo] have to do yourself. (native grazier, cattle theft meeting, Misaje, 15/01/2001)

Furthermore, participants blamed Mbororo parents for their practice of bailing their relatives caught in the act of stealing in order to prevent disgrace to the family. These complaints against Mbororo involvement in cattle theft implied a lack of social control within Mbororo society, a concern shared by both Grassfielders and Mbororo interlocutors.

In addition, Grassfielders criticised Mbororo for their reluctance to integrate into the local community; that is, to pay due respect to Grassfields authorities and to treat their neighbours as equals. Arguably, these failings have facilitated the occurrence of cattle theft. Village heads argued that they are unable to distinguish between resident Mbororo and strangers or potential thieves, as most Mbororo failed to introduce themselves properly. Many Grassfields interlocutors interpreted cattle theft as a corollary of unsettled farmer-grazier problems. Native graziers accused their Mbororo neighbours of instigating cattle theft out of envy and contempt. While these concerns are not shared by Grassfielders and Mbororo in the same way, many Mbororo interlocutors confirmed that Mbororo generally tend to maintain social distance to their Grassfields neighbours, despite individual interethnic friendships (see chapter 8). As they explained, this relatively restrained attitude towards non-Mbororo is part of *pulaaku*, the 'Mbororo code of conduct', and entails a stress on cultural and religious difference.

At the other end of the imagined producer-consumer chain are butchers, traders, and clients who are thought to instigate acts of cattle theft by buying cheap meat, obviously of stolen cows. As pointed out during the meeting, Grassfielders have the reputation of being voracious meat-eaters. For example, unlike Muslims, many Grassfielders do not hesitate to eat the meat of dead animals. Thus, when a cow died accidentally, its Mbororo owner often gives the cadaver to his Grassfields neighbours or the local *fon* who are happy recipients (cf. Bocquené 2002: 250-251). Particularly during important festivities, the demand for beef is generally high, as each family group and voluntary association aims at sharing a good meal to celebrate the respective occasion. Concurringly, the rate of cattle theft increases cyclically with its highest peak at Christmas and New Year. Other occasions triggering an increase in cattle theft are Islamic celebrations. It is well known among Grassfielders that Mbororo youths are tempted into illicitly selling their parents' or stolen cattle, as they need money for entertainment during those festivities.

The Divisional Officer cautioned the Grassfields chiefs who attended the meeting to be alerted to illegal transactions. Moreover, he emphasised that traders and butchers who did not inquire about the origin of sales animals or intentionally concealed the identity of meat were considered liable of collaboration.

The third party that participants identified as collaborators in the business of cattle theft are law enforcement officers who fail to ensure the punishment of culprits and

allegedly enrich themselves by extorting money from victims as well as thieves. *ArDo* Benjamin, for example, was robbed of eleven animals, some of which were recovered at Ndu. He was asked to come to the gendarmerie in Ndu to identify the thief and make a statement.

After the statement I went to eat. When I came back, the commandant told me the boy had escaped. When I received the news, death was at my hand. If I had a knife or a rope, I would have killed myself. Can this be true that the brigade has only one chain!?! How can that boy escape!?! Now, as I am here, the person who killed me was the commandant of the brigade. He allowed the thief to run away. How can he catch a man who stole cattle for a million and something francs CFA and just leave him carelessly!? I would have killed myself, and my family would have been informed that I died in the brigade. (Benjamin Kokila, Nfume, 03/01/02)

While this report is rather melodramatic, it gives a fair idea of victims' desperation about the malfunctioning of state services, in particular the gendarmerie. Concurringly, the records of the legal counselling programme of Ballotiral are full of complaints of illegal extortion raised against gendarmerie officers. However, not all civil servants comport themselves in the same way; often they do not support the venality of their colleagues. For example, the Divisional Officer (DO) of the Misaje Sub-Division tried hard to get cattle theft under control. Yet he, too, was said to accept 'gifts' of cattle and money from Mbororo whose sons were suspected cattle thieves. The DO compared the organisation of cattle theft in Misaje to the Italian mafia, with individuals being threatened of having their cows stolen, if they did not collaborate. During the meeting the Divisional Officer emphasised that, if cattle theft should be eliminated, it required cooperation on all levels of society, including the assistance of Mbororo herders, native graziers, traders, butchers, meat consumers, Grassfields and Mbororo authorities, and civil servants. He recommended a number of measures; herders should keep their animals in night-paddocks and check them regularly, herdsmen should not move at night, and *fons* and *arDos* should set up vigilante groups. The Divisional Officer claimed that he was close to dismantling the Misaje cattle mafia. He also came up with administrative measures to reduce cattle theft, such as limiting cattle movement to day-time only. For their implementation, however, he needed funds which were not available. Finally, before the DO succeeded in realising his plans, he was transferred to another Sub-Division. His successor was

less concerned with cattle theft and focused on other issues, such as the containment of occult activities (see chapter 9).

As my analysis of the administrative meeting on cattle theft has shown, there is a tendency among administrators and the local population to perceive cattle theft in terms of established discourses and ethnic stereotypes. Yet, unlike in the case of farmer-herder disputes, there is no clear distinction of victims and perpetrators along ethnic lines, as both Mbororo and native graziers have been affected. Instead, cattle theft is imagined as an organised chain of criminal activities in which each group fulfils a distinct function; while Mbororo youths count as potential thieves, Grassfielders count as potential instigators and clients. In addition, corrupt state agents are thought to function as auxiliaries and to frustrate any attempts at legal prosecution. Thus, in the case of cattle theft and farmer-herder disputes, state agents are seen as playing a crucial role and as contributing to the perpetuation of existing conflicts.

6.5 Conclusion

In concluding the chapter, I address the question suggested in the title; namely if, in the context of economic diversification, relations between Grassfielders and Mbororo have evolved from complementarity to competition? Moritz (2006a) asked a similar question and based his analysis on the existing literature. He concludes that the overall effect of the agro-pastoral conversion, widespread among pastoralists across Africa, on farmer-herder conflict remains unclear. With my case material I cannot offer a general answer to this question. Yet my detailed analyses of changing economic practices and inter-group relations in the Western Grassfields suggest that processes of economic diversification have intensified rather than reduced the potential for conflict, as competition over natural resources, particularly land, has generally increased. It would be simplistic, however, to describe farmer-herder relations as having developed from economic complementarity to competition. As we have seen above, the relationship between the two economic groups has been overshadowed by incidents of crop damage and arguments over access to land from the moment cattle were introduced to the Grassfields. Thus, even in the early phase, when Mbororo and Grassfielders occupied distinct economic niches, their relationship

was complementary only in terms of their produces (meat and crops), and not with respect to their economic practices and land use patterns.

Another feature of farmer-herder relations in the Western Grassfields is the apparent disjunction of corresponding discourses and practices, and the general tendency to perceive economic conflict in ethnic terms. Similar to my distinction of discourses and practices, Breusers et al. (1998) proposed to differentiate frontstage (public) and backstage (private) discourses in emic descriptions of socio-economic relations between Mossi and FulBe in Burkina Faso. There, many Mossi farmers are also cattle owners and entrust their animals to FulBe herdsman with whom they often entertain friendly relations. While in private they may acknowledge these relationships, in public they generally conceal any social and economic relations with FulBe herders, and endorse negative ethnic stereotypes. Guichard (1996, 2000) observed similar attitudes among FulBe in Benin regarding their socio-economic relations with their Bariba neighbours. A similar approach exists also in the Grassfields; though to a lesser degree, and more on the side of the Mbororo than native graziers. Yet discourses on farmer-herder dispute and cattle theft in the Grassfields include a relevant third party, namely corrupt state agents.

Here we return to a point stressed before, concerning the impact of changing administrative frameworks on farmer-herder relations. By elevating farmer-herder conflict to a pertinent administrative problem, while failing to provide efficient strategies of conflict resolution, the British colonial and more so the post-colonial administration have contributed to framing the relationship between Grassfielders and Mbororo in terms of competition over natural resources, even in regions where this is actually less of a problem. Moreover, by endorsing complex ethnic-occupational identities rooted in the early colonial period, governmental and non-governmental agents have contributed to the strengthening of ethnic stereotypes which are at the heart of discourses of farmer-herder dispute and cattle theft.

In my reading, farmer-herder conflict and cattle theft will remain an unresolved issue as long as Grassfielders, Mbororo, and administrators continue to perceive economic relations between the two groups in terms of established discourses and ethnic stereotypes that leave little scope for alternative approaches.

7 HAUSA HISTORY, ECONOMY, AND IDENTITY IN THE MISAJE AREA

A third significant population group in the Misaje area is the Hausa. Their settlement in the Western Grassfields dates back to the early 20th century when merchants and Muslim scholars coming from northern Nigeria established themselves at Bamenda, and later expanded to the rural areas. Nowadays, Hausa settlements are found in more than 20 locales in the Western Grassfields, including Misaje and Dumbo. With less than 1% of the province's population, the Hausa are a minority.¹⁸² However, in the Misaje area they are well represented, as they comprise 5 to 10% of the sub-division's population.¹⁸³

The Hausa community in the Western Grassfields is ethnically heterogeneous. It is comprised of the descendants of early Hausa traders as well as Town FulBe from northern Cameroon and Nigeria, and Grassfields individuals who converted to Islam. Moreover, Hausa tend to congregate with Mbororo with whom they share religious and economic ties. Over the second half of the 20th century, Hausa men and women have engaged in a variety of economic activities; nonetheless, they are still attributed complex ethnic-occupational identities that are rooted in the pre-colonial and colonial period. The Hausa diverge from their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours in two striking features, namely the indeterminacy of their conception of ethnicity, and the absence of political self-representation to the state. It is my aim to analyse and explain these divergences on the basis of my case material.

7.1 In search of Hausa identity

Right from the beginning of my research it became clear that 'Hausa' is a broad, ill-defined category that comprises members of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The ethnonym Hausa is popularly employed as a generic term for Muslim village dwellers and is also used by the latter in their ethnic self-identification. Yet, Hausa

¹⁸² According to the population census of 1953, the Hausa population of the Western Grassfields comprised approximately 3,500 persons vis-à-vis a total of 420,000 people (N. Awasom 1984: 1, Boutrais 1995/96: 636). Later censuses indicated 2,700 Hausa for 1964, and 3,100 for 1968 (Boutrais 1995/96: 636-637). Subsequent population censuses no longer differentiated between ethnic groups. It is unlikely that the Hausa population has increased proportionally more than the Grassfields population.

¹⁸³ This estimate is based on the village survey of Misaje Town of 2001, conducted by my research team (see chapter 2).

and non-Hausa informants frequently noted that only a few of the so-called Hausa in Misaje are of actual Hausa descent, i.e. individuals who can trace back their origin to the Hausa homeland, in particular to Kano. Most were identified as Town FulBe (Huya) from northern Cameroon and Nigeria or as Grassfielders who converted to Islam.

These statements provoke two questions. Firstly, why do Muslim village dwellers voluntarily subsume themselves under the ethnic category of Hausa and not Town FulBe as in northern Cameroon? Secondly, what is the character and content of Hausa ethnicity? The first question may be answered by historical contingency. Most contemporary Hausa settlements were founded by Hausa merchants who settled in the Grassfields in the early 20th century. Town FulBe (Huya) and other Muslim migrants only came later, and integrated in already established Hausa communities with whom they shared a number of affinities in terms of socio-cultural, spatial, and economic organisation.¹⁸⁴ It is highly probable that, if the historical order of Hausa and Huya immigration were reversed, the communities nowadays conceived as Hausa would be termed Huya. Moreover, as I will elaborate in chapter 8, the situation in the Grassfields is quite different from northern Cameroon where the Town FulBe are the politically and economically dominant group.

The second question concerning the character and content of Hausa identity is more complex, and is a subject widely dealt with in Hausa studies, particularly from the 1960s and 1970s.

7.1.1 Theoretical debate on Hausa ethnicity

The literature on the Hausa is substantial, as they are a widely dispersed group. Firstly, they constitute the main population of the Hausa homeland in northern Nigeria and southern Niger.¹⁸⁵ Secondly, Hausa (im)migrant¹⁸⁶ communities are found throughout Western and Central Africa.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Boutrais (1995/96: 638) remarks that the character of Hausa settlements changed to varying degrees with the advent of other Muslim population groups, including Town FulBe/Huya, Kanuri, Islamised Bamoun and Grassfields converts. Some hamlets, e.g. Konene situated on Bum territory, remained predominantly Hausa, while in other places like Tadu (close to Kumbo) the initial Hausa population was outnumbered.

¹⁸⁵ Hausaland is said to consist of seven original or 'legitimate' Hausa states (*hausa bakwai*) and seven false or 'bastard' states (*banza bakwai*) (cf. Hill 1972: 267, Sutton 1979: 195-199, Wall 1988: 8).

¹⁸⁶ In the literature on the Hausa diaspora there is no conscious distinction between migrant and immigrant communities. I consider Hausa communities in northwest Cameroon as immigrant communities. Most Hausa in the Misaje area have settled here for many years, and their children

The theme of Hausa ethnicity became popular in the context of research on the Hausa diaspora in Nigeria, Ghana, and Chad.¹⁸⁸ Best known is the work of Abner Cohen (1969) on Hausa (im)migrant communities in urban centres of southern Nigeria. Yet ethnicity emerged as a topic also in the literature on Hausaland (e.g. Adamu 1976, Barkow 1976, Nicolas 1975, Paden 1970). The following quote pointedly illustrates the difficulties researchers generally faced in delineating Hausa identity:

There can be no cut-and-dry definition of a Hausa person. This is because different criteria were, and still are, used by different people at different times to define who was or should be regarded as Hausa. Some people used purely historical claims to Hausa ethnicity, others used cultural traits and social values as their yardstick, while others still used religion plus language. There are also people who on very rare occasions prefer to use occupational specialisation in commerce. (Adamu 1976: 5)

Researchers diverge in their assessment of the Hausa ethnic category. Anthropologists who have studied Hausa in Hausaland tend to characterise them as a linguistic group with a particular cultural system or civilisation (e.g. Smith 1952: 333, 1959: 239, Barkow 1972: 317-318, 1973: 59, Sutton 1979: 199, Wall 1988: 7). Conversely, researchers working on the Hausa diaspora tend to comprehend them as political and economic interest groups that are organised along the criteria of religious affiliation, occupational organisation, settlement pattern, and language (e.g. Cohen 1966: 33, 1974, Salomone 1975c: 96). Furthermore, as Nicolas (1975) shows, Hausa ethnicity may comprise a number of sub-ethnicities on the basis of other population groups being integrated into the Hausa ethnic category; the examples he mentions are Hausa-Fulani (equivalent to Hausa of Huya descent in the Grassfields), Hausa-Kanuri, and Hausa-Buzu.

In Cohen's (1969, 1974, 1981) writings the Hausa feature as a prime example for a constructionist and instrumentalist model of ethnicity. His work (1965, 1966, 1969) on the economic and political organisation of Hausa in Yoruba towns during the colonial and early post-colonial period is most significant with regard to my study of

have been born here. They have no intentions of returning to their places of origin but understand themselves as local citizens.

¹⁸⁷ As Murray Last (e-mail communication, 09/09/2005) pointed out, the dispersal of the Hausa and their language only began in the 18th century, whereas before then Hausa was only spoken in Hausaland. On the contemporary dispersal of Hausa communities and the Hausa language see Kirk-Greene (1967: 89) and Wall (1988: 6).

¹⁸⁸ Researchers who have worked on the Hausa diaspora in West and Central Africa are Paden (1970), Salomone (1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1980), Sanjek (1977), Winchester (1976) and Works (1976).

Hausa in the Western Grassfields. In both settings the Hausa constitute an (im)migrant minority in a non-Muslim environment. In both regions they controlled the long-distance trade in kola nuts and cattle during the colonial period. As Cohen argues, Hausa identity constitutes an important political and economic capital and the key condition to individuals' participation in trading activities. Moreover, definitions of Hausa identity differ at home and in the diaspora. Among Hausa (im)migrants in Ibadan, internal status differences are largely ignored and ethnic boundaries are kept flexible and permeable. While (im)migrant Hausa communities in Ibadan and the Western Grassfields may have a lot in common, my study differs from Cohen's with regard to its time frame and its focus on a rural environment. I will critically engage with Cohen's findings in the course of my explorations and in the conclusion to this chapter.

7.1.2 Sources and modalities of Hausa historiography

My subsequent explorations are based on two sources of information, namely academic literature and interviews with Hausa individuals. Moreover, I have benefited from vital comments by Murray Last on an earlier draft of this chapter that I have incorporated into the text.¹⁸⁹

In my outline of Hausa history in the Western Grassfields I draw on the doctoral thesis of the historian N. Awasom (1984) who describes the economic development and socio-political integration of Hausa communities during the colonial period. Additional data on the Hausa's establishment and their relationship with their Mbororo neighbours is found in Boutrais' (1995/96) work. Regarding Hausa communities in the Misaje area, some information is included in Newton's (1935) colonial assessment report. My elaborations on the Hausa community in the Misaje area are based primarily on conversations and life history interviews with local Hausa informants. Most interviews were facilitated by my Hausa woman-friend Talatu Yusufa, and were generally held in Fulfulde or Pidgin English, as nearly all Hausa in the Misaje area are conversant in either or both of these languages. Occasionally, Talatu or Haruna acted as interpreters. We talked to 22 interlocutors of different gender and age groups. Many conversations produced rich life histories with relevant

¹⁸⁹ I would also like to thank Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov for valuable comments on an earlier version of the chapter.

information on diverse subjects, including Hausa history and identity but also economy, interethnic relations, married life, and religion.¹⁹⁰

As a result of the diverse character of the data obtained from Hausa informants, the subsequent elaborations on Hausa history, economy, and identity will be of a different nature than the Nchaney and Mbororo histories deployed in chapters 4 and 5. Moreover, Hausa approaches to historiography differ significantly from Nchaney attitudes and come closer to Mbororo modalities. Similar to the latter, the Hausa have no collective historical narrative. Their accounts are even more limited, referring to family units or individuals. Moreover, Hausa informants' historical memory hardly went beyond two generations. Each individual is expected to have a more or less profound knowledge of his/her parents' movements and their establishment in the area. In-depth knowledge is accredited to elderly and experienced community members who spent large parts of their lifetime in Misaje. Youths, however, might hold vital information acquired from relatives and friends. Furthermore, Hausa society is characterised by a significant gender segregation which finds expression in a duality of life worlds, visions, and socio-economic goals (cf. Barkow 1972, Callaway 1984, Schildkrout 1982, 1983, Smith 1959). This was also recognised by Hausa interlocutors who recommended interviewing both men and women whose historical perspectives are seen as complementary.

Hausa history diverges from Nchaney and Mbororo history also with regard to its content and orientation. While Nchaney history is primarily a reconstruction of Nchaney political relations, and Mbororo history a composite of lineage migration and settlement histories, Hausa history is a recollection of individual economic trajectories. Outside of interview situations the topic of Hausa history rarely emerged. Moreover, Hausa informants expressed little interest in their history's codification. I would like to stress, however, that this finding is specific for Hausa in the Grassfields, where they constitute an immigrant minority that has established itself only in the 20th century. Conversely, Hausa in northern Nigeria have produced elaborate traditions of oral and written historiography (cf. Hassan & Shuaibu 1952, Smith 1961).

Finally, in 2004 I sent an earlier draft of this chapter to Cameroon and asked my friend and host Nji Patrick to discuss it with Hausa informants in Misaje. Their responses were generally positive. Many expressed their satisfaction that I had finally

¹⁹⁰ The information on marriage and religion has been used in chapter 8 where I will focus on religious conversion and intermarriage between Grassfielders and Muslims in the Misaje area.

fulfilled my promise to write the history of the Hausa community in Misaje, analogous to the Nchaney and Mbororo histories sent earlier.

7.2 Hausa in the Grassfields: a historical reconstruction of economic practices

Before engaging with Hausa informants' historical accounts, I will provide a more general sketch of their establishment in northwest Cameroon. I base my historical reconstruction on the studies of N. Awasom (1984) and Boutrais (1995/96: 68-70, 99-101, 635-641), and complement it with a small selection of photographs by Basel missionaries who worked in the study region during the first half of 20th century.¹⁹¹

As the subsequent narrative will show, Hausa history is best understood as a history of specific socio-economic practices. In addition to describing the economic trajectories of Hausa immigrants in the Grassfields during the colonial period, I will elaborate on their relationship with their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours and the colonial administration.

7.2.1 Hausa establishment in the Western Grassfields

Hausa south- and westward migration from northern Nigeria was initiated in the early 19th century by the FulBe *jihad*, which simultaneously affected Mbororo communities (see chapter 5). Hausa migrants reached the Western Grassfields in the late 19th century. Their settlement, however, became feasible only after the German colonial power had pacified the area.¹⁹² The first and hitherto most important Hausa hamlet was founded around 1903 at Bamenda where the Germans had established a military base known as 'the Bamenda Station'. Most early Hausa migrants worked as guides, carriers, and servants for German colonialists. Subsequently, more Hausa migrants were attracted, most of whom engaged in long-distance trade with kola, textiles, and salt. Within a few years, the initial group of approximately 30 male bachelors rose to more than 100 individuals, including men, women, and children. Subsequently, first off-shoots of the Bamenda Hausa community were set up in Bali, Nso, Ndop, and Sabongari whose rulers welcomed the stranger population for economic and political

¹⁹¹ My thanks go to the Archives of mission 21 / Basel Mission, in particular its former head Paul Jenkins, for making these photographs available to me. In the meantime, the collection of historical photographs has been digitalised and is accessible on the net (<http://www.bmpix.org>).

¹⁹² For a detailed description of the Hausa's establishment during the German and British colonial period see N. Awasom (1984: 33-65).

reasons. The chiefs of Mankon and Bafut, on the other hand, were reluctant to receive Hausa settlers whom they saw as allies and prospective spies of the Germans.

After the downfall of the German colonial power, Hausa communities in the Grassfields scattered. Some transferred to Fouban, others repatriated to Nigeria. When the British assumed control over Southern Cameroons, they encouraged the return of Hausa migrants. By 1918 the Hausa settlement at Bamenda numbered again approximately 100 inhabitants. Subsequently, more Hausa migrants were attracted, and within less than two decades more than 20 Hausa hamlets were established in the Western Grassfields, including Misaje.¹⁹³

Two questions emerge from this historical account of Hausa establishment in the Grassfields. Firstly, why did German and British colonialists invest in Hausa presence? Secondly, what were the long-term incentives for Hausa migrants to settle in the Bamenda area?

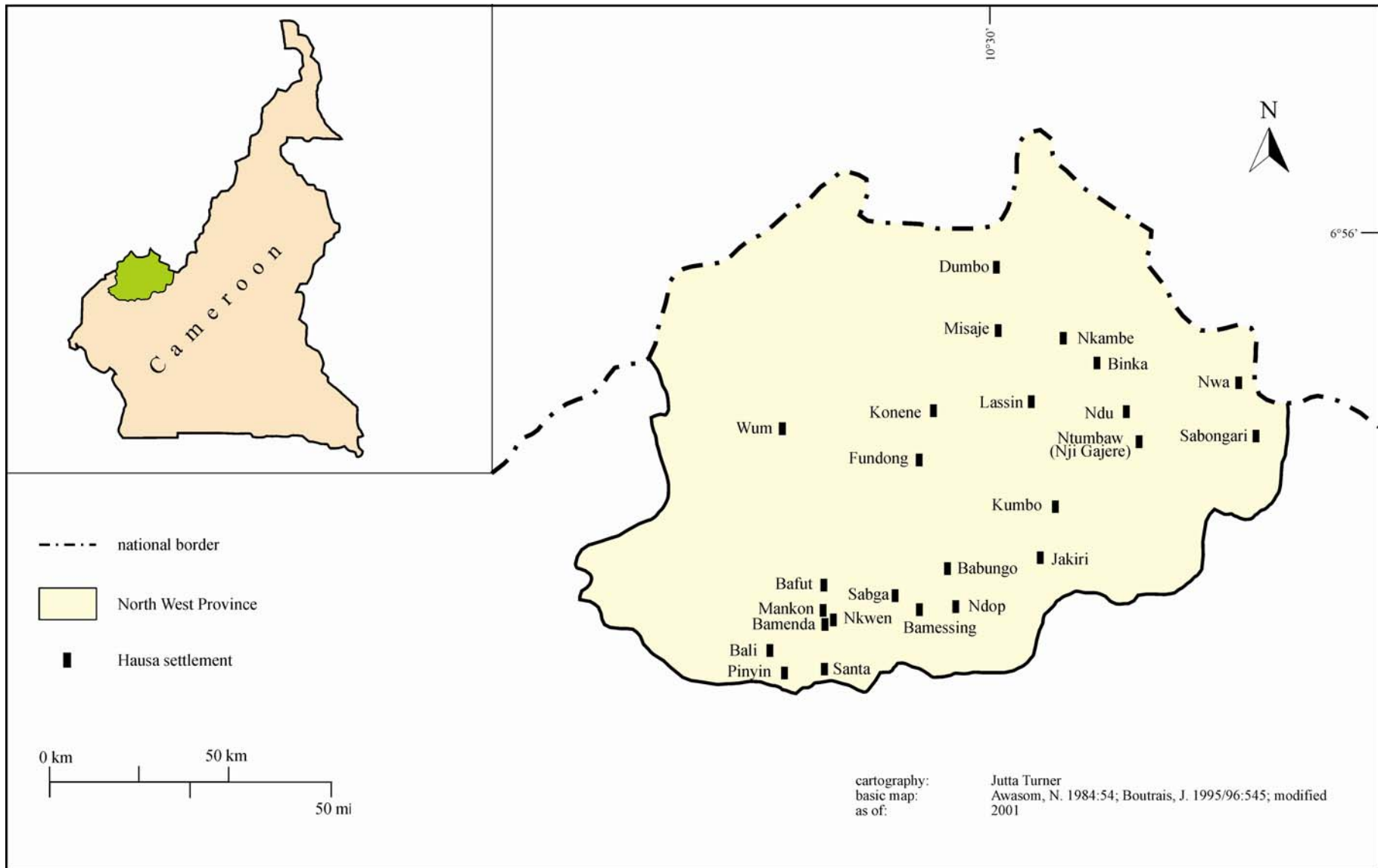
N. Awasom (1984: 34, 46) accredits the Hausa a privileged position in the German and later British colonial system that served the interests of both parties. Due to their commercial activities, Hausa merchants were taxed higher than their farming neighbours. Moreover, they frequently acted as intelligence agents for the colonial administration. N. Awasom (1984: 40) further argues that, as a consequence of the German presence beforehand, British administrators encountered Grassfields chiefs' reluctance and uncooperativeness. They thus relied on Hausa facilitators to implement their policy of indirect rule. Newton (1935: 21) comments on the popularity of Hausa language in the Misaje area, which most probably ensued from his working with a Hausa interpreter. Boutrais (1995/96: 68) mentions another motive of the Germans in support of the Hausa's economic activities, assuming that the availability of beef supplied by Hausa merchants would counteract cannibalistic practices in the southern regions, which they attributed to the absence of alternative protein supply.

Hausa migrants' incentives to settle in the Grassfields were of political and economic nature. German and British colonial administrators offered their assistance and protection to Hausa merchants. The villages that Hausa chose to settle in were either rich in trade goods or large enough to provide a market. A basic requirement for their

¹⁹³ According to N. Awasom (1984: 53-55), the exact number of Hausa hamlet was 25. He derived this information from an invitation letter that had been issued to 25 Hausa chiefs by the District Officer in 1947. Moreover, N. Awasom (1984: 54) provides a map of the Western Grassfields in which all the major Hausa settlements from 1918 to 1960 are indicated. On the current dispersal of Hausa communities in the Western Grassfields see map 7.1, in which N. Awasom's data is complemented with information drawn from Boutrais (1995/96: 545).

establishment, however, was an agreement with the village head to guarantee the settlers' safety. This was not always achieved. Particularly the areas at the western fringes of the Bamenda Plateau, while rich in trade goods like palm oil and kernels, turned out to be dangerous and unsuitable for Hausa settlement.

While N. Awasom (1984: 56-60) attributes this to the segmentary organisation of the local population, Boutrais (1995/96: 636-639) notes that Hausa settlers established themselves more easily in smaller rather than large and powerful chiefdoms. Furthermore, the Hausa's noteworthy presence in rural areas constitutes a particularity of the Grassfields, as Hausa migrant populations are generally perceived as city dwellers. Following census data of 1967, the Hausa population of the Grassfields comprised 2,700 inhabitants out of whom 1,350 lived in rural areas, 700 in major villages, and 650 in the urban centre of Bamenda (Boutrais 1995/96: 636) (see map 7.1).



Map 7.1: Current Hausa settlements in the Western Grassfields

In the early 20th century, the Hausa community in the Grassfields comprised two occupational categories. These were stationary settlers who made their living from petty trade, craftsmanship, teaching the Koran and producing traditional medicine. The second group were itinerant long-distance traders who relied on the stationary Hausa population for accommodation, services, and supplies.¹⁹⁴ Together the two occupational categories operated similar economic systems, though much less institutionalised and elaborate than the *mai gida* or landlord scheme of Hausa migrants in Ibadan, as described by Cohen (1966, 1969: 71-97; see also N. Awasom 1984: 94-104).

Photograph 7.1: Resident Hausa community in Bali



Source: Archives mission 21 / Basel Mission, E-30.83.085
Caption: "Hausa corner in the small market in Bali"
Photographer: Eduard Wunderli
Date: 1928

This photograph illustrates the everyday life of the settled Hausa community in Bali. The Hausa quarter was established in 1906 and subsequently expanded to include also non-Hausa villagers.

¹⁹⁴ Following Adamu (1976: 9-10) Hausa trade contains four types of activities, including stationary market traders (*yan kasuwa*), itinerant haberdashers (*yan koli*), long-distance traders (*fatake*) and professional caravan leaders (*madugai*). In the Grassfields all categories were represented with the exception of caravan leaders.

7.2.2 Long-distance trade: early 20th century to 1930s

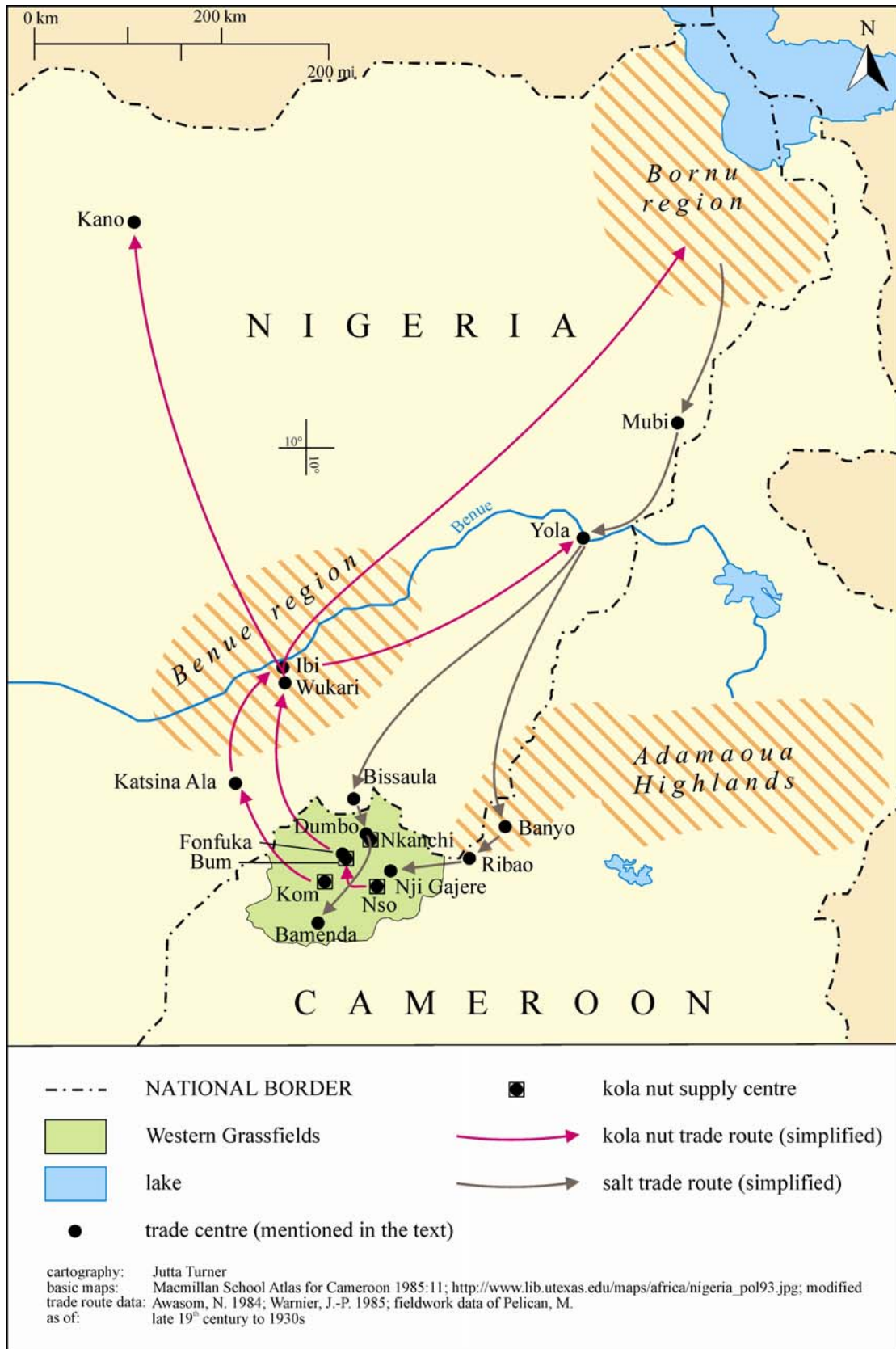
Hausa merchants were widely involved in long-distance trade, in which the Misaje area, alongside many other locales in the Grassfields, featured as a station of supply and demand. During the pre-colonial and colonial period the Grassfields constituted a rich and vibrant area of regional and long-distance trade (Chilver 1977, Rowlands 1979, Warnier 1985). A wide range of locally produced goods including palm oil, iron, agricultural products, small livestock, and crafts products were exchanged within the area. Long-distance trade relations connected the Grassfields with trading centres along the Benue River and on the Adamaoua Highlands (see map 7.2). Trade items comprised kola and cattle (in pre-colonial times also slaves and ivory) which were sold or exchanged in return for goods like cloth, garments, salt, and potash from the northern areas. The subsequent explorations will focus on Hausa involvement in the long-distance trade with kola in return for garments and salt.

Kola nuts were one of the main export products from the Grassfields to the Muslim north where the demand for this stimulant was high (Chilver 1977: 163-164, Warnier 1985: 106-107).¹⁹⁵ The indigenous species *cola anomala* was grown in many parts of the Grassfields since pre-colonial times. According to Chilver (1977: 163), the kola nuts from Bali, a chiefdom in the southwest of the Western Grassfields, were considered particularly tasty and compared to the red kola of Gonja (in northern Ghana). By the 1920s Grassfielders had expanded their kola plantations significantly, as trading activities were facilitated by the region's pacification (N. Awasom 1984: 100, Chilver 1977: 164). Kola trees currently found at Nkanchi were most likely introduced during that period.¹⁹⁶

The most dynamic phase in the kola trade lasted from 1916 to the early 1930s and involved both Hausa and Grassfielders. While N. Awasom (1984: 106) attributes a leading role to Hausa merchants, Boutrais (1995/96: 636-637) stresses the significant involvement of Grassfields traders from the Nso and Bum chiefdoms which constituted crucial stations along the kola trade routes.

¹⁹⁵ On the kola trade in southern Nigeria see also Cohen (1966).

¹⁹⁶ On a vegetational map drawn in 1917 by Kurt Hassert kola trees were indicated only in the areas of Nso and Ntam's. As trading centres feature Kentu (Mambila), Ntam's (Bum territory), Kumbo (Nso) and Fouban (eastern Grassfields). However, it indicates oil palms in the vicinity of Misaje, in particular at Nfume, Kwei, and Fonfuka.



Map 7.2: Hausa long-distance trade between Nigeria and the Western Grassfields

The main route followed during the pre-colonial and colonial period passed from Fonfuka to Wukari, from where the nuts were directed to Hausaland (Kano) and the Bornu region. An alternative but less frequented route passed through Kom and Katsina Ala (N. Awasom 1984: 89, Warnier 1985: 104, 107). Currently, kola nuts are transported by truck to northern Cameroon, with Banyo being the focal redistribution centre (Boutrais 1995/96: 657).

Merchants did not solely rely on kola, but supplemented their trade with additional goods. These included textiles, salt, and minor merchandises, such as spices, beads, tools, and household items imported from the Benue region and Adamaoua Highlands.

Textiles have been a prominent trade item in West Africa since the pre-colonial period (Chilver 1977: 157-158, Warnier 1985: 109-114). Hausa garments, in particular, have been popular because of their rich design, embroidery work, and quality.¹⁹⁷ In the Grassfields, textiles were relatively uncommon until the 1930s. Commoners and women clad simply; women dressed with a wisp of grass fibre, while men wore a loin cloth of bark fibre or fabric (Warnier 1985: 109).¹⁹⁸ Grassfields notables, on the other hand, had the prerogative of dressing in textiles. According to Warnier (1985: 141-142), Hausa gowns (*riga* in Hausa, *boubou* in French) were available before the German conquest and popular among Grassfields notables. Even nowadays, certain fabrics and garments classified as 'Hausa style' are much appreciated across a wide section of the Grassfields population, and constitute a significant trade good imported from Nigeria.

The trade with textiles was the monopoly of Hausa merchants. The main centres of cotton cultivation and cloth fabrication were in Hausaland and the Benue region (Warnier 1985: 113). Moreover, as Chilver (1977: 158) remarks, the import of European textiles was also handled by Hausa traders stationed near Banyo.

Another relevant item of long-distance trade to the Grassfields was salt for human consumption (*sodium chloride*), gained and imported from salt springs in the Benue region (Warnier 1985: 102-108). Additional supply came from minor salt springs in the Cross-River area, and small quantities of maritime salt were imported from the

¹⁹⁷ On Hausa garments and their popularity and wide circulation across West Africa see Adamu (1978: 8-9, 187-188).

¹⁹⁸ The Archives of mission 21 / Basel Mission include a number of photographs that show Grassfielders dressed in grass or bark fibres; among them a photograph taken in 1912 by Martin Göhring, showing the wives of the king dancing in Bali (file E-30.27.18).

coast (Chilver 1977: 158-159). A second type of salt (*sodium bicarbonate*), used for animal treatment and commonly known as *kanwa* (Pidgin English for potash), was imported from the Bornu region, and was in high demand among Mbororo for their cattle herds. While Mbororo graziers in the southern areas of the Grassfields benefited from local salt springs, those in the northern parts depended entirely on salt imports.¹⁹⁹

The salt trade route from the Bornu region to the Grassfields was far (800 – 1,000 km) and involved a number of stations where the goods changed hands (Boutrais 1995/96: 99-101, see also map 7.2). Bornuans transported slabs of potash to the big market of Mubi at the foot of the Mandara Mountains. Donkeys were loaded and led along the Benue valley towards Yola. From there carriers transported the plates to the Bamenda Highlands via the Bissaula-Dumbo cattle trade route. A second, but less popular route passed from Yola to Banyo to Ribao, entering the Grassfields via Nji Gajere (Ntumbaw)²⁰⁰, a Hausa settlement in the northwest of the Bamenda Highlands. As the trade with salt constituted a lucrative business, Hausa merchants competed with local traders from Nso, Nkambe, and Ndu (Boutrais 1995/96: 100).

¹⁹⁹ As Boutrais (1995/96: 236) explains, Mbororo deem it necessary to give salt cures to their animals every six months. Without occasional salt consumption cattle become nervous and perturbed in their grazing. Hence, the existence of salt licks constituted an important factor guiding Mbororo migration (see chapter 5).

²⁰⁰ The original toponym is Ntumbaw, but Hausa and Mbororo refer to it as Nji Gajere, a Fulfulde construct that means ‘the place of short Nji’ (Nuhu Salihu Jafaru, e-mail communication, 26/02/2005).

Photograph 7.2: Donkey caravan



Source: Archives mission 21 / Basel Mission, E-30.85.164
Caption: "Haussas on trek with donkeys"
Photographer: Wilhelm Zürcher
Date: between 1932 and 1939

Donkeys are not very common in the Grassfields. As Jingi, a Hausa youth in Misaje, explains, "Hausa traders used to go to Kumbo to buy kola nuts, take them to Nigeria, and exchange them for donkeys and other things. They carried the goods on the donkeys, and later sold the goods and some of the donkeys. Since the Nchaney were not hard-working and did not have anything to transport on the donkeys, they did not have any use for them. The donkeys were taken to Kumbo, and if you go there today, you still find many donkeys." (Jingi Mohamadou, Misaje, 23/07/03)

In the early 1930s administrative, ecological, and economic circumstances – so far supportive of the long-distance trade – changed and caused disruption among Hausa merchants (N. Awasom 1984: 109-112). With the partitioning of the German protectorate Kamerun into British and French administered zones, new national boundaries emerged. Consequently, trading activities across the border were discouraged, and trade routes were altered to pass within the respective colonial territory. This affected mainly trade routes between the Grassfields and the Adamaoua Highlands passing via Banyo. New roads were constructed linking Nso with Yola and Gashaka, while markets in Banyo were lost. Secondly, by the early 1930s the effects of the 1929 world depression trickled down to markets in Africa. Prices of export products to Europe and America dropped considerably, and the subsequent shortage of cash impacted on long-distance and regional trade. Finally, a locust plague affected the Grassfields. Over a period of four years (1930 to 1934) the insects devastated food crop and kola cultivations. The kola production dropped to a quarter of its initial rate.

Consequently, itinerant traders as well as settled businesspeople were forced to explore alternative domains. Many Hausa in the Western Grassfields intensified already established economic and social ties with Mbororo pastoralists and engaged in cattle trade; a noted economic niche of Hausa (im)migrants also in other areas of West Africa (cf. Cohen 1965, 1969).

7.2.3 Hausa and Mbororo in the Grassfields

The Hausa's close relationship with their Mbororo neighbours was one of the primary factors facilitating Hausa socio-economic establishment in the Grassfields (N. Awasom 1984: 122, Boutrais 1995/96: 636-641). From the very beginning, social and economic links between the two immigrant minorities were manifold. Similar to colonial administrators, Mbororo considered Hausa traders a source of valuable information on the region (Boutrais 1995/96: 68). Furthermore, Mbororo and Hausa share significant socio-cultural affinities, being Muslims and generally conversant in each other's language (Fulfulde and Hausa).²⁰¹ These commonalities constituted the basis for business relationships between Mbororo and Hausa, from which the latter largely derived their living.

Coming from Nigeria and northern Cameroon, Mbororo were used to food and clothing habits different to those encountered in the Grassfields. They soon became the main customers for goods imported from the north, and their demand for salt, garments, spices, and household items shaped Hausa trading activities. Rural Hausa hamlets turned into focal meeting points for Mbororo graziers who acquired much of their supplies from Hausa merchants. While Hausa women prepared ready-made food items that were in high demand by Hausa and Mbororo customers, Hausa men provided services as specialised craftsmen (e.g. tailors, horse gear producers) or as Islamic scholars (Hausa: *mallam*, pl. *mallamai*). At that time, only a few Mbororo had undergone Islamic training, while many Hausa had at least basic knowledge of the Koran. Thus Mbororo largely relied on Hausa *mallamai* to teach their children, fulfil

²⁰¹ In other regions where FulBe and Hausa co-reside, different patterns of language adoption have evolved. While in northern Nigeria Hausa has become the dominant language, in northern Cameroon and the Blue Nile region (Sudan) Fulfulde has gained ground at the expense of Hausa (Günther Schlee, personal communication, 29/03/2006; on linguistic changes in Fulfulde and Hausa in the Blue Nile region see also Abu-Manga 1986, 1999).

ritual functions, and produce amulets and medicine (N. Awasom 1984: 91-92, 122-124, Boutrais 1995/96: 638).²⁰²

Mbororo herdsmen, on the other hand, offered Hausa entrepreneurs the opportunity to engage in cattle trade, which under British colonial rule became an important economic sector and a lucrative source of income. In 1921 the British imposed a cattle tax (*jangali*) on the Mbororo which obliged them to sell some of their animals to meet their fiscal requirements.²⁰³ Cattle markets only existed in urban centres, such as Viktoria (Limbe), Tiko, and Douala to the south of the Grassfields, and Abakiliki and Enugu to the north. According to N. Awasom (1984: 115-124), Mbororo graziers preferred to concentrate on pastoral activities, and happily handed over the venture of driving sales animals to distant markets to Hausa traders. The latter quickly realised the prospective profits, and arranged a credit system with Mbororo graziers which enabled them to engage fully in cattle trade, even in the absence of the required capital (cf. Njeuma & Awasom 1990: 227-228).

Hausa entrepreneurs succeeded in monopolising the cattle business due to mutually beneficial relationships with Mbororo graziers. Their monopoly, however, was deliberately challenged in the 1940s by the British administrators who perceived the Hausa's involvement in cattle trade as a mode of exploiting Mbororo herders. Consequently, they introduced cattle markets and alternative cattle cooperative schemes. However, they did not succeed in their endeavour to eliminate Hausa middlemen.

N. Awasom (1984: 122) attributes the failure of these administrative measures to the fact that the British underestimated the socio-cultural properties of the relationship between Hausa and Mbororo which transcended purely economic considerations. Hausa traders, on the other hand, cleverly excluded Grassfielders from the profitable cattle business by emphasising their role as cultural brokers and by accentuating socio-cultural and ethnic differences between Mbororo and Grassfields peoples. N. Awasom (1984: 123) provides examples of the corresponding stories circulated to Grassfielders:

For example, it was widely rumoured that the Fulani often transformed themselves into cows and allowed themselves to be sold by their relatives. On driving such a herd of

²⁰² On the the work of *mallamai* see also Adamu (1978: 15).

²⁰³ On the impact of cattle taxes on pastoral economy see also Hutchinson (1992) with regard to Nuer in East Africa.

cattle, they would, at an unexpected point of the journey, suddenly transform into humans each holding a long leather whip in his hand and mercilessly beat the drovers to death. Only Hausa who had special talismen could detect real cows from human – transformed cows. Such a rumour permitted only the Hausa to be engaged in the cattle trade. A cloud of suspicion therefore existed between the natives and the Fulani, and not between the natives and the Hausa, or the Hausa and the natives. (N. Awasom 1984: 123)

Eventually, by the 1950s the Hausa's monopoly over cattle trade collapsed. Mbororo individuals began to undertake the marketing of their own cattle, and Grassfields businessmen with substantial capital entered the trade (Njeuma & Awasom 1990: 229). Particularly successful among the latter were entrepreneurs from Pinyin. Some Pinyin have established themselves in Misaje where they are still significantly involved in cattle trade (see chapter 6).

With the disruption of the close relationship between Mbororo and Hausa, the latter were compelled to reassess their economic strategies. Like all population groups in the Grassfields, they found themselves in an administrative setting that encouraged economic diversification. Hausa responses to these internal and external pressures and their contemporary economic activities in the Misaje area will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

7.3 Historical memories of Hausa establishment in the Misaje area

After this more general portrayal of Hausa establishment in the Grassfields, I will now engage with local historical accounts provided by Hausa informants in the Misaje area. In the following I will introduce three largely complementary perspectives on Hausa settlement in Misaje. The first narrative is a composite of the historical memory of *mallam* Mudi who was the current *sarkin hausawa* (Hausa, head of Hausa settlement) of Misaje. His portrayal focuses on the early years of Hausa settlement in the Misaje area, and largely corresponds to the descriptions of N. Awasom (1984) and Boutrais (1995/96). The second narrative is based on the historical recollections of Goggo Bebi²⁰⁴, a Huya woman who has lived in Misaje for approximately 50 years. Her contribution introduces a female perspective, so far omitted in earlier writings on Hausa history in the Grassfields. The third historical narrative introduces *alkali*

²⁰⁴ *Goggo* is a Fulfulde term and means paternal aunt. It frequently becomes part of an individual's name, as in the above case of Goggo Bebi.

Yusufa, a prominent Muslim cleric of the late colonial period who, in his position as Muslim judge, represented the interface between the Muslim community in Donga-Mantung and the British colonial administration.

The three historical narratives illustrate gendered perspectives on Hausa history and also reflect their authors' sub-ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, they provide information on the socio-economic development of the Hausa community, and its relations with neighbouring communities and the colonial administration.

7.3.1 Early Hausa establishment in the Misaje area: a male perspective

The first Hausa settlement in the Misaje area evolved in Nkanchi. It was established in the 1920s, during the rule of *fon* Fuma I who welcomed the Hausa (im)migrants because of their commercial input (see chapter 3). Two decades later, the Hausa community of Nkanchi transferred to Misaje on demand of the colonial administration. There, they were attributed the area now known as *unguwa rogo* (cassava quarter) which became the Hausa neighbourhood of Misaje. In his historical recollection, *mallam* Mudi recounts his family's migration and establishment at Nkanchi, their economic activities, and subsequent relocation at Misaje.

Mallam Mudi is deemed one of the few 'real' Hausa who is able to trace back his ancestry to the Hausa homeland. As he recounted, his mother was from Kano. His father was a man from Gora, south of Kano, and belonged to the sub-ethnic group of the Buzaye.²⁰⁵ His father's occupation as a *mallam* (Koranic teacher) took the family to many places in Yoruba land as well as to Jos, Bauchi, and the Adamaoua Highlands, and to Garoua and Maroua in northern Cameroon. They came to the Grassfields and later settled at Nkanchi where his father engaged in cattle trade, before he died many years ago. *Mallam* Mudi was born in Nkanchi during one of his parents' earlier trips to the area. During his early adult years he collaborated with one of his father's friends in trading *kanwa* (potash) between Nigeria and Cameroon, using donkeys for transport. When his capital depleted, he went to stay with his father's brother who was the *sarkin hausawa* (Hausa chief) in Nkanchi. He began to work as a *mallam* and later engaged in cattle trade, a venture that attracted more Hausa migrants to the Misaje area.

²⁰⁵ Possibly, the sub-ethnonym Buzaye used by *mallam* Mudi is equivalent to *bugaje*, a Hausa term that, according to Nicolas (1975: 418-422), is used to refer to Hausa of Tuareg slave origin (Hausa-Buzu). They are represented mainly in the region of Zinder (Niger).

Mallam Mudi estimated the size of the initial Hausa community at approximately 50 families who congregated under the leadership of his paternal uncle Audu Awaria. Many Hausa settlers made their living from trading goods like salt, textiles, spices, and beads which they acquired from Umuahia, a commercial centre in southern Nigeria. Others worked as Koranic teachers and supplemented their income with farming.

While in N. Awasom's (1984) historical reconstruction the trade with kola played a significant role in the early colonial period, *mallam* Mudi did not mention it. This divergence is explained by the fact that the commerce with kola diminished in the 1930s, when *mallam* Mudi was still a young man. Instead, he centred his description on the trade with cattle, salt, and textiles, and the Hausa's relationship with their Mbororo neighbours.

I have been trading for more than 20 years, mainly with cattle. We bought them one by one from the Mbororo. When all the cattle were joined together to consolidate a herd we would bring them to Umuahia. We were many cattle traders. The traders came from places like Binka, Nkambe, Lassin, Konene, Bafmen etc. All of us followed one route to Kashimbila [Nigeria]. Some traders travelled with their wives. We would carry food along or buy corn flour on our way. There were fixed points along the route. From here we had 44 stations before we reached Umuahia. The traders did not go to one market only. They went to Wukari, Umuahia, Onitsha, and other places. We bought women's and men's garments to take back. We also bought *kanwa* [potash] and other things. We tied the goods in bundles and paid people to transport them. I used to carry things on my head. (*mallam* Mudi, Misaje, 19/12/01)

As *mallam* Mudi and other informants explained, the area around Dumbo, Nkanchi, and Fonfuka was the main transhumance area for Mbororo from the adjacent highlands. While spending three to four months in the lowlands with their cattle, the herdsmen relied on their Hausa neighbours and the local Grassfields population to buy food, clothes, and other items of daily use as well as salt for their animals. Many Hausa at Nkanchi and Dumbo bought cattle from Mbororo graziers on credit to sell at Umuahia (in Nigeria) or Kumba (in southwest Cameroon).²⁰⁶ In return, they brought goods demanded by Mbororo and Grassfielders.

²⁰⁶ The current cattle markets at Misaje and Dumbo were established in 1969 (*Supplement to West Cameroon Gazette* 1969, no. 42, vol. 9, part B: B91 W.C.L.N.81 of 1969, B92 W.C.L.N.82 of 1969). Before then, traders frequented Mbororo hamlets to inquire about trade animals.

Beyond business relations the Hausa benefited from social and religious commonalities with their Mbororo neighbours. According to *mallam* Mudi, the latter supported their Hausa friends with alms (*sadaka*) and religious tax donations (Hausa: *zakka*, Fulfulde: *jakka*). Today Islamic charity is still practiced, but amounts to less than in the past, when – at least in informants’ memory – economic growth and generosity prevailed.

As *mallam* Mudi and other Hausa and Grassfields informants pointed out, the Dumbo area was attractive to hunters. Hausa hunters were renowned for their specialised techniques, using poisonous arrows and spears. The presence of Hausa hunters was also noted by Newton (1935: 20, 26) and it seems plausible that they were not only after game but elephants.²⁰⁷

In the 1940s, a few years after the customary court had been established at Misaje, the Hausa community transferred from Nkanchi to Misaje. *Mallam* Mudi recounted the visit of four colonial administrators from Bamenda and Buea (the British headquarters) who invited the Hausa community to relocate at Misaje. They agreed to transfer within a year. Upon their arrival in Misaje, they met *mallam* Ibrahim with his congregation from Dumbo who was installed as *sarkin hausawa*. He was a Kanuri and ruled for three years, before he died. He was followed by Audu Awaria, the former *sarki*²⁰⁸ of Nkanchi.

In comparing *mallam* Mudi’s account of the Hausa’s transfer to Misaje with the Nchaney version narrated in chapter 4, a number of divergences and similarities emerge. Firstly, Nchaney elders and notables dated the Hausa’s departure from Nkanchi to the same time as the construction of the Ring Road. Conversely, *mallam* Mudi and other Hausa informants stated that they moved before the road construction

²⁰⁷ Trading activities in ivory were particularly vivid in the second half of the 19th century, stimulated by European and American demand for the manufacture of knife handles, piano keys, combs, and billiard balls (Johnson 1978: 548). Hausa merchants reputedly participated in the ivory trade in the northern regions, including Hausaland, the Benue region, and the Adamaoua Highlands. They reached as far southwards as Ngilla in the Centre Province of contemporary Cameroon. Moreover, they were significantly involved in the hunting of elephants. By the end of the 19th century elephants in the Grassfields were critically decimated due to massacres by Hausa hunters and European poachers, and also as a consequence of the expansion of cattle into their habitat (Chilver 1977: 162, Warnier 1985: 139). One of the few regions left with a significant elephant population were the forested lowlands between the Donga valley and Gashaka in the Mambila. As Chilver (1977: 163) notes, ivory sharing agreements with Hausa hunters existed in the Mbembe area until the turn of the 19th century. This possibly accounts for Grassfields and Hausa informants’ mentioning of Hausa hunters in the Dumbo and Misaje area.

²⁰⁸ Following Hausa grammar, the nominative form is *sarki*; when followed by a genitive, it becomes *sarkin*, as in *sarkin hausawa*.

began and that *sarki* Audu was installed in Misaje in the early 1940s. Secondly, while Nchaney sources associated the Hausa's relocation with a smallpox epidemic, this was not mentioned by Hausa informants, nor did I come across the respective information in colonial documents. As a Bessa friend commented, the Nchaney version should not be taken at face value, but as an ideological statement reflecting the latter's aversion to stranger populations. Similar to the smallpox story about the Hausa, Nchaney legends attribute the introduction of scabies to the arrival of the Mbororo.

7.3.2 Economic strategies of early Hausa women-settlers

While *mallam* Mudi's account of Hausa history in the Misaje area focused on men's economic activities, I will now complement this picture with a female perspective. Moreover, *mallam* Mudi and Goggo Bebi differ with regard to their sub-ethnic backgrounds. While *mallam* Mudi is a Hausa from Kano, Goggo Bebi is of Huya descent.

Goggo Bebi traced her origin to Maroua, a town in northern Cameroon dominated by Town FulBe. Her father was a Muslim cleric (Fulfulde: *moddiBo*) who worked for the *laamiiDo* (FulBe paramount chief) of Banyo. Her mother was a chieftainess' daughter from the area of Ganye where allegedly only women became chiefs. Her father had two children, two slaves, two concubines and many cattle. Subsequently, one concubine left, one slave escaped and the cattle were entrusted to a caretaker who squandered them all.

Goggo Bebi's life and marriage history entails detailed information which I can only summarise here. She was married at least eight times, with each marriage lasting from two months to eight years. For the most part of her married life she led a secluded life. Yet two of her husbands were herdsmen, and they lived with the cattle 'in the bush'. The periods between marriages Goggo spent with her relatives at Binka from where she frequented Nkanchi, Dumbo, and Misaje. About that phase she told us that she was stubborn, enjoyed the life of a *bordel* (Pidgin English) or *karuwa* (Hausa for 'free woman'²⁰⁹ or 'woman between marriages'), smoked, and supported herself by selling kola nuts and ginger.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Kapfer (2005: 131) names a number of possible origins of the term 'free woman' or *femme libre*; it may have been a legal term used in the Belgian Congo for those women who were given papers to

Eventually, Goggo Bebi settled in Misaje with her sixth husband, *mallam* Dina Garo, a man from Yola. His work was to play cards or gamble. With the profits he bought cattle and later operated a store with miscellaneous goods. When Goggo Bebi first came to the Misaje area, the Hausa community was at Nkanchi. She recalled a few Hausa elders, including the *sarkin hausawa*, the *sarkin pawa* (Hausa, chief of the butchers) with three butchers, the *imam* (religious leader of Muslim community) with one *mallam*, and three merchants trading with cattle and kola. Goggo Bebi also recalled her early encounters with Mbororo in the area. The first Mbororo were Jaafun under the leadership of *arDo* Burti who stayed on the road to Lassin. Aku only came later and were headed by *arDo* Maguwa who settled at Bridge Five.

When Mbororo herdsmen took their cattle to the transhumance area around Nkanchi and Dumbo, they were followed by ‘free women’ who made their living from selling food items and offering their (sexual) services. These were predominantly Huya women and their customers were paid herdsmen; most of them being Huya from northern Cameroon. As Goggo Bebi explained:

We used to go to the transhumance area at Dumbo. There were so many people. Everyone had his own woman. So the women followed the herdsmen to Dumbo, because there was nobody left on the highlands. We prepared food to sell. The women without husbands fried *makala* and *masa* [snacks]. They sat and made their market. When the men came to greet their girl-friends they bought what the women were selling. A man would tell his girl-friend, that he loved her. Some men even promised marriage. The woman agreed. If she had a brother, she informed him that this man wanted to marry her. They would discuss before the marriage was tied. Not all women were free. Some who stayed at Dumbo were married. They sold *coBBal*²¹¹, *makala*, *masa* [snacks]. They just made their business. (Goggo Bebi, Misaje, 03/12/01)

The status of *karuwa* (‘free woman’) was not considered permanent but transitory and many women found new husbands while at the transhumance area. As Goggo Bebi pointed out, it is only nowadays that it has become socially tolerable for Hausa

move around freely in settlements normally restricted to Africans (cf. Little 1973: 113). The term ‘free woman’, as I use it in the text, refers to unmarried women who (supposedly) have sexual relations with one or several men.

²¹⁰ The term *bordel* most likely has been adapted from French. According to Eguchi (1973: 72), in northern Cameroon *bordel* refers to a professional prostitute. As becomes clear from Goggo Bebi’s account, her usage of the terms *bordel* and *karuwa* are relatively neutral and refer to unmarried women who are searching for a new partner rather than professional prostitutes.

²¹¹ *CoBBal* is the Fulfulde term for maize or millet dumplings; in Hausa it is called *fura* (see below).

women to stay unmarried and support themselves. Currently in Misaje, the number of single Hausa women of childbearing age is considerable.²¹²

Goggo Bebi's narrative describes Hausa women's economic activities and explores the close relationship between Hausa and Mbororo from a female perspective. While Hausa men were drawn to the transhumance areas by the opportunity of trading goods and cattle, Hausa women likewise were attracted for socio-economic reasons. Married women had no choice other than following their husbands, but benefited from the herdsmen's demand for prepared food items which they sold via their children. 'Free women' were drawn in by the opportunity of supporting themselves by selling snacks, offering sexual services and by the likely chance of finding a husband.

Moreover, Goggo Bebi's account reflects her sub-ethnic background as a Huya woman. Her description of her father's property (concubines, slaves, cattle) illustrates the earlier lifestyle of the FulBe aristocracy of northern Cameroon. Huya and Mbororo belong to the FulBe ethnic category and share narratives of a pastoral past. Huya men frequently work as paid herdsmen with the aim of building up their own herds or amassing enough capital for alternative economic ventures. Thus Huya women are frequently exposed to switching between life in the village and 'the bush' which is reflected in Goggo Bebi's diverse marriage experiences. Conversely, 'real' Hausa women rarely agree to live in 'the bush' where they face physical hardship and social isolation.

7.3.3 The fame of alkali Yusufa

A third perspective on the history and life of Hausa in the research area is conveyed in anecdotes about *alkali* Yusufa who during the pre-independence period acted as *alkali* (chief judge) in the Muslim court at Nkambe. *Alkali* Yusufa was an eminent Muslim intellectual who attracted a large following among fellow Hausa and Grassfields neighbours. He was the husband of Ajumma and the father of Talatu on whose accounts the following narrative is based.

²¹² On the social status of 'free women' in Hausa society see Barkow (1972), Callaway (1984), Chaibou (1994), Cohen (1969: 51-70), Pierce (2003) and Pittin (1979). It should be kept in mind, however, that the implementation of *shari'a* law in twelve Nigerian states since 2000 has considerably altered working conditions for 'free women' (Murray Last, e-mail communication, 09/09/2005; see also Last 2000). For a more recent account on 'free women' in Maroua, a Muslim town in northern Cameroon, see Kapfer (2005: 94-95, 125-138).

As Talatu narrated, three relatives of her grand-parents' generation left Kano and settled at Sabongari in Cameroon. They were merchants trading with *kanwa* (potash), earrings, cloth, and spices, among other commodities. Distant relations from Kano joined them in Cameroon, some settled in Bem, some in Nji Gajere (Ntumbaw), some in Konene. Talatu's father Yusufa grew up in Kano and was trained as a Muslim scholar before he joined his relatives in Sabongari. Subsequently, he was made their *sarkin hausawa* and later employed as *alkali* in the Muslim court at Nkambe.

According to N. Awasom (1984: 269-322), the British colonial administration firstly approved the establishment of an *alkali* court in 1945 to be set up at Ndop. While the initial *alkali* M. Ahmadou faced a number of obstacles, his follower Abba Namtari was more successful. Subsequently, the request for an additional *alkali* court was put forward to the British administration. This second Muslim court was established at Nkambe in 1957 with *alkali* Yusufa as its first *alkali*.²¹³

²¹³ N. Awasom (1984) does not mention the name of the first *alkali* at Nkambe, but most likely it was *alkali* Yusufa.

Photograph 7.3: *alkali* Yusufa



The photograph was contributed by Talatu for whom it reflects the treasured memory of her father *alkali* Yusufa.

It shows *alkali* Yusufa and his fourth wife Adawa sitting in front, two Wimbun men, Umaru (left) and Shey (right), standing behind them.

It was taken around 1960 when *alkali* Yusufa came back from a visit to Ngambenh (near Sabongari) where he was given his new wife Adawa.

Umaru and Shey were *alkali* Yusufa's *dogari* (escort, palace servants) who acted as messengers and errand boys. They were two of the numerous young Wimbun men staying in his compound. Neither Talatu nor Ajumma were sure if they were Muslims, as no one was compelled to convert to Islam to become part of *alkali* Yusufa's family.

In 2003 my assistant Jonathan discussed the above photograph with Issa Balla, a Hausa man from Misaje living in Yaoundé. The latter had no knowledge of the context in which the image was taken and based his comments on previous experiences with similar photographs. By juxtaposing his reading with the informed comments of Talatu and Ajumma, I illustrate the multiple meanings and conventional interpretations such photographs may carry.

From Issa Balla's viewpoint the clothing of *alkali* Yusufa suggests that the photograph was taken shortly after his return from Mecca. Among Cameroonian Muslims it is a common practice to greet pilgrims within a few weeks upon their arrival to receive their blessings, symbolic presents and to take photographs with them in the hope that their religious fulfilment will be shared.

Alkali Yusufa is dressed in three layers of clothes of which two are symbolically significant: Over the white inner garment (*saro*) he wears a traditional Hausa gown (*ngare*) which is sewn and embroidered by hand. The design implies an important personality, like a Hausa chief or a Muslim cleric. On top of the *ngare* he wears a coat (*alkyaba*) from Mecca indicating his status as *alhaji*. The head garment is equally acquired in Mecca and a sign of his accomplished pilgrimage. In his right hand *alkali* Yusufa holds the Koran which signifies his position as chief judge of the *alkali* court arbitrating according to Muslim law. Notable are also the shoes of *alkali* Yusufa and Adama, as by then *cover shoes* (Pidgin English for lace-up shoes) – as opposed to sandals or bare feet – were a status symbol.

Numerous stories about *alkali* Yusufa account for his popularity and influence. Ajumma, *alkali* Yusufa's wife, described him as follows:

Talatu's father was an important man. Within Cameroon there is no one person feared like him. When he was angry, he could finish the fire with his bare hands. When he came out of the house, people had to get up. At first, Talatu's father was the *sarki* at Sabongari. When we had about three children, he became *alkali*. We moved to Nkambe and later to Kumbo. Talatu's father was the one responsible to catch all the thieves and judge their cases. If someone fell into a hole, he was the one to rescue him. He was the only one the government had given handcuffs. He was a very important man. Thus I could not go out of the compound and move around loosely. Since he died I have never seen a man like him again. (Ajumma, Misaje, 01/10/01)

In retrospect, Ajumma appreciated her marriage life with *alkali* Yusufa. It implied radical seclusion due to her husband's high social status, and meant freedom from strenuous work and economic hardship. With the death of her husband, Ajumma's life changed significantly. She married *mallam* Abdullahi and continued staying in *alkali* Yusufa's compound until they transferred to Misaje. *Mallam* Abdullahi became the *imam* of Misaje but was not able to support his family in the same way as *alkali* Yusufa. Subsequently, Ajumma split with *mallam* Abdullahi, and remained in Misaje where she faced increasing economic hardship. She was joined by her daughters Talatu and Larey and her previous husband's nephews. *Alkali* Yusufa's followers have since constituted a substantial portion of the Hausa population in Misaje.

Ajumma's description of the *alkali*'s skills in persecuting thieves was largely endorsed by Hausa informants. The period before independence was a turbulent time, characterised by political upheavals and general insecurity, which resulted in frequent incidents of theft and robbery. *Alkali* Yusufa was determined to eradicate this peril by catching and jailing the bandits. He had his own police force who were sent out to arrest thieves and impose law and order. As informants pointed out, they were dressed in shorts (like colonial policemen). Allegedly, the means by which *alkali* Yusufa succeeded were of both ordinary and supernatural quality. As regards the latter, Talatu has impressive stories to tell about her family:

The quarter in Kano from where my family came is called *unguwa* [quarter] Dalma Sharipé. This means 'the quarter of the Sharifai who cannot be touched by fire'. The

name of my lineage is Wangarawa. The Hausa have their own lineages.²¹⁴ All the Wangarawa are from Kano; they are identified by three cuts besides their eyes [scarification].

The people of *unguwa* Dalma Sharipé are renowned for their ability to touch fire without being burned. Yusufa, my father could place meat directly on the fire without feeling any pain. He was able to stop the fire by shouting at it. For the people of *unguwa* Dalma Sharipé fire is like water. If they are angry they heat oil and rub it on their bodies as if it was water. That's how the elders were made by God, not through medicine. Because I was born in Cameroon, I did not inherit these powers. For my father, it was a gift from God, not through medicine, although this is also possible. When sitting with his legs stretched, my father was able to extend the length of his toe that it would reach very far. He could also draw his tongue as much as to wrap it around his head like a turban. But when our elders came to Cameroon, they stopped these things; because in Cameroon this was not good. Only my father's small brother who died early this year, he still knew how to do all these things. When there was a fight in the market and the gendarmes could not solve the problem, they finally had to call for my uncle, Haruna, the *sarkin hausawa*. He would come and remove his hat so that bees came out of it and stung the people. They would disperse the crowd and the fight ended like that. But he would not do so very often. After he died, his son Mohammadou Awalou took over from him and became *sarkin hausawa*. He, too, no longer has these special powers because he was born in Cameroon. But his father has transferred some protective powers to him. (Talatu Yusufa, Misaje, 26/09/01)

Two aspects are particularly interesting in Talatu's account, firstly the sub-ethnic identification as Wangarawa, and secondly Hausa beliefs in supernatural powers.

Wangarawa means the people of Wangara, in this case a term used in the 16th century for the area currently known as Birnin Katsina. The Wangarawa were originally merchants from Mali – as distinct from merchants from Bornu who were their main competitors (Murray Last, e-mail communication 09/09/2005).²¹⁵ Lovejoy (1978) confirms the existence of a Wangara community in Kano, dating back to the 14th century, which gave up its distinct ethnicity but retained its group name as a local surname (see also Al-Hajj 1968). As the case of the Wangarawa illustrates, even

²¹⁴ The conversation with Talatu was held in Fulfulde and she used the term *lenyol*, pl. *lenyi*, which is equivalent to the English term 'lineage'.

²¹⁵ According to Lovejoy (1978) the ethnonym Wangara occupied a confusing position in West African historiography and, over time, changed its meaning. It subsequently was used to indicate Dyula and Jahanké merchants in the Niger-Senegambia region, Songhay merchants in Borgu and Hausa cities, and resident merchants in Borgu. Eventually, it became a general term for traders from the west (see also Last 1985, 1989).

among those who consider themselves 'real' Hausa, the idea of discrete identities may persist also in the absence of distinct social practices.

The second comment to Talatu's anecdote concerns Hausa attitudes vis-à-vis supernatural powers. In chapter 4 we have seen that mystical accounts play a considerable role in Nchaney historical narratives, signifying the spiritual link between the Nchaney, their ancestors, and the land. Hausa tend to distance themselves from Nchaney beliefs in mystical events. They generally stress their Islamic orientation and portray Muslim civilisation as enlightened and progressive while scorning rural Grassfielders as superstitious and backward.²¹⁶ Talatu's description of the supernatural powers of her family makes it clear that such a disparaging view of Nchaney beliefs is primarily ideological. It is not the result of truly diverging world views, but a strategy of exclusion by stressing ethnic boundaries. However, the effects of an ongoing transformation and rationalisation of Hausa beliefs are implied in Talatu's statement that her family's supernatural powers disappeared upon their settlement in Cameroon. Thus, the migration from Nigeria to Cameroon signifies both a spatial transition and a shift in time and orientation which implies a cross-over from the mystically inspired past to the secular present.

7.3.4 Colonial policies and early Hausa history

As argued in chapters 4 and 5 on Nchaney and Mbororo history and identity, colonial and subsequently post-colonial policies have played a significant role in the construction of ethnic identities; the same applies to the Hausa. The previous accounts on Hausa history in the Misaje area indicate a number of instances in which administrative intervention impacted on Hausa self-understanding and socio-political integration.

The first occurrence concerns the establishment of the Hausa quarter in Misaje. Both Hausa and Nchaney sources reported that the transfer of the Hausa community from Nkanchi to Misaje was initiated by the colonial administration. Similar instances have been recorded for other places, e.g. Bamenda (N. Awasom 1984: 33-52), Galim in northern Cameroon (Leis 1970: 677), and Kumasi in Ghana (Schildkrout 1978: 74). Furthermore, the Misaje example illustrates that the colonial administration endorsed

²¹⁶ This standpoint is expressed even more pointedly with regard to occult beliefs, which will be discussed in chapter 9.

the establishment of separate Hausa settlements or distinct Hausa quarters rather than encouraging their spatial and social integration into local village communities.

A second reference to colonial policies is entailed in *alkali* Yusufu's story. Following the British policy of indirect rule, Hausa and Mbororo were administered via political representation through their Grassfields hosts. With the introduction of Islamic courts, the British administration accepted the provision of a distinct legal body for the Muslim population, while refusing it autonomous political representation. The measure was taken in response to demands by Mbororo (see chapter 5), while Hausa were secondary beneficiaries. Due to the Hausa's previous authority regarding Islamic training, Hausa rather than Mbororo clerics were available for the post of *alkali*.

Nowadays, the actual powers of Islamic courts in the Grassfields are considerably limited. Compared to the above description of *alkali* Yusufu having his own police in dealing with robbery and theft, *alkali* courts today have little significance in the public domain and their authority is confined to family matters (marriage, divorce, and inheritance issues). Nonetheless, the post of *alkali* is considered prestigious. At the time of my research, two Islamic scholars in Misaje, one Mbororo and one Hausa, took pride in assisting the Muslim court in Nkambe.

Quite possibly, the colonial government was pre-occupied with the administration of Grassfielders and Mbororo who constituted the politically outspoken and economically most viable groups. They paid limited attention to the Hausa whom they subsumed into the generic categories of stranger population and Muslim minority.

Having engaged with narratives on Hausa establishment in the colonial period, the subsequent sections will examine economic and political developments in the second half of the 20th century. My focus will be on gendered economic trajectories, their impact on Hausa self-understanding, and on their relations with their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours. Subsequently, I will analyse current strategies of Hausa political representation to the state and international agencies. My elaborations are based on participant observation and on interviews with Hausa men and women resident in the Misaje area.

7.4 Hausa economic trajectories and interethnic relations in the second half of the 20th century

As outlined in chapter 6 with regard to Grassfielders and Mbororo, the initial situation of economic specialisation along ethnic lines largely disintegrated in the second half of the 20th century. In public perception, however, the alignment of occupational and ethnic identities has endured. A similar situation applies to the Hausa case.

The Hausa are generally associated with trade, i.e. the introduction of imported consumer goods to the local economy and the circulation of cattle and agricultural products. I argue, however, that the complex ethnic-occupational notion of ‘Hausa merchants’ is qualitatively different from the related concepts of ‘Grassfields farmers’ and ‘Mbororo graziers’. While Grassfielders and Mbororo identify themselves with farming and grazing respectively, the notion of ‘Hausa merchants’ is based primarily on external ascription. As we will see below, from a Hausa perspective, ethnic and occupational identities have been disentangled.

I herein diverge from an interpretation promoted, among others, by Cohen (1969) that defines Hausa ethnicity primarily as an economic identity. In his later writings Cohen (1974: xx-xxiii) equates Hausa with London city men, and defines both as economic interest groups that occupy specific economic niches and cultivate distinct ‘ethnic’ identities. While providing an excellent theoretical model based on his etic interpretation of Hausa ethnicity, Cohen however falls short of describing Hausa self-understanding from an emic perspective; a critique remarked also by Banks (1996: 36).

As I see it, a narrow occupational definition of Hausa identity cannot account for the variety of Hausa economic activities and the indeterminacy of Hausa conceptions of ethnicity as encountered in the Grassfields. The subsequent elaborations will thus illustrate this diversity and reflect Hausa self-understanding from the perspective of male and female Hausa informants in Misaje.

7.4.1 Economic diversification among Hausa men

As outlined above, most Hausa immigrants initially made their living as merchants, Islamic scholars, and cattle traders. Eventually, when they could no longer sustain competition with Grassfields traders, they began to diversify their economic activities, becoming businessmen, craftspeople, civil servants, and farmers.

Some Hausa individuals have remained in the cattle business and became cattle drovers (Fulfulde: *gaynaako coggal*). Their work is to accompany herds of sales animals on foot to the next station in the trading system. Cattle drovers usually work in teams of two or three, depending on the herd size which varies between 35 and 55 animals. There is no obvious ethnic prevalence in the field of cattle driving.²¹⁷ Mbororo are said to possess the best skills, but many dislike the idea of facilitating a process that culminates in the slaughtering of cattle. Grassfielders are said to be harsh to their animals, and allegedly only a few are courageous enough to face the many challenges involved. Among Hausa, the job of cattle drover is relatively popular. Dauda, for example, is a Hausa man in his early 50s. He has been in the business for more than fifteen years and has driven herds to several markets in Nigeria, to Bamenda, and to Kumba in southwest Cameroon. To my question of how he acquired the necessary skills, he answered as follows:

I had to learn the work since my father did not have cows. There was a Pinyin man, he was called Jeremiah Nyanga. He taught me the cattle work. He liked me. You see, Sam Minang [Pinyin cattle trader] employed me first to drive his animals to Bamenda. He joined me with Yeri Nyanga. Yeri told me how to handle the cattle. He said, do so if you want to turn a cow, or do like that to make them go or stop. That is how he taught me and when we reached Bamenda, I knew the work one time. You see, still tomorrow, if I see him, I will tell him, he is my father because he taught me the work. (Dauda, Misaje, 15/01/02)

Dauda's account is an example for the potentially integrative effect of economic diversification. At the same time, the cattle business has become an arena of economic competition, open to everyone with the necessary capital or respective skills.

While Dauda remained in the domain of cattle trade, many of the nephews of *alkali* Yusufa engaged in occupations that went beyond trade and Islamic scholarship (see also diagram 7.1). Some started off with small-scale trading and Koranic teaching, but later specialised in craftsmanship (tailor) or service jobs (driver), or entered government service (council worker, soldier). I will illustrate this range with two examples.

²¹⁷ This statement is based on detailed research I carried out in the cattle market and slaughterhouse of Bamenda. Bamenda, being the capital of the North West Province, is a focal station in the national cattle trade and meat supply.

Isa Danladi is in his early fifties and works with the town council of Misaje. He started his job 24 years ago. For more than fourteen years, he had been in charge of supervising the transport business in Misaje, before he rose to the position of market master. Isa Danladi went to adult school in Nji Gajere. In his view, it was on account of his Western and Islamic education that he was employed as council worker.

His younger brother Pallalu is in his late forties and successfully operates a tailoring workshop on the market square in Misaje. He attended Primary School at Nkambe and then went to Nkongsamba where he did an apprenticeship in tailoring. A few years later, he returned to Nkambe to write the entry exam to the veterinary school in Jakiri which ran a special training programme for FulBe and Hausa applicants. He failed, arguably because he lacked the necessary financial background. He later decided to advance his training as a tailor and left to north Cameroon to specialise in embroidery techniques for Hausa and FulBe garments. Finally, some fifteen years ago, Pallalu opened a tailoring workshop in Misaje. He concluded this chapter of his life history with the following words:

From that time on, my own profession that God has given me to make my living was and still is tailoring. I am a man of two educations. I have undergone the English education and the Arabic. So, I am very happy for what God has given me. That is why I am still in Misaje. (Pallalu, Misaje, 15/12/01)

Both brothers stressed their Western and Islamic education as a vital factor in their occupational specialisation. Many of their age-mates were less fortunate and ended up as unskilled labourers, with only basic knowledge of the Koran.

Among members of the younger generation, the occupations of baker, shopkeeper, driver or soldier have become popular. Hausa youths have recognised the advantages of literacy and education. Many young men and women attend adult classes in Islamic education to enhance their general knowledge. Furthermore, Islamic schools have been founded all over the North West Province, in which children are trained in both Western and Islamic education.

As these examples have shown, Hausa have become relatively marginal in the cattle business and have ventured into alternative economic spheres. Similarly, many occupations considered distinctively Hausa – e.g. merchant, Koranic scholar, butcher,

barber-surgeon (*wanzami*)²¹⁸, and drummer – are nowadays performed by people of varying ethnic backgrounds. Nonetheless, complex notions of Hausa ethnic-occupational identities persist.

Hausa and Mbororo have reacted differently to processes of economic diversification with regard to their self-understanding. As we have seen in chapter 5, Mbororo youths have responded to the decline of the pastoral economy and their exposure to Western lifestyle and education with self-doubts and collective attempts at redefining Mbororo identity. Conversely, economic diversification and exposure to Western education have caused no identity crisis among Hausa. Although Hausa interlocutors experienced economic competition and marginalisation as distressing, they envisaged diversification as a probable outcome, without challenging implications for their ethnic or cultural self-understanding. Individuals thus have pursued a variety of alternative economic trajectories and still consider themselves Hausa.

These divergences in Mbororo and Hausa approaches to economic diversification reflect differences in the two groups' ethnic self-understanding. While Mbororo self-understanding includes pastoral identity as a principal constituent, the Hausa conception of their ethnicity provides room for economic individuality.

Economic self-expression is also a feature of Hausa women's lives and identity. Similar to their male counterparts, Hausa women's economic activities have changed since their establishment in the Western Grassfields. In the following I will describe their current business ventures in Misaje, and discuss the effects of economic decline and social change on Hausa women's lives.

7.4.2 Hausa women's current business ventures

Hausa women are renowned for their 'hidden economy' which they pursue from within their households, relying on their children for errands and sales (cf. Hill 1969, Schildkrout 1982, 1983). In Misaje, the same system is employed by married women who supposedly observe a secluded lifestyle. Actual modalities of seclusion are continuously negotiated between husband and wife and differ between households and over time. Nonetheless, they are guided by general rules. Firstly, Muslim women

²¹⁸ A *wanzami* is a barber-surgeon who fulfils a number of cosmetic, therapeutic and ritual functions for a Muslim clientele. For a more detailed description of his functions see Wall (1988: 222-227).

are not supposed to leave the compound without their husband's consent. Secondly, their movements should be confined to the evening period, and they are supposed to go out only with an escort or chaperone (e.g. a young girl).

Hausa women are socially encouraged to generate an income to support themselves and the family. Pallalu described the ways in which husband and wife ideally complement and assist each other as follows:

My mother's business was to fry snacks like *makala* and pancake or to grind corn and sell corn flour. She also crushed groundnuts to remove the oil and make *abakuru*. She then sent the boys to sell the snacks for her. They brought back the money. That is the women's means to make their own money to buy dishes for their daughters' marriages. Any profit made from selling snacks is put aside. After some years the money they have gathered can also be used for their own health. At times, we, the husbands, see that they have no money. We can support them with some money to start their own business and way of living. At times, they also help us with money; i.e. when you face difficulties, they might buy something for the children to eat. Some women reason well. They do not only count on the husband to do everything but help on their own initiative. (Pallalu, Misaje 25/11/01)

Unlike married women, elderly (and single) women have fewer opportunities to rely on others and thus are required to provide for themselves and their dependants (children, grand-children etc.). Consequently, they have different, less restrictive social rules which give them more freedom in the choice and pursuit of their economic activities.

7.4.2.1 Hausa women's small-scale ventures

Popular economic ventures of Hausa women in the Misaje area include the selling of snack food, groundnut oil, and the retailing of maize. These activities are largely compatible with their household chores and the secluded lifestyle of married women. Yet the same activities are also undertaken by single and elderly Hausa women, and partly by Grassfields women.

The most popular business of Hausa women is the preparation of snack food for sale. Their repertoire includes a variety of fried cakes made of maize, cassava, wheat, and groundnuts which are in high demand. The supply of different varieties of snack food is considerable, especially on market days and on Fridays when the Muslim

congregation meets for communal prayers in Misaje. Both Hausa and Grassfields women sell snack food. While different snacks are generally attributed to different ethnic groups, in practice it is primarily a question of profitability and personal preference.²¹⁹

Another business considered profitable by Hausa women is the processing of groundnuts into cooking oil, while the remains are used to make groundnut snacks. Initially, the laborious production of groundnut oil counted exclusively as a Hausa practice. In the meantime, the business has become dominated by Grassfields women, particularly from Dumbo, who benefit from being primary producers of large quantities of groundnuts of a particularly rich quality.

Currently, some Hausa women have invested in the retailing of maize. Every year, shortly before the new harvest, the demand for maize rises, as many households have run short of their main staple. Although the envisaged gain is relatively high, only a few Hausa women engage in this risky business. Many are discouraged by the initial financial investment, unpredictable price fluctuations, and the crop's vulnerability to storage conditions and insects. Moreover, they compete with local storekeepers and salespersons in the weekly market.

Two economic ventures rooted in the close relationship between Hausa women and their Mbororo neighbours have disappeared over the years, with adverse effects on the two groups social relations. Previously, Hausa women sold *fura*, maize dumplings that are served with fresh or sour milk and are popular with Mbororo and Hausa customers. Due to the decline of Mbororo milk sales, this line of commerce collapsed (cf. Pelican 1999, 2004b). Concurrently, friendship relations between *fura* producers and their regular Mbororo milk suppliers declined.

Secondly, during the initial period when Misaje was used as transhumance area Hausa women frequently sold maize flour to cattle traders and herdsmen. Yet as Mbororo families began to cultivate their own fields, the demand for maize flour drastically decreased. By now, this line of commerce has been replaced by the sales of *gari* (grated, drained, and fried cassava) which a number of Hausa women produce from the proceeds of their cassava farms. Cassava was introduced to the Misaje area by Grassfields migrants who initially dominated the *gari* commerce. Hausa women's

²¹⁹ The 'original' snack food of the Hausa is *masa*, small maize cakes fried in palm oil. As the story goes, it was Mohammed who first asked his wives to prepare *masa* to distribute among children as an act of charity (*sadaka*), and thus initiated Hausa women's commerce of snack food. Even nowadays, only *masa* are considered appropriate 'to make *sadaka*'.

participation in producing *gari* for sale is relatively recent and occurred in response to the rising demand by school children for whom it constitutes an easy meal.

Besides these minor forms of commerce practiced by almost all Hausa women in Misaje, some women also undertake major business ventures such as running a restaurant. Thanks to the large Muslim community in Misaje and its surrounding, the demand for eating places that offer meals acceptable to Muslims is considerable. Mbororo in particular are fastidious in their food habits and only reluctantly take food in a non-Muslim environment. On Thursdays (cattle market day), Fridays (communal prayer day), and Saturdays (general market day) Mbororo presence in Misaje is substantial. These are the days Hausa women's businesses flourish.

At the time of my research, four restaurants were operated by Hausa women; in addition to a handful run by Grassfields women. The most constant has been run for seven years by a well established Hausa woman who operates on a daily basis. As informants argued, although the food quality has deteriorated over the years, Mbororo customers feel morally obliged to continue supporting her business. The most popular restaurant is operated on the three busy weekdays by Ladi, a young, single, and energetic Hausa woman. Ladi told us about the physical hardship entailed in running a restaurant. Furthermore, she recounted problems she faced with bothersome customers and stubborn suitors. There is the emblematic story of the Mbororo youth who refused to pay the bill. The argument went out of hand and a brawl arose which was followed by summons to the gendarmerie. Eventually, the Mbororo youth was released, after his father had paid a significant amount of money to the gendarmes, while Ladi had the satisfaction of having made it clear that conceitedness – for which Mbororo youths are notorious – does not pay.

The restaurant business is demanding and underlies significant seasonal fluctuations with high peaks in times of Muslim and Christian festivals and lengthy slumps during fasting and harvesting periods. Several Hausa women eventually surrendered to the hardship and unfavourable conditions.

Hausa women's economic activities depend on the existence of a market. Some ventures are more reliable and established (e.g. the snack business), others underlie significant seasonal fluctuations (e.g. restaurant business, maize sales), and others have been affected by socio-economic change (e.g. Hausa-Mbororo women's business partnerships). Obviously, married women are less flexible and concentrate on those

varieties of commerce that are easily combined with their household tasks and a secluded lifestyle. Single women, on the other hand, are driven by the need to make a living and hence more open to engage in riskier and more demanding economic ventures.

7.4.2.2 Single and elderly Hausa women's economic activities in the face of social change

For single and elderly women making a living is often difficult, and they occasionally seek assistance from members of their extended social network. To illustrate this point I discuss the social security and kinship network of my friend and single mother Talatu (diagram 7.1).

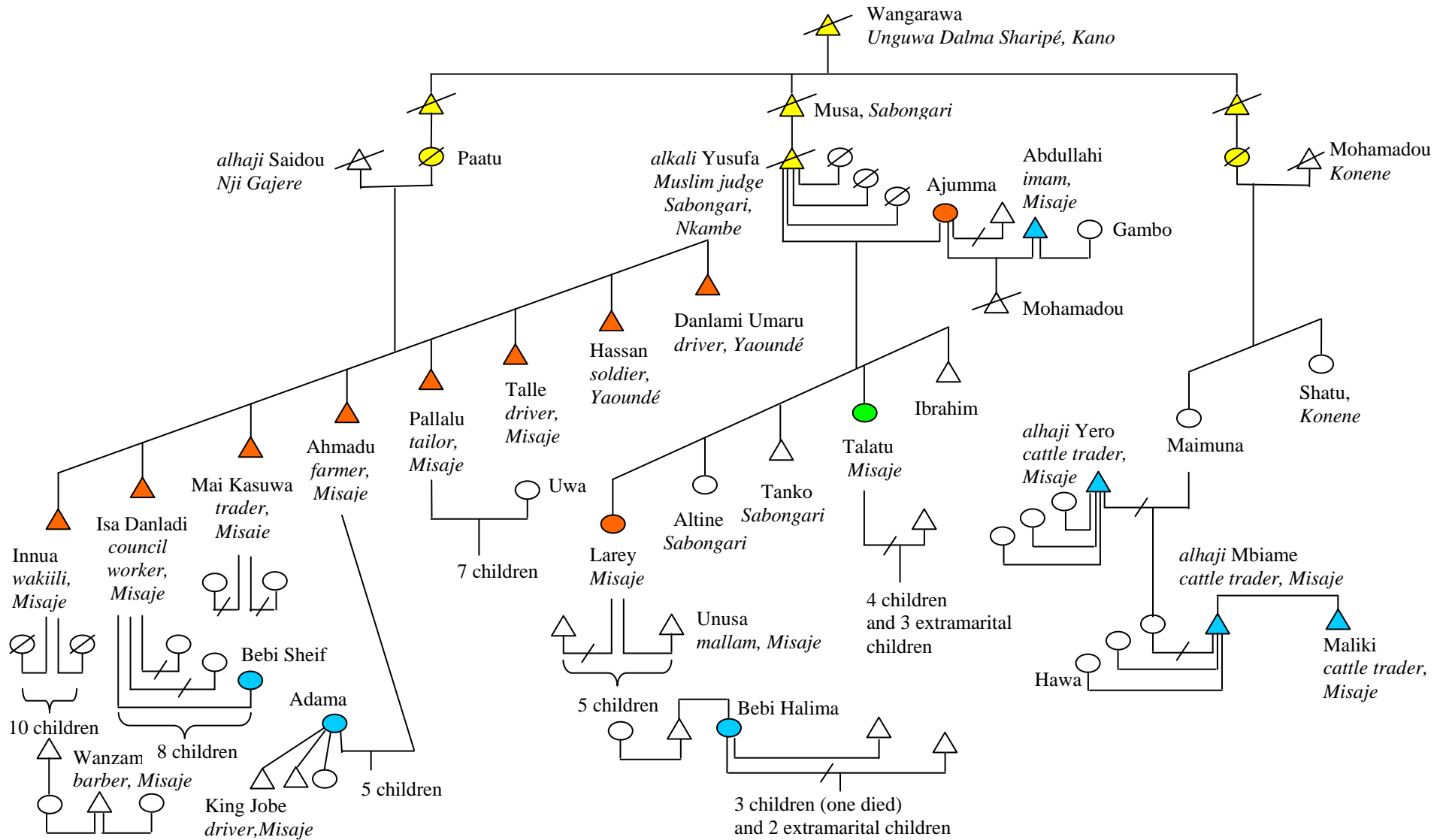
It has generally been noted that Hausa kinship systems and terminologies are non-specific and inclusive (Cohen 1966: 25-26, Wall 1988: 26-27).²²⁰ As Wall remarks,

[t]he imagery of blood relationship is frequently used in situations where one wants to minimise the social distance between two people, to create a feeling of intimacy and personal closeness. (Wall 1988: 27)









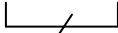
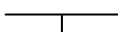
This attitude is reflected in Talatu's perception of individuals who occupy a vital position in her social network as kin rather than mere friends. Socially accepted options of including someone into one's kinship network are numerous. They comprise close and distant kinship relations, alliance, and foster parentage (see also chapter 8).

²²⁰ For a detailed analysis of the meanings and use of kinship idioms in the perception of ethnic relations among Hausa immigrants in Kumasi, Ghana see Schildkrout (1978: 138-190).

Diagram 7.1: Kin and social security network of Talatu Yusufa, Misaje (November 2001)



Key for diagram 7.1:

Symbols:		Colour code:	
	woman		main informant Talatu Yusufa
	man		shared ancestors
	dead person		cognates, with whom ego entertains a close relationship
	marriage		affines, with whom ego entertains a close relationship
	divorce		
	descent		

Comments:

The diagram does not cover Talatu's entire kin or social network, nor does it illustrate all the kinship and alliance linkages between the many people indicated. It mainly serves to illustrate Talatu's social network from her own perspective. Furthermore, the diagram focuses on Hausa informants featuring in this and other chapters, thereby helping the reader to socially contextualise and place them in relation to each other.

Ajumma was the first person from *alkali* Yusufa's group who came to Misaje. She was joined by her daughters Larey and Talatu, the latter being the main informant in this diagram. From Talatu's perspective, her closest relatives in Misaje are her mother Ajumma and her eldest sister Larey. Her next closest relatives are her paternal grandfather's brother's daughter's sons to whom she generally refers as her [classificatory] brothers. Together they constitute the Wangara group in Misaje, the followers of *alkali* Yusufa. Among her [classificatory] brothers Pallalu is closest to Talatu, with whom she shares a vital interest in community activities. Furthermore, she is a friend to Bebi Sheif and Adama, the wives of Isa Danladi and Ahmadu respectively.

Talatu's best friend is Bebi Halima, a Hausa woman from Konene who is of the same age-group and also a single mother. She is able to construct a kinship link with Bebi Halima via her sister's daughter's marriage with Bebi's brother. The other three individuals crucial in Talatu's social network are *alhaji* Yero, *alhaji* Mbiame, and Maliki, all three being relatively wealthy cattle traders of Huya descent. In times of economic hardship and financial difficulties, she often relies on their assistance, particularly if her [classificatory] brothers are not able to support her adequately. In return, Talatu runs errands for them and helps in taking care of *alhaji* Mbiame's child who has sickle cell anaemia. In this case as well, Talatu manages to construct distant kinship relations via her paternal grandfather's brother's daughter's daughter's divorced marriage with *alhaji* Yero whose daughter has been married and divorced from *alhaji* Mbiame who is the brother of Maliki. Talatu refers to *alhaji* Yero, *alhaji* Mbiame, and Maliki as her [classificatory] brothers while they call her 'our sister'.

Although single Hausa women receive much support from relatives and friends, they cannot entirely rely on their social or kinship network for their sustenance. Most women engage in a variety of economic ventures including prostitution.

From Goggo Bebi's earlier account we know that the status of a single or 'free woman' was seen as transitory and that women were expected to remarry within one or two years. Nowadays, the situation is different; more and more women remain unmarried and raise children on their own. Goggo Bebi assesses the contemporary situation of 'free women' in Misaje as dire. "Nowadays it is the *bordel* [prostitution] of hunger. Women only receive *sadaka* [alms]." (Goggo Bebi, Misaje 26/11/01)

As concerns men's attitude to marriage, a growing reluctance has been noticed. Hausa interlocutors argued that, in the early days, suitors were more generous and willing to convert a love relationship into a marriage. Nowadays, many men are largely interested in short-term relationships and are economically unable to sustain their lovers. This development has partially been prompted by the nationwide economic depression that set in by the late 1980s and has been pressing on all population groups. It resulted not only in the worsening treatment of 'free women', but generally contributed to the weakening of social contracts. As Hausa informants emphasised, while young men tend to delay their marriages, women are less willing to keep up with negligent partners or inconvenient arrangements.

Corresponding to changes in individuals' attitudes, societal values have altered as well. While, ideally, married women are attributed a higher status than 'free women', the social reinforcement of such ethical standards is hardly feasible. In Misaje, where the Hausa community consists of approximately 90 households, I know of at least six Hausa women who are considered 'free women' and who prefer staying single over an unfavourable marriage. Biba²²¹, for example, delivered her third extra-marital child during my field stay. The father is a Hausa man in Misaje who is neither willing nor able to support her and the children. Concurrently she entertained a relationship with a Mbororo suitor who had been courting her for several years and supported her financially. She never accepted his marriage offer, arguing that she could not live 'in the bush' like a Mbororo woman, nor face his family's disregard for a Hausa daughter-in-law. Biba was fully aware of society's criticism of her 'disgraceful' lifestyle, but she claimed to be waiting for the appropriate husband who is capable and

²²¹ In this particular case I use a pseudonym to conceal the women's identity.

willing to care for her and her dependents, including her mother. Regarding her relatives' disapproval of her staying single, they did not so much condemn or blame Biba for her current situation, but saw it as a structural problem and expected a better solution to turn up.

Of all groups in Misaje, the Hausa seem particularly flexible in the ways they handle social norms and ideologies in the face of socio-economic change. Norms are stretched and modified in a way that actual challenges to Hausa men's and women's self-esteem and sense of identity are avoided.

Conversely, in Mbororo society there is no niche for 'free women'. A woman who wants to remain single and provide for herself, has to move to town and 'enter' Hausa society. Yet this does not mean that only Hausa women engage in prostitution, Grassfields and Mbororo women are equally involved. Like most other lines of commerce, the *bordel* business is no longer ethnically contained, neither on the part of the women nor their clientele. While in the early settlement period the main customers of Hausa – respectively Huya – women were Huya herdsmen (see Goggo Bebi's account), it is now much more diversified, and ethnic and religious boundaries are ignored. Moreover, it is no longer only women between marriages but also young, never-married women who offer their services. These girls are mainly from poor families, and their fleeting relationships could be read as pre-marital sexual relations; but from the perspective of 'free women', they constitute noteworthy rivals.

It should be understood that, although the public tends to perceive them as such, not all single women offer sexual favours. Furthermore, Cameroonians have increasingly become aware of HIV-Aids. During my first stay in Cameroon in the early 1990s, HIV-Aids was consciously ignored. Nowadays, villagers are confronted with an alarming rate of deaths and have started to recognise HIV-Aids as a potential cause. Consequently, this awareness has affected the business of 'free women'.

As the above elaborations have shown, changing economic conditions in the second half of the 20th century have affected Hausa men's and women's ventures. The subsequent engagement of Hausa individuals in a wide sphere of economic activities has also impacted on their socio-economic relations with their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours with whom they now compete on equal terms. Moreover, some of their activities have collided with existing societal norms, some of which have been stretched or altered to comply with the current situation.

Another field in which Hausa men and women have started to engage is agriculture. Here, as well, elderly Hausa women's active participation has required an alteration of social norms and has concurrently prompted ambivalent reactions among local Grassfielders.

7.4.3 Hausa as farmers

Among Hausa in the Grassfields, farming counts as a respectable economic activity. Many Hausa families in Misaje have negotiated access to nearby farmland through the *fon* or Grassfields friends. They focus on the cultivation of maize and beans for home consumption and cassava for market production. Their practices of farming are informed by Islamic gender norms which recommend that labour intensive work is done by men and children, while women assist in lighter tasks like planting and harvesting. If affordable, most families prefer employing local Grassfielders for the most arduous tasks. Alternatively, some have joined farmers' work groups to accomplish wearisome tasks quickly and effectively. Pallalu, for example, combines both strategies in cultivating a medium sized maize and cassava farm.

Regarding farmwork my wife only comes to help me during harvesting season. Most of the work is done by me and the children. At times, when the time is short, I employ other people to help. I am also a member of a farmers' workgroup. We decide today we go to this man's farm, then tomorrow we go to another person's farm. You prepare yourself to receive the group and they just complete your work. That is how we do it at times. The group is made up of people from different 'tribes', i.e. Hausa, Wimbum, Nchaney, Bessa.²²² They all cooperate. They all farm in our area. I participate with some of the natives [Grassfielders], they understand me very well. They say I am a hard-working farmer. They like me. Once I go to the farm, I am not lazy. I do the work the same as them. They are very happy about that. (Pallalu, Misaje 25/12/01)

As Pallalu's account shows, his engagement in the workgroup is intended as an economic strategy, and concurrently facilitates his social integration into the local community.

While for many Hausa families, farming is a supplementary activity, some elderly Hausa women have no alternative means of sustenance or income. Under 'normal' circumstances, old women would be cared for by their grown-up children. In the

²²² The conversation was held in English. The term 'tribe' is commonly used in casual conversation in referring to an ethnic group, clan, cultural entity, or lineage.

absence of such an arrangement, it is socially acceptable for them to engage in agriculture, although following the Islamic role model, they are not supposed to. Women informants perceived their farming attempts not as a matter of choice but as a mere necessity. Ajumma for example, the former wife of *alkali* Yusufa, described her trajectory from a fully secluded wife to a farmer as extremely dire:

When I was small, I did not know problems. But it is in Allah's will. And now, I am really suffering. It is in Misaje, in this village here, that I started farming because of my children's problems and in order to have food for them. [...] At first, after Talatu's father's death, I began to sell *makala* [snack food]. Even for 10,000 FCFA (€ 15), I always sent Talatu to sell it. But for farming, I did not know how to do it. I had to learn it here. People were laughing at me. So, they showed me how to do it until I knew. I cultivate sugar cane and cassava. When I tried to cultivate maize, it did not do well. Maybe I do not know how to do it well? [...] The selling of *makala* is Talatu's work. My own is the farm. When I am not in the farm, I come back to the house to look after the children. (Ajumma, Misaje, 1/10/01)

Ajumma considered the selling of snack food as young women's work, while she deemed farming an elderly women's task; the reason being that Islamic restrictions primarily apply to women of child-bearing age, while elderly women are largely exempted from the ideals of female modesty and male control. Secondly, Ajumma's account shows that, similar to Pallalu, she benefited from the support of Grassfielders who helped her improve her farming techniques. The latter see it as normal that individuals of whichever background should engage in farming in order to sustain themselves. On the other hand, the fact that elderly Hausa women engage in agriculture, while Hausa men generally claim that their women should be exempted from community service on religious grounds, has generated heated discussions and ambivalent feelings among local Grassfielders. This example shows that, while ideological differences occasionally are utilised to reinforce ethnic boundaries, pragmatic realities may support the transition and permeability of ethnic and social boundaries.

Probably more than any other population group in the Misaje area, the Hausa have experienced the effects of economic decline over the past decades, as they have always been dependent on the collaboration and assistance of neighbouring groups, particularly the Mbororo. Yet unlike the latter, they have not responded to the political

changes of the 1990s by forming an ethnic elite association. As we will see in the following, they largely rely on their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours in their political representation to the state.

7.5 Absence of politicised Hausa ethnicity

The absence of a politicised Hausa ethnicity is remarkable, particularly as both their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours have effectively explored new avenues of political representation. In order to understand this divergence, it will be helpful to consider the Hausa community in its wider socio-political contexts; i.e. as part of the Nchaney chiefdom, the Misaje Town community and the wider Muslim community.

In order to provide possible explanations, I will first portray Hausa perspectives on their socio-political integration into the Nchaney chiefdom, and then compare Hausa and Mbororo approaches to political representation. Subsequently, I will examine their involvement in community development projects and voluntary associations.

7.5.1 Hausa socio-political integration into the Nchaney chiefdom

Because the Hausa community in Misaje resides on Nchaney land, they are administratively and politically subordinated to the *fon* of Nkanchi. This arrangement dates back to their establishment in the 1920s and has been endorsed by the colonial and post-colonial administration.

Hausa informants today see themselves as local citizens and generally accept the Nchaney *fon*'s supremacy. As Talatu explained, Hausa have been accustomed to similar systems of political organisation in Hausaland and thus have no difficulties in integrating themselves into a hierarchical system. Grassfields and Hausa interlocutors equated the political status of the *sarkin hausawa* to the position of a sub-chief or quarter head who represents the interests of a faction of the Nchaney population, in this case Hausa residents on Nchaney territory. Innua, the current assistant (*wakiili*) of the Hausa chief in Misaje, described the political hierarchy between Hausa and Nchaney leaders as follows:

The *sarki* is like the *nji* [Grassfields sub-chief, advisor] of the *fon*. Since we are all in the land of the *fon*, he is our overall ruler. The *fon* is the head of all the people living on his land, including the FulBe and the Hausa. The big men representing the Hausa are the *sarki* and his assistant, the *wakiili*. (Innua, Misaje, 18/12/01)

Both Hausa and Nchaney informants portrayed the relationship of their community leaders as characterised by mutual respect and cooperation. While the *fon* is perceived as a father to all subordinates, the current *sarki* is regarded as his elder because he surpasses *fon* Richard in age and life experience. The *sarki* is expected to advise the *fon* on matters concerning the Hausa population and is responsible for communicating administrative orders to his community. Furthermore, he attends to Hausa-internal matters such as marital disputes and the organisation of Muslim rituals. Occasionally, the *sarkin hausawa* represents not only the Hausa population but Muslims in general, including Mbororo; for example, when participating in the traditional council, since the Mbororo have deemed it unnecessary to elect their own representative.

A subversive view of the political hierarchy between Nchaney and Hausa and of Nchaney cultural integrity was put forward by Jingi, an educated and outspoken Hausa youth:

If you go to Nkanchi today, almost all elderly people speak Hausa. Also their strong *ju-ju* [mask] they call *ngumba*, allegedly originates from Gboko in Benue State in Nigeria. *Fon* Michael stayed in Gboko and attended primary school there. He frequently sent me to Gboko with gifts to the compound where he stayed before. It is a Hausa compound. [...]

All the Nchaney *fons* bear Hausa names, for example *fon* Sale. Sale is a Hausa name, and he maintained it while being a *fon*. *Fon* Michael's Hausa name was Audu. *Fon* Richard is called Affang. *Fon* Michael used to go to the Muslim prayer ground on *salla* [prayers at the end of *ramadan* or at the feast of the ram]. He just went there but did not pray, because he was afraid of his people. He just sat and watched the Muslims praying. His people cautioned him that they did not like it and when he became sick, he stopped doing it. When he stopped going to the *idi* ground [Muslim prayer ground], he encouraged one of his sons to join the Muslim faith so that the chain of Muslim names in the family should not disappear. The son is called Abdullahi. I do not understand why the present *fon* has not given a Muslim name to any of his children. He himself has a Muslim name, although it is not popularly used. Even among the initial seven kingmakers, one was called Yahdo. Yahdo in Hausa is *yaro* which implies that one of the seven kingmakers was a Hausa. The Nchaney probably did not know how to pronounce the name, so they called him Yahdo. *Yaro* means 'domestic servant', while in Nchaney *bonba Yahdo* means 'the children of Yahdo'. So you see the link. The late man who controlled the bad *ju-ju luong* was called Musa [Muslim name]. There are many ties between Nchaney and Hausa, but the Nchaney neglect the Hausa. They were supposed to do all their traditions [rituals] with the Hausa. The current Hausa chief is the oldest chief in the Nchaney clan and is

supposed to have a strong role in all their activities, but he is neglected. [...] (Jingi Mohammadou, Misaje, 23/7/03)

This passage is taken from Jingi's response to chapter 4 on Nchaney history and identity of which he read a preliminary version. In challenging Nchaney claims to political and cultural sovereignty, he stressed features of cultural borrowing and related them to Hausa or Muslim influence.²²³ Jingi's contention is quite radical and hardly endorsed in public discourse. Yet it reflects first signs of a growing political consciousness among Hausa youths who no longer accept Nchaney pre-eminence but claim cultural and political parity.

In comparing Hausa and Mbororo approaches to their socio-political integration into the local and regional community, a number of significant divergences emerge. While Hausa generally accept a subordinate position in the local political system, Mbororo tend to contest the *fon*'s political supremacy and demand autonomous representation to the state (chapter 5). In his challenge of Nchaney sovereignty over the Hausa, Jingi demanded parity rather than autonomy. Similarly, in the conflict during *fon* Richard Chefon's investiture (chapter 3) the two groups differed in their approaches. While most Hausa aimed at mediation and reconciliation, many Mbororo favoured an offensive approach. Although eventually the two groups pursued a common strategy, the Hausa remained apprehensive of damaging the socio-political relationship with their Nchaney neighbours.

The reasons for divergences in Hausa and Mbororo approaches to socio-political integration into the local and regional community are complex. Due to the lack of up-to-date quantitative and qualitative data on Hausa communities in other areas of the Grassfields and Cameroon, my explanations are tentative. Although both Mbororo and Hausa are minorities in all locations of the Grassfields, the two population groups significantly diverge in their relative group sizes and economic power. While the Hausa constitute less than 1%, the Mbororo add up to approximately 15% of the overall population of the North West Province. Moreover, Hausa economic assets are relatively small compared to the Mbororo's capital vested in livestock. In facing local Grassfields groups and the colonial and post-colonial administration, the Mbororo are thus a much more powerful actor than the Hausa. Secondly, while Mbororo

²²³ On practices of cultural borrowing among Grassfields groups see e.g. Argenti (2004), Nkwi (1987: 19-40).

understanding of socio-political relations is rooted in the segmentary organisation of pastoral nomads, Hausa socio-political organisation is based on a more hierarchical model, as practiced in Hausaland and among Town FulBe in northern Nigeria. Thus, Hausa have less difficulty in integrating themselves into the local political hierarchy than Mbororo who aspire to autonomous integration into the overarching regional unit. Hausa informants rejected the idea of forming an ethnic elite association, arguing that they successfully pursued their interests via participation in community development projects and individual involvement in Mbororo associations.

7.5.2 Hausa as members of the Misaje Town and Muslim community

The Hausa's strategy of associating with other, politically more influential groups entails appealing to common denominators (Eriksen 1998), such as shared location or religion. Accordingly, Hausa residents in Misaje identify themselves as members of the Misaje Town community and more importantly of the Muslim community.

In his article on the politics of the kola trade Cohen (1966) introduces the notion of the Hausa as a "moral community". He interprets membership in the Hausa moral community as the prime mechanism of channelling individual strategies and generating group conformity, and thus as being at the basis of the Hausa monopoly over the kola trade in Southern Nigeria. He defines moral community as follows:

By a moral community in this context I am referring to the multiplicity of informal, face-to-face, essentially non-contractual relations which link and cross-link members of the community and which impel men to act in accordance with intrinsic values and norms, without much consideration for specific gain. [...] The intimate relations which make up the texture of such a moral community can arise only between men who can easily and effectively communicate with each other, by using the same language and sharing the same cultural symbols, customs, and traditional values. Within a multi-tribal society they can arise mainly between members of the same tribe. (Cohen 1966: 25-26)

In Cohen's understanding, shared ethnicity is a basic precondition for the emergence of a moral community. However, my case material from northwest Cameroon suggests otherwise. In line with Cohen's definition of a moral community, Hausa informants perceive of the Muslim community as being governed by religious norms and binding obligations. Yet the Muslim community in Misaje includes Hausa, Mbororo, and Grassfields converts. As we will see below, Hausa individuals appeal to

unity and solidarity within the local Muslim community when soliciting their participation in Mbororo associations.²²⁴

The following elaborations on Hausa participation in community development projects and their involvement in voluntary associations will substantiate my argument that Hausa see themselves not primarily as a trans-local and ethnically exclusive group, but as members of larger social units that transcend ethnic boundaries and are defined by shared locality or religion.

7.5.2.1 Hausa participation in community development projects

By the time of my fieldwork, the Hausa community in Misaje had successfully realised a number of community development projects, generally in cooperation with their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours. None of their undertakings was designed to benefit Hausa exclusively, but they were part of larger projects aimed at promoting the population of Misaje Town or the Muslim community in Misaje.

Among the most recent projects, undertaken with their Grassfields neighbours, is the provision and management of a public water tap in the Hausa quarter. In 1999, the *fon* of Nkanchi and the Divisional Officer of Misaje encouraged the inhabitants of Misaje to embark on a community development project proposed by the Cameroonian non-governmental organisation SIRDEP (Society for Initiatives in Rural Development and Environmental Protection). The project's goals were to provide public water taps to the town population, to demarcate a water catchment area, and to train individuals in the maintenance of the provided infrastructure. The Hausa community, alongside other population groups, contributed their share in cash, kind, and labour, and were represented in the water committee. Like in all quarters, the public water tap is supervised by the respective quarter head, in this case the *sarkin hausawa*. Although this project was not initiated by the Hausa community, Hausa have benefited on the grounds of their active participation and their membership in the Misaje Town community.

Many Hausa community development projects in the Misaje area are geared towards the Muslim community. Most significant is the establishment of an Islamic Primary School in Misaje which was realised with sizeable financial assistance of

²²⁴ The perception of the Muslim community as a moral community is also relevant factor in support of religious conversion, a theme discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Mbororo individuals. The school started off in 1994 as an informal venture that subsequently expanded in ambition and size. In 1998 it was registered as a formal educational institution within the Islamic educational framework of the Cameroonian government. In 1999 a school compound was constructed, as more than 110 students were enrolled and proper teaching facilities were required. Many individuals supported the endeavour. The *fon* of Misaje offered the site, Hausa and Mbororo individuals contributed cash, kind, and labour. Moreover, the school received teaching aids, books, and prizes from external bodies, such as the Cameroonian government, the national Islamic Association based in Yaoundé, the Swiss development association Helvetas, and the Mafor University Women, an association of female university graduates.²²⁵ The Islamic Primary School in Misaje is not the only one of its kind. Within Donga-Mantung there are six registered Islamic schools that provide primary school education in English as well as instruction in Arabic language and Muslim religion. Taking into consideration that the endorsement of formal education by Hausa and Mbororo parents is a relatively recent phenomenon, the Islamic Primary School in Misaje has had considerable success, having enrolled 154 students and five teachers by 2001.

As these two examples illustrate, in pursuing their collective interests, Hausa tend to prioritise their local and religious identity over their ethnicity. Similarly, individuals' choice of participating in local self-help groups is not guided by the criterion of ethnic identity but by shared interests and a common socio-cultural background.

7.5.2.2 *Muslim voluntary associations in Misaje*

Hausa men and women in Misaje commonly participate in Muslim voluntary associations, such as the Islamic Youth Association and a variety of rotating credit associations (*adashi* in Hausa, *njangi* in Pidgin English).

The Islamic Youth Association was formed by young Hausa men in the late 1980s as a self-help group. In 1995 the association was officially registered. By 2002 it had more than 50 members, including Hausa and Mbororo as well as Grassfielders interested in the Muslim faith. During their weekly meetings the members operate a

²²⁵ On the history and development of the Islamic Primary School in Misaje see the report compiled by its headmaster Nji Enock Tanjong (appendix C).

saving group, advance their Islamic education, organise social activities, and fulfil community duties, such as cleaning the mosque or clearing the graveyard. As they deem community development an important goal, the Islamic Youth Association contributed significantly to the construction of the Islamic Primary School in Misaje.²²⁶

The Islamic Youth Association in Misaje is a local organisation with equivalents in many places across the Grassfields and Cameroon. Yet despite occasional contacts and exchange visits, no attempts were made to cooperate or form a trans-local umbrella association. Moreover, members of the Islamic Youth Association in Misaje are aware of the existence of international Muslim organisations based in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. As advertised by visiting scholars from Egypt and by Cameroonian individuals who benefited from their programmes, these organisations offer Islamic educational schemes and assistance for Muslim community projects, such as the construction of mosques or health centres. As yet, the Muslim community in Misaje has no project or intention to apply for assistance from international Muslim organisations. Their availability, however, is a known factor and has influenced Hausa strategies of pursuing their community interests by identifying with the wider Muslim community.

While young Muslim men in Misaje are organised in the Islamic Youth Association, many Hausa women and men engage in rotating credit associations. During the time of my research, five Muslim rotating credit associations existed, most of which included Muslim and non-Muslim members. Many Hausa women participated in one or more of these saving groups which fulfil financial and social functions.²²⁷

The two most popular Hausa *adashi* in Misaje are *Renakama* and *Salama*. By 2001 they comprised between 30 and 50 members and had been running for ten and eight years respectively. Both associations include a variety of saving schemes and provide financial and social support to their members, particularly in the context of birth, marriage, illness, and death. Group members are supposed to own a garment in

²²⁶ For a comprehensive overview of the history and activities of the Islamic Youth Association in Misaje see the newsletter compiled by its members (appendix D).

²²⁷ Rotating credit associations are a well known and long established institution in many areas of Cameroon (cf. S. Ardener 1964, Ardener & Burman 1995). On rotating credit associations among Hausa in the Hausa homeland see Hill (1972: 203).

the associations' chosen cloth and to parade in their uniform at social gatherings and official occasions, such as Women's Day or National Day celebrations.

Most exceptional among the Muslim groups in Misaje Town is the group named *kawtal pulaaku* (meaning 'FulBe meeting' in Fulfulde). It was formed in the late 1990s on the initiative of the NGO Ballotiral (see chapter 5). Its activities include an adult literacy programme, a basic saving scheme, and occasional trainings in income-generating activities. Initially, the group was planned to consist of Mbororo women exclusively; but upon Hausa women's requests to participate, it was opened up to Hausa members.

Hausa attempts to partake in Mbororo development projects are a common phenomenon in Misaje and reflect the Hausa's primary self-identification as members of the Muslim community rather than an exclusive ethnic group. Hausa generally stress their close relationship and socio-cultural interrelatedness with their Mbororo neighbours. Mbororo reluctance to integrate Hausa into their programmes of community development and political self-representation was met by Hausa interlocutors with incomprehension:

The Hausa and the Mbororo understand each other [...]. The only difficulty we have been facing is that they say they have their own cultural organisation. They do not want to invite us, the Muslims. They say, it belongs to the Mbororo only. [...] They say, MBOSCUDA is only for the Mbororo. It is only now, really at the running hour, that they have invited us and that they mix with some of our Hausa. Really, we are happy now for that. Everything has come together. (Pallalu, Misaje, 25/11/01)

In looking at Hausa strategies of pursuing their community interests it has become clear that no attempts have been made to explore ethnicity as a viable avenue of political self-representation. Instead, Hausa tend to identify themselves as part of larger units, such as the Nchaney chiefdom, the Misaje Town community, and above all the Muslim community. As outlined above, among the tentative reasons for the lack of politicised Hausa identity in the Grassfields are their small group size, their lack of economic influence, and the indeterminate character of Hausa conceptions of ethnicity.

7.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to describe the historical evolvement of the Hausa community in the Western Grassfields, and to examine transformations in Hausa self-understanding and interethnic relations in the context of changing economic and political conditions. In concluding the chapter, I will summarise some of its main findings by comparing different understandings of Hausa ethnicity in the Western Grassfields, the Hausa homeland, and in southern Nigeria as described by Cohen (1969).

Upon reading an earlier draft of this chapter, Murray Last made a significant comment concerning the relevance of Hausa ethnicity in Hausaland and in the diaspora:

My guess is that terms like *hausawa* [Hausa people], *bahausha* [Hausa man] matter more in the peripheries of Hausaland and beyond – and your study is therefore fascinating for its care and skill in that context; for ethnicity matters in your world. It matters too in some wider political contexts. But it is a different world from Hausaland itself, and the day-to-day talk of farmers and their wives and children in, say, the Kano or Katsina countryside. It is in the periphery that notions like ‘becoming Hausa’ (used by Salomone at a particular political conjuncture²²⁸) become important. The current trend in the Nigerian middle belt is marked more by ‘ceasing’ to be Hausa. (Murray Last, e-mail communication, 09/09/2005).

Furthermore, Last pointed out that, in identifying themselves, individuals in Hausaland – now and in the past – use terms that refer to their regional rather than ethnic background; for example, Kanawa (people from Kano), Katsinawa (people from Katsina), or Zazzagawa (people from Zazzau, present-day Zaria). These regional differentiations are largely absent in the Western Grassfields, where sub-ethnic identities are more pertinent. Moreover, in Hausaland some sub-ethnonyms like Wangarawa have distinct (slightly disparaging) nuances, which they lack in the Western Grassfields.

As I have outlined above, Hausa ethnicity in the Western Grassfields includes a variety of sub-ethnicities, most of which exist also in other regions. The sub-ethnic category of Hausa of Huya descent, for example, is equivalent to the category of Hausa-Fulani common in northern Nigeria (cf. Nicolas 1975). Similarly, in western

²²⁸ Salomone (1975b) describes processes of religious and ethnic conversion among the non-Muslim Gungawa of Yauri Emirate in northwestern Nigeria where the Hausa constitute the ruling class.

and southern Cameroon as well as in many parts of Nigeria, Muslim converts tend to take up Hausa identity.²²⁹

A feature that widely applies to Hausa communities in the diaspora, but not so much in Hausaland, is the association of Hausa ethnicity with trade. In the Western Grassfields the complex ethnic-occupational identity of Hausa merchants is rooted in the early 20th century, the period of Hausa establishment in the region. In the meantime, however, Hausa men and women have diversified their economic activities. Moreover, in their self-perception, ethnic and occupational identities have been disentangled. The Hausa conception of their ethnicity differs from the self-understanding of Grassfielders and Mbororo, as it provides room for economic individuality.

In comparing Cohen's (1969) descriptions of the Hausa diaspora in southern Nigeria with the Hausa community of the Grassfields, a number of commonalities and differences are apparent. While keeping in mind divergences in time frame and urban versus rural focus, I will engage with three parallels.

Cohen (1969: 15) argues that Hausa communities in Ibadan are far from being reproductions of Hausa communities in Hausaland. Their socio-political and economic organisation has developed in response to local conditions. Thus stressing Hausa identity as a means to realise economic and political interests is mainly a feature of Hausa communities in the diaspora. Furthermore, it is a feature particularly pronounced among Hausa communities established on British colonial territory, as the British administration with its policy of indirect rule endorsed the emergence of autonomous ethnic groupings (Cohen 1969: 24). Cohen's comparison of Hausa communities in Hausaland and the diaspora corresponds with the above comment by Murray Last. His argument about the conducive role of the British colonial administration may as well be applied to the Western Grassfields, though with some alteration. As we have seen, the establishment of Hausa in the Grassfields was facilitated by the German and later British colonial administration. However, the British refused the Hausa (and Mbororo) autonomous political representation, but granted them limited judicial autonomy. Compared to the attention paid to Grassfielders and Mbororo, the Hausa were rather neglected by the colonial (and post-

²²⁹ Alternative cases in which religious conversion does not necessarily result in ethnic conversion will be discussed in chapter 8 (see also Salomone 1975b).

colonial) administration; a factor that may account for the absence of a politicised Hausa ethnicity in the Western Grassfields, both today and in the colonial period.

Another striking parallel between the Hausa communities in southern Nigeria and the Western Grassfields is their control over the kola and cattle trade in the first half of the 20th century. As Cohen (1969: 184) explains, the Hausa in Ibadan successfully monopolised these lines of trade by maintaining ethnic exclusiveness and by organising themselves for political action in facing their Yoruba opponents. In the Grassfields the situation was different. Here the kola trade lasted only to the 1930s, and Hausa traders faced relatively limited competition by Grassfielders. Regarding the trade with cattle, the Hausa benefited from their close social and economic relations with their Mbororo neighbours. However, in the 1950s, when Grassfields individuals began to venture into cattle trade, the Hausa's monopoly soon subsided.

A third parallel concerns criteria of membership in the Hausa community in Ibadan and Misaje. As Cohen (1969: 29, 49) points out, individuals are not integrated into the Hausa community solely on the basis of coming from Hausaland and speaking Hausa; they undergo a complex process of "retribalisation" in which they have to adjust to locally established norms and practices. On the other hand, there are Hausa labour-migrants who do not opt for living in a Hausa community, but integrate themselves in mixed neighbourhoods where their ethnicity is of secondary importance (Cohen 1969: 15). At the same time, many members of the Hausa community in Ibadan are not 'real' Hausa (i.e. children of Hausa parents), but count as Hausa on the basis of speaking Hausa as a first language, being able to name a place of origin in Hausaland, being Muslims, and having no scarification that indicates membership in a different ethnic group (Cohen 1969: 49).

As outlined above, the Hausa community in Misaje is (sub-)ethnically as diverse as the Hausa community in Ibadan. Here all Muslim village dwellers are included into the Hausa ethnic category. Moreover, as we will see in the subsequent chapter, the ethnonym Hausa has come to stand for Muslims in general; a situation quite different from the Ibadan case where Hausa identity is more clearly delineated. The Misaje case also differs from the Ibadan case in the sense that there are no mechanisms to exclude Hausa migrants from membership in the local Hausa community. This divergence may best be explained in terms of relative group size and rural versus urban setting. The Hausa community in Misaje is numerically small and economically rather insignificant. In order to guarantee its continued existence, it is a more viable

strategy to keep group boundaries permeable and to relinquish mechanisms of exclusion until a critical group size is achieved. The situation may be somewhat different in the urban centre Bamenda where the Hausa community is much larger and economically more viable than in Misaje.

As these comparative explorations on Hausa ethnicity have shown, being Hausa may have different meanings in different locations and at different moments in time. With regard to the Western Grassfields, we have seen that local conceptions of Hausa identity are rather flexible and elusive. Group boundaries are kept permeable, and the criteria of membership in the Hausa community are rather basic. Yet despite the indeterminacy of Hausa conceptions of ethnicity, Hausa individuals have a clear understanding of their own identity. Furthermore, membership in the Hausa (or Muslim) community provides individuals with a like-minded social environment and a social security network. These are also vital incentives for Grassfields individuals to consider religious and ethnic conversion, a subject explored in the subsequent chapter.

8 RELIGIOUS CONVERSION, INTERMARRIAGE, AND INTERETHNIC FRIENDSHIP

As outlined in the previous chapter, the Hausa community in Misaje is comprised of 'real' Hausa, Huya (Town FulBe), and Grassfields converts. As compared to northern Cameroon where Islam has attracted many members of local non-Muslim population groups, Muslim conversion is relatively limited in the Western Grassfields. Here, the majority of the population are Christians and/or practitioners of African local religions, and it is mainly in areas with a strong Hausa and Mbororo presence that Grassfields individuals have been attracted to the Muslim religion and community. For example, in Misaje Town 19% of all compounds are Muslim households, with a quarter of them headed by Muslim converts; i.e. 21 compounds or 4% of all households belong to Nchaney, Bessa, Nso, and Wimbun converts.²³⁰ Taking into account the relative numerical, political, and economic insignificance of the Muslim community in the Western Grassfields, it is noteworthy that Grassfields individuals are attracted to Islam.

As frequently mentioned by informants, one of the main incentives for Grassfielders to convert to Islam is intermarriage with Hausa or Mbororo. While the Hausa community has no restrictions on intermarriage with Muslims of any ethnic background, the Mbororo are more exclusive and generally marry within their own group. The number of Grassfields individuals who are married to Hausa or Mbororo partners is small, and in the Misaje area amounts to less than 1% of the local Grassfields population. Due to the lack of long-term data, I was unable to establish a reliable statistical assessment of intermarriage between Grassfielders and Muslims in the Misaje area. However, in the view of local interlocutors, intermarriage between the three groups has increased over the past decades and is taken as an indicator of their mutual integration.

While marriage alliances and conversion to Islam create bonds mainly between Grassfielders and Hausa, Mbororo are more inclined to cultivate individual friendships with their Grassfields and Hausa neighbours. As outlined in previous chapters, most Mbororo in the Misaje area have settled for more than 30 years and have established economic and social relations with their Grassfields and Hausa

²³⁰ This data is derived from the village survey of Misaje Town conducted by my research team in 2001 (see chapter 2).

neighbours. Individual friendships play a significant role, as they fulfil both social and economic functions.

It is my aim in this chapter to highlight the factors that facilitate religious conversion and interethnic marriage in the Grassfields, despite the absence of structural incentives that promote corresponding processes elsewhere in northern Cameroon. Furthermore, I am concerned with the ways individuals exploit multiple identities that result from these processes. Finally, I am interested in the social ties that emerge from interethnic friendship, and the functions they fulfil in individuals' lives.

I base my elaborations on participant observation and interviews with Grassfields, Mbororo, and Hausa informants. In collaboration with Talatu Yusufa and Ngeh Jonathan, I interviewed more than 40 interlocutors on the subjects of religious conversion and intermarriage or interethnic friendship. Part of the information was obtained from life history interviews with Hausa informants, which also constituted the basis for my elaborations on Hausa identity and economy in the previous chapter.²³¹ Comparative dimensions are derived from similar research on religious conversion and interethnic marriage in northern Cameroon. Most pertinent are the studies of Burnham (1972, 1996) and Schultz (1979, 1980, 1984) which focus on the interplay of migration and religious and ethnic conversion. A number of subsequent studies have addressed related themes, and special attention has been paid to gendered perspectives (e.g. van Santen 1993, 1998a). With regard to interethnic friendship, I will draw comparisons with the findings of Boutrais (1984) and Burnham (1980) on friendships between pastoral FulBe and their agricultural neighbours in northwestern and northern Cameroon.

8.1 Individual identity switching and cross-cutting ties

My focus in this chapter is on individual identity switching and the management of multiple and polytactic identities. According to Elwert (1997: 257, 2002a: 39), individuals and groups may belong to different reference groups simultaneously and may thus situationally stress different affiliations and identities. Moreover, some identities may include a polytactic potential, meaning a latent multiplicity of order and

²³¹ I would like to thank my colleague Sarli Sardou Nana for vital information on the Muslim community in Nso, included in this chapter. Furthermore, I thank Frances Pine for critical comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

identities (see also Schlee & Werner 1996: 14-16). My interest is in identity discourses relevant to religious conversion and intermarriage, i.e. I am concerned with the ways individuals switch between religious and ethnic identities, in particular Muslim, Grassfields, and Hausa identity. As will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter, Muslim and Hausa identity in the Western Grassfields are widely seen as congruent and interchangeable. Thus religious conversion comes close to ethnic conversion. On the other hand, while Grassfields converts count as members of the Hausa community, they may partially retain their Grassfields identity. As many Grassfields converts explained, they understand themselves as Muslims or Hausa by choice and Grassfielders by birth. Thus, while they have the opportunity to switch their allegiance from one group to the other, they also face the predicament of managing their loyalties and liabilities to both communities.

In studying interethnic friendship, I tie in with the debate on the integrative or dissociative faculty of cross-cutting ties, which was initiated by Gluckman (1973 [1966]) and further refined by Hallpike (1977) and Schlee (1997, 2000, 2004) (see chapter 1). Allegiances between Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa resulting from historical, cultural, political, and economic commonalities have been discussed in earlier chapters. Here my primary focus is on social bonds, in particular those created through interethnic friendship, intermarriage, and religious conversion. It is somewhat remarkable that institutionalised social bonds, such as interethnic joking relationships, are largely absent in the Western Grassfields. While in many parts of western Africa FulBe are known to entertain joking relations with a variety of ethnic groups (cf. Diallo 2002, Paulme 1939), their only joking partners in the Grassfields are Kole'en (Kanuri), who are numerically few and subsumed under the Hausa category. No new joking relationships have evolved in the context of the Mbororo's establishment in the Grassfields; for example with the Pinyin with whom they entertain quite close and friendly relations due to their shared interest in cattle husbandry. Moreover, as we will see later, friendships of Mbororo and Grassfielders or Hausa lack an institutionalised character and are of a strictly individual nature.

8.2 Religious conversion and intermarriage in northwest Cameroon: general considerations

In the following I will briefly outline the approaches of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa to religion and religious conversion. Furthermore, I will give a short overview of the groups' marriage practices and their approaches to interethnic marriage. These brief elaborations provide a general background to the individual cases of religious conversion and interethnic marriage that will be analysed in the subsequent section.

8.2.1 Religious freedom in the Grassfields

As argued by Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa interlocutors, religion is an important spiritual source that provides moral guidelines to a successful and good life. Active membership in a religious community is seen to yield emotional support and social security. Moreover, the choice of one's faith is generally considered an individual freedom. Yet religion occupies different positions in the self-understanding of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa. Whereas for the latter two, being Muslim is an inseparable part of their ethnic and cultural self-understanding, for Grassfielders their religious identity is not constitutive of their ethnic identity. Many Grassfielders are Christians, others practice African local religions, and a few are Muslims. Besides, many families are 'mixed', with their members belonging to different religions and/or denominations.

While among Grassfielders religious conversion is relatively common, interlocutors emphasised that sequential conversion is not desirable, and that once an individual has chosen his/her faith, he/she should be serious and remain in it. Conversely, among Hausa and Mbororo, conversion to Christianity or alternative religions is rare. Although there are a couple of American missionaries in Nkambe and Sabga working towards this aim, their success rate is extremely low.

Hausa and Mbororo generally welcome Grassfielders' conversion to Islam, as it supports the spread of the Muslim faith, and concurrently strengthens the Muslim community and its political and economic influence in the Grassfields. As outlined in the previous chapter, Hausa society is more receptive and inclusive than Mbororo society. Grassfielders converts thus integrate mainly into the Hausa community.

While in an individual's lifetime, his/her religious choice is generally respected, religious differences and competing claims occasionally are played out in the context

of converts' funerals.²³² Grassfielders and Muslims differ significantly in their eschatological beliefs and their burial practices. In Grassfielders' understanding the dead continue to exist in a parallel though invisible world, to which the funeral is the gateway. If the burial rites are not performed properly and according to the deceased's social status, he/she may turn into a roaming spirit.²³³ Muslims and Christians, on the other hand, believe in the existence of paradise and hell. Christian burial practices are still compatible with Grassfielders' traditional funeral rites; but Muslim practices differ so much, that Grassfielders tend to take offence when their converted sons or daughters are buried in the Muslim manner. Such an instance occurred during my research in 2001 when Adamu Kibanya, an Nchaney convert and protégé of the Hausa chief, died.

Adamu had a government job and was considered a member of the local elite. Upon his death, both his Nchaney relatives and his chosen Hausa family claimed the right to bury him according to their respective religious traditions. Eventually, it was agreed that Adamu considered himself a Muslim and wished to receive a Muslim burial. His corpse was covered with a white cloth and laid out in the Hausa chief's compound before it was buried on the Muslim graveyard at the outskirts of Misaje.²³⁴ Michael Bako, a close relative to the deceased and head of the Kibanya family, summarised Grassfielders' reservations over Adamu's Muslim burial as follows:

The women complained that it is not good to keep somebody on the ground. They compared it with their own fashion to keep the dead person on a bed and to come and see the person. I saw it the first time with important personalities like Abacha. I decided that if they do the same thing with important people in Nigeria, it is really their fashion. That is why I was not too angry. Also, they only allowed the family members to see his face; that is not the same with our tradition. They kept the corpse in a separate house and also separated the Muslim and the other mourners. I would have preferred them to join the two groups, because we are all the same people. But the Hausa do not like to cry, although it is a normal thing when you lose a person. We know, it is their fashion and you cannot force them to cry. It is not because they do not feel the loss, it is just their fashion. (Michael Bako, Misaje, 08/01/02)

²³² Similarly, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (2001: 170-172) point out that to many Cameroonians their burial location is a vital issue, because it expresses their belonging to a specific place and community. Thus even in the context of migration, Cameroonians (and their relatives) insist that they should be buried in their home area, in the land of their ancestors.

²³³ On Grassfielders' notions of death and their burial rites see e.g. Haaf & Fondö (1992: 175-191), Koloss (1980a: 19-27, 1980b, 2000: 329-346), Ritzenthaler & Ritzenthaler (1962: 62-73).

²³⁴ For a more detailed description of Muslim funeral rites see van Santen (1993: 239-242).

Hausa informants, on the other hand, stated that by no means could they have allowed Adamu's relatives to bury him. As they argued, the latter suspected that Adamu was killed by witchcraft and wanted to put magical potions in his grave that should find and punish his murderer; a practice they considered irreconcilable with Islamic doctrine. Moreover, Hausa women argued that the Grassfielders' expressive style of mourning was incompatible with Muslim etiquette of bereavement, and hence it was necessary to separate the two groups of mourners. In the end, Adamu's burial passed well and no lasting grievances remained between his Nchaney and Hausa relatives.

As this example illustrates, funerals occasionally become a site of contention where religious differences and competing claims to an individual's identity are played out.²³⁵ Similar incidents have been documented by researchers working on religious conversion in northern Cameroon. Gausset (1999: 259, 269), for example, mentions disagreements over burial rites between Muslim and non-Muslim Wawa in Adamaoua, which took quite a different turn than in the Grassfields. Elder Wawa were shocked that their Muslim sons no longer participated in the funeral masquerades and feared that they would refuse to bury or mourn them. In consequence, they abandoned the masquerades and adopted Islam.²³⁶

8.2.2 Hausa, Mbororo, and Grassfielders' perspectives of intermarriage

In anthropological and sociological literature a number of approaches have been introduced to explain the attractiveness of interethnic marriages, not only from an individual but also from a group perspective (cf. Thode-Arora 1999 for a comprehensive account). Explanations refer to structural incentives (e.g. spatial closeness, demographic factors) as well as socio-political motivations, such as political alliances and status increase. As we will see later, some of these factors have facilitated interethnic marriages in Misaje. Conversely, there are a number of structural and cultural factors that complicate intermarriage of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa. Among them are considerations of a sedentary versus mobile lifestyle, divergences in Grassfielders' and Muslims' marriage systems, and notions of cultural superiority.

²³⁵ Similar examples have been provided by Cohen & Odhiambo (1992) concerning the burial of a prominent politician in Kenya, and by Geertz (1999: 96-132) for Eastern Central Java, where the burial of a boy became the centre of conflict between rivalling political factions.

²³⁶ Similarly, van Santen (1993: 228-244) compares funeral rites of non-Muslim and Islamised Mafa in northern Cameroon. She states significant differences, but does not report any emerging conflict.

Grassfielders preferentially marry partners from their own ethnic group, or from neighbouring Grassfields groups with whom they share friendly relations. In the Misaje area marriages between Nchaney and Bessa are fairly common. Both groups are patrilinear and virilocal and follow a bridewealth system which requires the husband to present the bride's family with goods, money, and services as part of the marriage arrangement. The bridewealth is negotiated between both families and is often paid a few years after the couple has been married and produced children. Moreover, the husband is supposed to assist his wife's relatives throughout their marriage. Marital unions with members of other Grassfields groups are socially acceptable, though with a few exceptions. Intermarriage between Nchaney and certain sub-sections of Nso, for example, is ritually prohibited, and marital unions are thought to produce deficient or no off-springs. This interdiction resulted from the inter-chiefdom war that took place in the 19th century and culminated in bloodshed and ritual separation of the two groups (see chapter 4). Intermarriage between local Grassfielders and Grassfields migrants is virtually absent, as the latter prefer to marry within their own ethnic group. Some Grassfields migrants who grew up in Misaje entertain love relationships with local Grassfielders, Hausa, or Mbororo. Yet as they pointed out, these arrangements are not considered suitable and eventually, they will marry a partner from their home area.

In the view of many Grassfielders, intermarriage with Muslims is problematic. Particularly marriage to a Mbororo partner is viewed critically – not so much because of the requirement of religious conversion, but because of the Mbororo's assumed mobile lifestyle and the relatively tense relationship between the two groups.²³⁷ An interlocutor from the neighbouring chiefdom Bum phrased his concerns as follows:

In the case of Bum girls having children with a Mbororo man, the girls stay with the Mbororo man as girlfriend and boyfriend. We do not like them to get married to the Mbororo man, because the Bum people do not like to take dowry from the Mbororo. A Bum man does not like to give his daughter to a Mbororo man because the Mbororo are too mobile and they are wicked, destroying the farms. They only make friends with local girls because they are rich. But the most important thing is that they are too mobile. They

²³⁷ J. Goody (1970) reports similar assertions with regard to intermarriage between sedentary farming groups and nomadic FulBe in northern Ghana, while Oberhofer (2005: 162) documents related arguments against intermarriage of Dyan, Phuo, and Lobi with FulBe in southwestern Burkina Faso.

can take our children to Nigeria, stay abroad, and sell all their animals. (Bangsi Bala Joseph, Lakabum, 24/11/2000)

Besides the fear of being deprived of their children and grandchildren, the incompatibility of the different marriage systems of Grassfielders and Muslims is a complicating factor. While Grassfielders practice a bridewealth system, Mbororo and Hausa practice a system of direct and indirect dowry. The bride is supposed to bring her own possessions into the marriage, which are partly provided by her relatives, and partly bought with the money contributed by the groom. In both systems husbands have to come up with relatively large sums of money. But while the bridewealth goes to the parents, the dowry belongs to the bride. Thus, for Grassfields parents giving their daughter to a Muslim husband implies a twofold loss; they receive no bridewealth and have no claims to continuous assistance from their son-in-law. However, against the background of increasing economic hardship, many Grassfields parents prefer their daughters to marry a Muslim husband than to remain single and dependent on them.

Hausa society has much less restriction on intermarriage; the only condition being that both partners are Muslims. Furthermore, the Hausa's demographic marginality in the Grassfields renders intermarriage with Mbororo and Grassfields converts desirable, as women and men married to a Hausa partner generally integrate into the Hausa community.

Conversely, from the perspective of most Mbororo, interethnic marriage is not desirable and normally discouraged. As explained in chapter 5, FulBe classify all non-FulBe as *haaBe* and tend to consider them as culturally different or inferior. To preserve their cultural (and racial) purity, Mbororo tend to reject intermarriage with *haaBe*, although such a discriminatory approach conflicts with the Islamic doctrine of Muslim equality.²³⁸ Mbororo interlocutors in the Grassfields were familiar with the tradition of betrothal marriage in which, ideally, patrilateral parallel cousins are engaged in their childhood by their parents (cf. Stenning 1994 [1959]: 41-46, 112-116). However, in the Misaje area it is no longer practiced, and most Mbororo men and women chose their partners themselves. Two criteria play a major role in the choice of preferential marriage partners; these are kinship relations and the spatial proximity to the bride's natal family, as Mbororo women rely on their close relatives

²³⁸ According to Yamani (1988) reluctance towards interethnic marriages is common in many Muslim societies, including Saudi Arabia.

for practical and moral support. As the Mbororo population in the Misaje area is very diverse in their lineage composition, the kinship criterion has become secondary. Many marriages take place across lineages and between neighbouring or nearby families.

Another significant factor facilitating intermarriage across lineages and ethnic groups is the relative wealth of Mbororo. Many Mbororo men marry more than one wife. While the first spouse preferably belongs to the same lineage as her husband, subsequent wives may be chosen on the basis of alternative motives such as love or political alliance. Marrying wives from different lineages or even other ethnic groups enhances the husband's social integration into the wider community. However, examples of Mbororo men who married Grassfields women are very few. One of them is *arDo* Sale who lives on Bum territory and married the daughter of the late *fon* of Bum. Most Mbororo and Bum informants interpreted this liaison as a political gesture to strengthen Mbororo integration and alliance.²³⁹

Other examples of intermarriage or *de facto* partnerships between Mbororo and Grassfielders refer to a different stratum of Mbororo society, namely hired herdsmen (*wainaaBe*). Because of their meagre income and harsh lifestyle many hired herdsmen find it difficult to find a Mbororo wife. Most Mbororo girls prefer being the third or fourth wife of a wealthy husband than the sole wife of a poor herdsman. For local Grassfields women, on the other hand, a partnership with a Mbororo or Huya herdsman may be more attractive than marrying a Grassfields husband. Local informants counted at least seven Bessa and some Nchaney women who are married to *wainaaBe*.

As these examples show it is either the rich or the poor who can socially afford to diverge from the norm. In general, however, the notion of cultural difference or superiority persists, and the number of Mbororo who marry partners of a different ethnic background is relatively small.

While interethnic marriages are relatively rare, informal love relationships between members of different ethnic groups are more common. In some cases, lovers eschew marriage because of societal restrictions. In others, it is the result of increasing economic hardship, as many aspiring husbands are unable to provide the required

²³⁹ As Francis Nyamnjoh (personal communication, Dakar, 15/04/2006) who grew up in Bum pointed out, from her early childhood the daughter of the late *fon* of Bum had an affinity for Mbororo, comporting herself in the same manners and enjoying the company of her Mbororo friends. It was thus not surprising that she married *arDo* Sale

marriage prestations and to adequately support their future wives and children. This tendency to *de facto* partnerships applies to both interethnic and intra-ethnic relationships.

8.3 Actors' perspectives on religious conversion and intermarriage

In order to examine the many ways in which Grassfields individuals are attracted and socialised into the Muslim faith and community, I will now introduce three portraits of Muslim converts from the Misaje area with both genders being represented. The portraits are based on interviews with each convert and reflect their perspectives.

Adama: forever Muslim

Adama is the daughter of an Nchaney man and a Bessa woman. Her father died when she was still young, and her mother is a practicing Presbyterian. Adama went to the Presbyterian Church until she fell in love with Hamadu, a Hausa man. They stayed together for one year, before Hamadu had to serve a prison sentence for two years. Adama waited for him, but after some time she got pregnant. Hamadu came out of prison and wanted her back. By then, Adama was about 29 years old and had given birth to three children out of wedlock.

Hamadu approached Adama's uncle with the request to marry her and make her a Muslim. Her relatives agreed but left the final decision to her, as she had to choose herself if she wanted to convert to Islam. Adama agreed, and Hamadu gave her uncle 7,000 FCFA (approximately €11), which he accepted.²⁴⁰

Although many men had come to ask for Adama, she refused all earlier marriage offers by local Grassfielders. In her view, Grassfields men cause too much trouble. They beat their wives and often provide insufficiently for them. A Muslim husband, on the other hand, is more responsible and only in exceptional cases batters his wife.

Adama was instructed in Muslim practices and ideology by her husband who is a *mallam* (he completed reading the Koran). She learned to make the prayers and to observe *ramadan*. Initially, she and her husband communicated mainly in Pidgin English, but gradually she learned Hausa; not from her husband, but from her

²⁴⁰ In comparison, my Bessa host Patrick settled the bridewealth for his Nchaney wife Munka at 40,000 FCFA (€60), while my Hausa neighbour contributed 150,000 FCFA (€230) for the indirect dowry of his Hausa wife.

children. Her son refused to communicate in Nchaney, his mother's original tongue, but only responded in Hausa. For some time, Adama resisted and scolded him. Eventually, she gave in and made an effort to learn Hausa.

While staying at her parents' compound, Adama used to drink *shah* (maize beer). At times, they drank maize beer in the market until they were drunk and even slept there. But when she became a Muslim, she gave it up. It was not hard for her. She pointed out that while she may tolerate relatives and friends drinking *shah*, she no longer considered it good for her. However, many of her Grassfields friends no longer visit her, as she spends most of her time in the company of Hausa women. Some of her former friends were angry because she left the Presbyterian Church, others felt offended by Hausa women who resented them for drinking *shah*. Throughout her marriage, Adama insisted on cultivating her own farm, although this contradicts the Muslim rule that married women should not be seen in public or do heavy work. She explained to Hamadu that it was important that she and her children had enough food to eat, and eventually had her way.

By the time of my research, Adama and Hamadu had been married for more than 20 years. Together they had five children, and Hamadu made a living by building fences and washing clothes. When I asked Adama why she converted to Islam, she answered:

Only the marriage. Since I like him, am I not supposed to enter his faith? And it is all the same thing. But now I am inside the Muslim church, direct. Now I cannot change my church again. Even if I leave this marriage, I cannot change the church. I will stay in it until I die. This church is good. It is very good. It has truth inside. It does not lie. The church is like that, you sit down and you see the food. God sends it to you. I tell you the truth. Now, that we sit here, we will see the food coming. God sends it. That is why I agree that this Hausa church is good. And I will die in this church. Even if the man leaves me, I will still stay. I will not change and go back to our own church. (Adama, Misaje, 26/11/01)²⁴¹

²⁴¹ The conversation was held in Pidgin English, and Adama used the expression church to refer to both the Muslim and Christian faith as well as the respective prayer houses.

Mohammadou: a man of two worlds

Mohammadou was born as a Bessa, but grew up as a Hausa. His father was a soldier with the Nigerian army and was a close friend of the husband of Baba Kande, a popular but childless Hausa woman. When Mohammadou was five years old, his parents sent him to stay with Baba. He explained that, while growing up with Baba and her husband in Bamenda, he completely forgot about his initial home, his parents, and siblings. At the age of twelve, Baba took him back to Misaje to his family, who had called for him on the pretence that his grandmother had died. They had heard that he did not attend school in Bamenda, and planned to send him to school in Misaje. As Mohammadou explained:

I got used to them, but not as much as my foster parents. It was also because the cultures of the Muslims and Bessa differ. I did not have an interest in the Bessa culture, because I had already gone deep into the Muslim culture. (Mohammadou, Misaje, 16/11/01)

His birth-parents did not want Mohammadou to remain a Muslim and engage with Muslim friends. They wanted him to learn the language, customs, and religious practices of the Bessa. But as Mohammadou pointed out, he resented his Bessa background and environment. He refused to learn the Bessa language and instead socialised with the Nchaney. As soon as he was old enough to be independent, he moved to Douala. He took up Islamic education again. At first, he stayed with a *mallam*. Later he rented his own flat and after prayers attended the lessons of the *imam* (prayer leader) who taught them the Arabic scripture. He read many religious texts in English and Hausa translation.

Studying the Muslim faith also helped him to accept his dual identity as a Bessa and a Muslim. He began to ask himself how he could reject his natural parents and his culture, although the Koran prescribes that a Muslim should respect his biological parents – even if they are not Muslims – but should not follow those customs that contradict the Muslim faith. He began to understand that nobody is born a Muslim but everyone joins the faith; i.e. even Hausa have both an ethnic and a religious identity. He came to see himself as “a man of two worlds”.

While in Douala, Mohammadou worked a number of odd jobs. He was employed in a bank, later in a German road construction company. Subsequently, he ran an import-export business between Nigeria and Cameroon. Finally, he ended up as a bus driver. He began to look for a wife in Douala, but eventually decided to ask his foster

mother Baba to find him a good wife. As he explained, he completely trusted her and she prepared everything to her best ability, treating him as her own son. Mohammadou's natural parents were not involved in the marriage arrangement nor did he ask them for financial support.

Mohammadou pointed out that he is aware of his dual responsibility towards his natural parents and his foster mother Baba. He supports both sides equally by sending letters and money. Moreover, being an active member of BECUDA (Bessa Cultural and Development Association), he began to cultivate his knowledge of the Bessa culture and language. Yet ultimately, he felt that he shares a stronger bond with his foster mother Baba and with Muslim religion and culture than with the Bessa side of his kin and identity.

From Sam to Salifu to Sam

Sam is a tailor in Buea, in the South West Province. He is a Mbembe man, but was raised in Misaje. His parents were practicing Presbyterians. Among his sisters, some are married to men belonging to different Christian denominations (Catholic, Baptist) and one is married to a Muslim, to the *sarkin hausawa* (Hausa chief) of Misaje. Sam lived in Misaje for about 15 years. Before that, he stayed with his family in Akweto where most of his friends were non-Muslims.

Sam joined the Muslim faith in 1987 through the influence of his Muslim friends in Misaje and adopted the Muslim name Salifu. As a child he sold *masa* (maize snacks) for his elder sister, the wife of the *sarkin hausawa*. Despite the close interaction with his Muslim sister, he never made up his mind to join the Muslim faith. Yet he was friends with his sister's (step-)children and they usually enjoyed Muslim feasts together, such as the end of *ramadan* and the feast of the ram. The key factor that attracted him to the Muslim faith was his love for a Muslim girl, the sister of one of his friends. She told him that they could only marry if he converted to Islam.

Sam, who had become Salifu by then, went to Nigeria to further his professional training as a tailor. He visited places like Takum, Benue, Jos etc. While in Nigeria, he learned the Hausa language. Upon his return to Misaje he continued in the Muslim faith and socialised mainly with his Muslim friends, most of whom were children of Grassfields converts. As he explained, during this period his Christian friends avoided him and he disliked them too; he saw them as being unclean. His Muslim friends

continued to teach him Islamic doctrines. He studied a small section of the Koran and also read it in English translation. His Muslim life reached its apex when he married his wife, a Muslim from the Ndaka area (forest zone between Dumbo and Bissaula). They celebrated their marriage with a Muslim ceremony in Misaje. When their first son was born, many Muslim friends and acquaintances attended the naming ceremony.

After some time, Sam's attitude to his Muslim life began to change. First of all, his Muslim friends protested that his wife should not move around in public, for example escorting the children to school. Furthermore, Sam did not like that he regularly had to wash away his perfume before prayers, and that he could not have a night of uninterrupted sleep without getting up to pray or to do cleansing for fasting. These and other factors finally made him to change back to the Christian faith.

When he became a Christian again, he changed his name back from Salifu to Sam. His second son's name was also changed from Danjuma to Randolph, although people in Misaje still call him by his Muslim name. Sam gradually also changed his wife's faith. He made her realise that it is not easy to continue as a Muslim in Buea with the many restrictions imposed by Islamic doctrine. The argument convinced her. Presently all their children go to the Presbyterian Church. Sam explained that he cannot allow them religious freedom, as there is a proliferation of sects, most of which he views with suspicion. He would also discourage his children from taking up the Muslim faith, since from his own experience it is better for them to continue as Presbyterians.²⁴²

In retrospect, Sam respected the Muslims for their solidarity. He also admired them for their respectful appearance. As he explained, they dress in big, beautiful robes and are always neat and clean. On the other hand, he criticised the Muslims for not interacting socially with people of a different faith. Moreover, he did not like their injunction on women's mobility and economic activities, such as farming, which in his view constituted a vital contribution to the household economy.

When I asked Sam if he regretted the fact that he once changed his faith to become a Muslim, he responded that he regretted on the one hand and did not on the other.

²⁴² Grassfields parents have generally no other than moral arguments to influence their children's religious choice. Conversely, among non-Muslim groups in northern Cameroon sanctions against individuals who converted to Islam could be drastic. Schultz (1979: 224) reports of individuals who were disinherited or ostracised by their parents.

The experience enriched my ideas and knowledge about Islam. For example, at first I thought that being a Muslim implies enjoyment and wealth at one's disposal. Eventually, I realised that those riches are mostly the fruit of Muslim solidarity networks or a good knowledge of the Koran which can be used to prepare charms and medicine on demand. These activities make life a bit easier for the Muslims; but with the present economic hardship, things are no longer the way they used to be. (Ndamo Samuel, Buea, 29/04/01)

As the three portraits of Grassfields converts illustrate, Muslim faith and lifestyle have some attraction for local Grassfielders. The Hausa are admired for their seemingly leisurely life, their calmness, and their respectable appearance. Grassfielders with close Muslim friends are often invited to their social activities, such as youth meetings or celebrations, and are impressed by Muslim solidarity networks. Women occasionally consider the idea of marrying a Muslim, because they are said to respect their wives and to provide for a comfortable life. Yet despite these incentives, only a few individuals intermarry and/or convert to Islam. Many Grassfielders anticipate or experience difficulties in keeping up with Muslim doctrine, such as daily prayers, fasting, and alcohol abstinence. Moreover, becoming a Muslim not only implies a change of faith but comes close to renouncing one's birth community, as many ritual and social practices become untenable. Not all Grassfields converts successfully cope with these predicaments. While many remain in their chosen faith, some – like Sam – eventually return to their initial lifestyle and identity.

Taking the three portraits as a starting point, I will now analyse converts' incentives and experiences, and examine their strategies in managing the practicalities and difficulties of religious conversion and intermarriage. Moreover, I will draw comparisons with Muslim conversion and intermarriage in northern Cameroon as described in the literature.

8.3.1 Factors facilitating Muslim conversion

Misaje, being a place with a relatively large Muslim community, offers a number of possibilities and incentives to local Grassfielders to convert to Islam. Muslim reputation is one of them as well as facilitating social contexts, such as friendship, marriage, and foster parenting.

8.3.1.1 *Muslim reputation*

Muslim reputation in Misaje has contradictory aspects. On the one hand, local Grassfielders view their Hausa neighbours as lazy, i.e. idling around and reading the Koran, while they portray themselves as busy with making a living from their farms. Puzzled about the source of their Hausa neighbours' livelihood, some informants perceived them as beggars or thieves (see chapter 4). Mbororo are often seen as wild and aggressive, and as people who easily attack and injure farmers over disagreements on crop damage (see chapter 6). They are also viewed as backward and as "people of the bush", since they eschew the benefits, infrastructure, and comfort of village life. Yet as reflected in the three portraits, Muslim practices and identity are also assessed positively. Grassfields interlocutors often interpreted the seeming leisure and sociable lifestyle of Muslim villagers as the result of their piety and solidarity. Muslims are admired for their 'sense of togetherness', their affability towards strangers, their generosity, and their concern for the needy. These are all qualities promulgated by Muslim ideology and bolstered by institutionalised forms of charity, such as alms (*sadaka*) and levies (*zakka*), which in turn add to the donor's happiness and fortune. Moreover, Muslims are admired for their respectful way of interacting with each other, their calmness, and abstinence from alcohol and other kinds of intoxication. But the same features of reserve and self-control that here are valued positively also give rise to criticism. Mbororo are often characterised as conceited, and Muslims' distaste for *shah* (maize beer) is seen as an impediment to socialising with Grassfielders. Thus Muslim reputation among Grassfielders is ambiguous and, taken on its own, cannot fully account for individuals' conversion. In most cases the prospective convert's social context is a vital factor.

8.3.1.2 *Friendship, marriage, foster parenting*

As in many locales in the Grassfields, Misaje provides a multicultural context in which members of different ethnic and religious groups interact on a daily basis. It is therefore not surprising that most villagers have friends, acquaintances, and relatives from different social and religious backgrounds. Youths and children in particular tend to breach ethnic and religious divides, and are interested in learning about each other's religion and culture. This aspect is illustrated well in the portrait of Sam who largely grew up in his Muslim sister's household in Misaje and had many friends

among Hausa and local Grassfields converts. Furthermore, the Islamic Youth Association offers opportunities for Muslims and interested Grassfielders to socialise and familiarise themselves with the Muslim faith. Occasionally, members of the Islamic Youth Association organise a crusade to attract new converts. As Ardo Musa, one of the leading members, explained, it is difficult to assess the number of individuals who developed an interest in the Muslim faith as a result of the proselytising activities of the Islamic Youth Association. However, over the past years they counted five new converts alone in Misaje.

Marriage is a strong incentive for religious conversion for both genders, but particularly for women. In most women's view, their religious identity depends on that of their husbands. Although theoretically a marriage between a Muslim woman and a Christian or Jewish partner would be acceptable, it is not practiced in the Grassfields, with the exception of unions between Muslim Cameroonians and Christian Europeans or Americans. For Grassfields women who aspire to marry a Muslim their conversion is a precondition. But as the example of Sam shows, Grassfields men also envisage religious conversion when seriously planning to marry a Muslim girl.²⁴³

The sincerity of the act of conversion depends on the individual and his/her subsequent experiences. In Adama's view, her religious devotion will survive the love relationship with her husband. Sam, on the other hand, disentangled religion and matrimony in a later stage of his marriage and became a Christian again. He even persuaded his wife to follow him in his religious choice.

The third and probably most effective way of socialising a Grassfields individual into the Muslim community and faith is foster parenting. The Arabic term for foster parenting is *kafala* which is derived from the verb 'to feed' and may be translated as sponsorship. According to Islamic rules, a foster child retains the name of his/her biological parents and inherits from them rather than his/her foster parents. Moreover, members of the foster family are not considered blood relatives and thus count as possible marriage partners. The Islamic concept of foster parenting emphasises the foster parents' role as trustees and caretakers of another person's child. It is thus different from the concept of adoption which implies the legal change of a child's

²⁴³ According to Yamani (1998: 154), Islam permits Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women provided they are 'people of the Book' (Jewish or Christian). Muslim women, on the other hand, are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men; their relationship would be considered illegal and their children illegitimate.

identity and inheritance (internet sources: Huda n.d., Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad n.d.).²⁴⁴ The fostering of children of relatives and friends is a relatively common practice among Hausa in the Grassfields and elsewhere (cf. Mary Smith 1965: 146). They thus contribute to disseminating the Muslim faith, and show charity to those facing difficulties in the upbringing of their children. At the same time, foster parenting is also a way of increasing the economic potential of one's household. Muslim women rely strongly on the assistance of their children, as they are restricted in their movements by Islamic ideology (cf. Hill 1969, Schildkrout 1982, 1983). Childless women, in particular, depend on relatives or friends to give them a child which they then treat as their own. Baba, for example, is an elderly, well-respected Hausa woman who never bore a child. She fostered two of her relative's children and Mohammadou, the son of her husband's Bessa friend. Baba benefited from her foster children who supported her in her economic activities and cared for her in her old age. Moreover, by educating Mohammadou to be a good Muslim, she gained spiritual redemption.

Conversely, foster parenting is less common among Mbororo. A first-born child is often raised by his/her grandparents, as the Mbororo traditionally observe a rule of parent-child avoidance (cf. Bocquené 2002: 192). With regard to subsequent children, however, the bond between parents and children seems more intimate than among Hausa. With the establishment of an Islamic school in 1995, a 'modern' system of custody emerged in Misaje. Mbororo pupils from faraway compounds stay with relatives or family friends who live nearby the school. A few stay with the Hausa chief and his family during term time and receive basic accommodation, food, and care. In turn the Hausa chief is presented with gifts in cash or kind.

Among Grassfielders it is not uncommon to entrust children to friends or respected individuals (cf. N. Awasom 1984: 108). Conversely, to find Hausa or Mbororo children entrusted to Grassfields foster parents is extremely rare, as Muslim parents cannot allow their children to grow up in a non-Muslim environment.

As the portrait of Mohammadou illustrates, foster parenting is a powerful means of conversion. The child is socialised into the Muslim community and faith as if it was born into a Muslim family. Familiarity with Muslim relatives and friends during childhood and/or youth is another, though weaker factor supporting religious

²⁴⁴ On the distinction between adoption and foster parenting see also E. Goody 1971.

conversion. Love and intended marriage with a Muslim partner, finally, is a strongly motivating factor for youths and adults, most of whom have been exposed to the Muslim community and faith beforehand via friends and/or relatives.

8.3.2 Experienced advantages of religious conversion and intermarriage

When asked about the benefits experienced from converting to Islam, informants in Misaje stressed three features: participation in Muslim solidarity networks, genial husband-wife relations, and psychological stability.

8.3.2.1 Muslim solidarity networks

As Yamani (1998: 153) states, “ideally, the spirit of Islam is supposed to promote cohesion between Muslims despite any racial or cultural differences that may exist.” This understanding of Islam as a uniting force across social and ethnic boundaries is also pertinent in Misaje and is expressed in the following statement by a Hausa interlocutor:

For Islam, Muslims are brothers. If you are a Muslim, you are equal to all other Muslims. Any time you meet up with a Muslim, even if you come from America, you have to exchange greetings. You say “*salamu alaikum*”, he answers you. From that moment on you are equal. It does not matter if you know him or not. It is only based on the religion. Even for strangers, you have to welcome them all. (Jingi Mohammadou, November 2001)

Through conversion an individual automatically becomes a member of the Muslim community, and is entitled to participate in shared activities and to benefit from Muslim solidarity networks. Muslim togetherness and solidarity take various forms in Misaje. Muslim men regularly gather for prayers, and socialise in front of the mosque or the Hausa chief’s compound to exchange the news of the day or to recite a prayer on someone’s behalf (*addu’a* in Hausa, *do’a* in Fulfulde). Hausa women actively participate in social and religious celebrations, such as marriage, naming, and graduation ceremonies for Koran students, and many are members of rotating credit associations (*adashi* in Hausa) (see chapter 7). They maintain an elaborate system of gift-exchange, support each other in the preparation of celebrations, and provide social comfort and economic assistance in cases of illness and death. Many young men are members of the Islamic Youth Association. A sense of togetherness is also conveyed in the Islamic educational system, when Muslim children meet in the

private classroom of their *mallam* or, more recently, when attending the Islamic primary school in Misaje. Moreover, as outlined in chapter 7, Muslim solidarity networks transcend the village level. National and international Islamic associations offer their support to community development and educational projects (cf. Moritz 2003: 245-247).

For an aspiring Grassfields convert his/her access to Muslim solidarity networks opens up new opportunities. This is reflected in the following statement by an Nchaney informant in which he describes Adamu Kibanya's reasons to become a Muslim.

He [Adamu Kibanya] joined these people because he was sure that they would contribute money and help him. The style of the Hausa people is like that. They assure you that if you join their faith everything could be possible for you. They will buy you clothes, contribute money, and buy you suitcases. Even if you wanted to marry, they could give you a wife for free and you could continue in your own way. He was attracted, accepted the conditions, and joined them. That is how he came about being a Hausa man or a Muslim. (B.J., Misaje, 24/12/01)

Similarly, Adama's statement at the end of her portrait that members of the Muslim community receive food freely refers to the benefits of Muslim solidarity networks. These networks, however, function on the basis of reciprocity. If there are few wealthy individuals who contribute, there will be little to share among the poor and needy. As Sam mentioned, looking back on his Muslim life, he had thought that "being a Muslim is enjoyment and wealth at one's disposal". However, with the present economic recession the situation has changed. The same opinion and experience is shared by almost all Hausa in Misaje, many of whom benefited from the relative wealth and generosity of the Mbororo. In the long term, this may be a factor reducing Grassfielders' incentives to convert to Islam.

8.3.2.2 *Husband-wife relations*

Women informants mentioned genial husband-wife relations as a vital factor motivating their conversion to Islam. According to the Muslim ideal, women are supposed to show deference and obedience to their husbands who should act as their caretakers and provide them with everything necessary for their material and spiritual well-being. Women are not supposed to move around freely and should be exempt

from strenuous tasks, such as fetching water or cultivating food (cf. Ogunbiyi 1996: 48-49, van Santen 1995: 186-187). Due to pragmatic and financial constraints many Muslim families in the Grassfields do not strictly keep to this ideal. Women converts often expressed the desire to work their own small plot of land as a way of supporting themselves and their children in times of hardship. Adama recounted that her husband did not like the idea of her cultivating crops, since it contradicts Muslim doctrine. Eventually she had her way, because the family was poor and in need of food. Conversely, Sam's elder sister, the wife of the Hausa chief, could never convince her husband to eat food she had cultivated. As head of the Hausa community he could not set a bad example, even when their economic situation was strained. His wife gave in and limited her economic activities to the compound.²⁴⁵

Despite economic difficulties that bear negatively on the realisation of the Islamic gender model, the vision of a leisurely lifestyle is still a strong incentive to marry a Muslim husband. This has to be seen against the background that women married to a Grassfields husband face much harsher treatment and more economic responsibilities. According to the gender model practiced by Grassfielders, women are responsible for the subsistence of the family. Many women cultivate not only food crops for home consumption, but assist their husbands in their personal farms, and also grow crops for sale to have some cash at their disposal. Grassfields women cannot expect much financial support from their husbands and largely have to fend for themselves and their children. Occasionally, it is even the mothers who sponsor their children through school. Halima, a Bessa woman married to a Mbororo man, assessed the two gender models as follows:

I was married to a *country-man* [Grassfielder] before I left him and married this one [Mbororo husband]. The reason is that, if you stay with a *country-man* you have to suffer before you eat; but with this man you will only eat [enjoy]. With the *country-men* you have to suffer, you have to work and sell crops before you can buy oil, Maggie etc. But with this man, if things get finished, he will bring them. It is God who has given me this marriage. Otherwise I would not be here now. If you never get a Mbororo man who takes good care of you, you only have to *tie heart* [Pidgin English for persevere]. But if you get one, you only thank God. (Halima Gorawo, Misaje, 24/11/01)

²⁴⁵ Van Santen (1993: 309-311) reports similar disapproval of women's farming among FulBe in northern Cameroon.

A second difference refers to Muslim's and Grassfielders' attitude to battering women. According to Uthman dan Fodio, the leader of the 19th century FulBe *jihad* whose interpretation of the Koran is still influential in West Africa, recalcitrant women could be punished with at most one month of abstention from sexual intercourse, or by beating them with the condition that no lasting physical harm is caused (cf. Ogunbiyi 1996: 49, van Santen 1995: 187). Muslims in the Western Grassfields are even more opposed to violence against their wives and children. Although Mbororo youths have the reputation of being aggressive, Mbororo elders are known as calm and reserved. Among Mbororo and Hausa, self-control is a valued social quality while beating one's wife is tacitly disapproved. Among Grassfielders, on the other hand, it is a common and accepted practice to beat women and children; moreover, women fight back. Coupled with the extensive consumption of maize beer (*shah*), disputes between spouses may turn into serious brawls. This point is also illustrated in Adama's portrait, when she outlined her reasons for refusing her Grassfields suitors:

I refused to get married to a country man. Many men came and asked, but I refused. Country people cause trouble. Better I settle with this man. Whether he has money or not, we are together. If he was a country man, I would have left long ago. I would have gone. They beat their women a lot. It must be very severe before a Hausa man beats his woman just anyhow. And you as the woman you also have to contribute a lot before he will touch you. But if you follow his fashion, you stay together well. (Adama, Misaje, 26/11/01)

A third point in which husband-wife relationships differ among Muslims and Grassfielders concerns the management of polygyny. According to Islamic norms, men are allowed to have up to four wives with the condition that they are capable of providing sufficiently for them and their children. They are required to treat them equally, i.e. to spend the night with each wife in rotation, and to offer them and their children equal goods and opportunities. Among Grassfielders, on the other hand, it is acceptable to marry as many wives as possible with the condition that the first wife agrees to a polygynous arrangement. There is no social or moral imperative to treat all women equally, and there are no practical guidelines. As a result, women in a polygynous household are dependent on the husband's tastes and preferences. The argument that Muslims have a 'better' system of polygyny than Grassfielders was raised, for example, by Jacqueline, a Bessa woman married to a Bessa man. Her

husband converted to Islam before they met, but stopped practicing upon his move to Mutengene in South West Cameroon. As the Muslim community in the South West is relatively small, he lacked adequate assistance to continue in his chosen faith. The following passage is taken from the fieldnotes of my assistant Jonathan who carried out the interview with Jacqueline in Mutengene:

Generally, she [Jacqueline] likes the Muslim faith and also the way the Muslims behave. Particularly the youths have a lot of respect for elders and people in general and their way of dressing is good. Now that her husband is not practicing the Muslim faith, Jacqueline does not like the idea of a co-wife. On the other hand, if they should become practicing Muslims, it will be alright for her husband to get other wives. She believes that a Muslim man can treat his wives better than a non-Muslim, because it is part of their tradition. Even for a Muslim convert like her husband who was not brought up in the Muslim faith, he can still learn to treat his wives well, because his Muslim friends will assist and advise him on this matter. (interview with Jacqueline, Mutengene, 28/04/01)

At the time of the interview, Jacqueline was a practicing Christian, while her husband did not go to the mosque or to church. Should he choose to become a serious Muslim again, Jacqueline affirmed that she would willingly follow his religious choice.

8.3.2.3 Muslim faith providing psychological stability

Besides the advantages of benefiting from Muslim solidarity networks and genial husband-wife relations, Grassfields converts noted that Muslim practices and ideology helped them to calm their temper and to overcome their fear of witchcraft. Amina Mudi, the wife of the *sarkin hausawa* (Hausa chief) in Misaje, vividly described respective changes in her life.

Michaela: What helped you most in the Muslim faith?

Amina: What I have seen with the Muslims, I can say is good. I can say I liked fighting. I used to find palaver. But since I started *salla* [Hausa for praying], when I see something coming which is bad, I like to run from the thing. And I like to make the thing cool down. Then, something like *mimbo* [Pidgin English for alcohol], I was fond of drinking. Whenever I drank a little, it worried me, but I forced myself to drink. I stopped it. I smoked cigarettes at my [previous] husband's store where I was the saleswoman. I learned to smoke when I was still little. But when I came here and stayed for a while, and began to understand what was said in the book [Koran], I decided to leave those things. Yes, things have really been planted in me. Like the five prayers; if I wanted to do

something bad, I would remember something recited there and become weak. Those are the things, I can say, I gained from it.

Michaela: That is, the book [Koran] itself helped you to calm down?

Amina: Yes, it helped me to calm down my temper. At first, if they said anything about fighting, I would start to fight. It lasted for about a week and I would not get tired. It would just be as if I should continue to fight. And if I argued with somebody, it would just be as if each time that we met we should continue quarrelling. But since I have come here, all those things have gone off my mind. I do not have those things again. Secondly, at first, when they were doing something like *ngambe* [Pidgin English for soothsaying] we would just go and stand. You know, certain things like *ju-jus* [masquerade, medicine], my heart has come out of it. But at first, the least thing that occurred, we would go to the *ngambe-man* [soothsayer] or to make *country-fashion* [sacrifices, witchcraft]. But these things are no longer in my heart. So when they are doing these things, I no longer feel it. Or if they say, there are witches in that house, I am not afraid. I will just go, enter and come out. At first, I was afraid of going to places like the one we just came from [where a woman suspected of witchcraft had been present]. In the time of my grandmothers, they would say, if you go there, you will be caught by witchcraft. Today, I am no longer afraid; all that was nonsense. Now I no longer have that fear. I think it is the Muslim faith that helped me. That is what I believe. (Amina Mudi, Misaje, 13/01/01)

Similar experiences were reported by other informants. They agreed that Muslim practices and doctrine helped them to overcome negative habits such as drinking, smoking or bad temperedness. As they argued, the daily routine of five prayers prevents Muslims from working themselves up into a rage. It urges them to take a break from daily issues, to reflect on their comportment, and to improve their self-control.

Informants also noted that their faith in Allah and the effectiveness of Muslim protective medicine helped them to lose their fear of occult aggression (see chapter 9). As Amina recounted, since her conversion to Islam she no longer believes in *ju-jus* as representations of divine power, and no longer needs the help of diviners and witchdoctors. Some informants argued that the protective and enlightening capacity of Islam enhances the attractiveness of religious conversion.

8.3.3 Practicalities and difficulties of Muslim conversion

As has become clear from the foregoing elaborations, Muslim conversion entails a number of changes from previous lifestyles. Grassfields converts are requested to take up a Muslim name, to dress in the Muslim fashion, to practice Muslim prayers, to abstain from alcohol, to observe the *ramadan*, to learn Hausa or Fulfulde, and to integrate into the Muslim community. Conversion often follows established patterns, and the Muslim community in Misaje offers a number of institutions that facilitate Grassfields converts' integration. Individuals, however, may face difficulties in keeping up with Muslim doctrine and in reconciling their Grassfields and Muslim identities, which may even result in occasional re-conversion.

8.3.3.1 Established patterns and institutions of Muslim conversion

Individuals who have firmly taken the decision to convert to Islam are required to undergo a period of formal instruction in everyday Muslim practices which may take several months. They are encouraged to choose a *jagora* (in Hausa) or *kollitowo* (in Fulfulde), meaning a guide or helper.²⁴⁶ The English term that describes this role most pointedly is godparent. Although it is a term borrowed from Christianity, informants occasionally used it in referring to the Muslim convert's spiritual and social guide. The *jagora/kollitowo* facilitates the convert's socialisation into the Muslim community and acts as a confidant(e). In the case of a female convert, he/she often contributes to the wedding and dowry. The *jagora/kollitowo* normally also takes care of the convert's burial, as in the case of Adamu Kibanya discussed above. Most often, it is learned and respected community members who are approached to take over the responsibility. Their benefit is more ideational than material, as it is a Muslim's duty to assist others on their religious path.²⁴⁷

It is common that converts are instructed in basic practices and doctrines, such as ablution, prayers, fasting, and sexual duties, by their *jagora/kollitowo* or their partner.

²⁴⁶ My thanks go to Bobeji Bello and the *bibbegassungol* internet discussion group for clarifying these terms for me.

²⁴⁷ While in the Koran the concept of a spiritual and legal guide (*murshid* in Arabic) is acknowledged, his/her responsibility does not extend to the social domain (Roman Loimeier, personal communication, Saly, 04/04/2006). Conversely, the *jagora/kollitowo* in the Grassfields is mainly concerned with the integration of his/her convert into the Hausa community, while spiritual guidance is often provided by a *mallam*. Thus, the role of the *jagora/kollitowo* seems to be adapted to the particularities of this region where Muslim conversion implies integration into a distinct social environment.

Frequently a *mallam* (Muslim teacher) is hired to broaden the education. Informants pointed out that Muslim and Christian ways of teaching differ considerably. Muslim teaching is mainly done in Hausa, Fulfulde, and Arabic, while Christian doctrines are promulgated in English, Pidgin English, and Grassfields languages. Several interlocutors mentioned their initial inadequate understanding of Muslim doctrine as a problem. Amina Mudi, for example, recounted her experiences as follows:

Before I became a Muslim, I went to church every Sunday. I heard the word of God and went back home to think about it. When I came here, I saw we were only praying at home. We did not go to church. I thought God would not see what I was doing, and that I should go back to church. I asked my husband, how one can sing songs without knowing the meaning. I wanted to know their meaning. That was when he brought the *imam* to teach me so that I should understand the meaning of what I was supposed to do. You see, in church we had a special interpreter; that is the pastor was preaching or there was an interpreter explaining the prayers to us in a language we understood. That was worrying me here and wanted to disturb my *salla* [prayers]. But after they had come and told me everything, I continued with it and I saw that everything was the same. (Amina Mudi, Misaje, 13/1/01)

Most literate converts make an effort to read the Koran and other Muslim writings in English or Hausa translation. Among our three portraits, Mohammadou illustrates the interest and dedication of some Muslim converts to acquire an in-depth knowledge of Islamic teachings.

Moreover, being a Muslim or being married to a Muslim partner requires learning the language of the community in which the convert aspires to integrate. As outlined in chapter 2, multilingualism is an essential feature of the Grassfields. Each individual speaks or understands at least three languages, including his/her mother tongue, Pidgin English, and the language of at least one of the neighbouring groups. Hence learning another language as a result of Muslim conversion is not so much perceived as an obstacle than a normal requirement of living together. In a multi-ethnic or multilingual household the question of the dominant language is normally resolved pragmatically. Children often learn the languages of both their parents. Since Mbororo, Hausa, and local Grassfields communities are patrilineal, primary importance is on the father's language and culture. Yet as the portraits of Adama and Mohammadou show, often it is the children themselves who decide which language they want to speak.

8.3.3.2 Keeping up with Muslim doctrine

Many Grassfielders face difficulties in keeping up with Muslim doctrine and practices. While some welcome the structure provided by the five daily prayers, others experience their performance as disrupting their usual working and sleeping routine. Most challenging, however, is the fasting that lasts for 28 days during which Muslims are only allowed to eat and drink before sunrise or after sunset. Generally, learning to adhere to the religious requirements takes time and dedication. Amina Mudi, for example, explained that it took her four years to become firm in the Muslim faith and to perform the fasting correctly.

Such practical difficulties, but also personal dislike of Muslim customs or attitudes, occasionally prevent inclined individuals from converting to Islam. Female informants, for example, mentioned that they disliked the Muslims' reluctance to send their children to school, and that they could not accept the Muslim practice of marrying their daughters off into a forced arrangement at an early age. The same concerns, however, are shared by many Hausa and Mbororo mothers, and parents' attitudes are gradually changing. Others were put off by the Muslims' perceived reluctance to engage in development projects and community activities. Indeed, many Mbororo in the Misaje area participate only peripherally in local development projects, as their allegiances are mainly with MBOSCUA, the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association. Moreover, Hausa are seen as largely abstaining from community service and as justifying their absence with reference to religious constraints (see chapter 7). As a result, Grassfielders as well as governmental and NGO workers tend to associate the Muslim community with traditionalism rather than progressivism.

Some Grassfields converts only subsequently realised – and often under the influence of an urban, non-Muslim environment – that the religious impositions on their lives were too burdensome. In his portrait, Sam mentioned the inconveniences that eventually led him to give up the Muslim faith. When he and his family moved to Buea in South West Cameroon, it became increasingly difficult for him to remain a practicing Muslim. In Buea different gender and work ideals prevailed from those in Misaje. He argued that, working as a tailor in the market, he could no longer spare the time to go to the mosque for daily and Friday prayers. Moreover, he wanted his wife to assist in tasks also outside of the household; an arrangement that conflicts with the

Muslim gender model. Finally, as the Muslim community in Buea is relatively small, Sam lacked the company and assistance of Muslim friends. Sam's case is not exceptional. Evidently, living in an urban and predominantly non-Muslim environment puts converts' conviction to the test.

8.3.3.3 Juggling multiple identities and social liabilities

From a Muslim perspective being a Muslim does not require the exclusion of other, e.g. ethnic or social identities, but it implies a hierarchy of identities. Sarli Sardou Nana clarified this point as follows:

While in theory it is possible to be a Muslim and keep your ethnicity or culture, in practice it is difficult, because Islam seeks to be an entire way of life, a government with laws for all aspects of life. It is also said that you are a Muslim first before anything else. So, Islamic identity precedes any other. (Sarli Sardou Nana, e-mail communication, 25/06/03)

Grassfields converts are faced with the quandary of managing their belonging to two partly overlapping, partly exclusive social contexts. Some converts have difficulties in accepting their Grassfields background alongside their chosen Muslim identity. The most glaring example is Mohammadou whose portrait shows that, while being socialised into the Muslim community in Bamenda, he developed disdain for his birth-community. Upon his return to Misaje, he deliberately refused to re-integrate socially and culturally into the Bessa community. Only as an educated adult, he began to reconcile the two sides of his personality, and came to see himself as "a man of two worlds". Most Grassfields converts understand themselves as Grassfielders by birth and Muslims by choice. They experience the partial incompatibility of their ethnic and religious identities as a pragmatic issue.

With conversion to Islam, a number of Grassfields practices and social liabilities that are vital to Grassfielders' social organisation become untenable, as they contradict Islamic doctrines. These include ritual duties with regard to the land and the ancestors, burial rites, the consultation of a diviner, and the indispensable consumption of *shah* (maize beer) during social activities. Consequently, conversion to Islam entails opting out of one's social and cultural environment. Many Grassfields converts noted that their circle of friends changed after they converted, and that both sides developed mutual contempt. Halima, a Bessa woman married to a Mbororo

husband, described her experience of estrangement from her former friends as follows:

Some country people laugh at me because at first I was with them, I did their own thing. But now I cannot join them again. Some people drink until they are drunk. I look at them like foolish people, and they, too, look at me like a foolish person. Because at first I went with my friends to dance, drink, and sleep for two days. But now I cannot do so again. I have lost all my friends. Now when they see me passing by they say: See that Mbororo! (Halima, Misaje, 24/11/01)

Adama and Sam mentioned similar experiences in their accounts. Even more significant than the loss of friends is the impact of religious conversion on the relationship between parents and children. A Grassfields woman who intends to marry a Muslim husband cannot expect financial support from her parents. Instead it is her *jagora/kollitowo* (social guide) who normally assists in accumulating the dowry. Alternatively, she may provide for it on her own or with her husband's support. The absence of financial assistance to a female convert by her parents is not surprising, as Grassfielders practice a bridewealth system, while the Mbororo and Hausa furnish their daughters with a dowry. Conversely, Grassfields converts face difficulties in performing their social and ritual liabilities towards their birth-parents and relatives. Since many of the required services and ritual duties conflict with Muslim doctrine, Grassfields parents cannot expect the full support of their Muslim children. The Hausa elder Baba described Muslim impositions on Grassfielders child-parent obligations as follows:

Her mother [of a female convert] who is a Christian cannot send her to buy *mimbo* [alcohol] for her, and she too cannot give money to the mother to buy *mimbo*. She cannot eat or buy the meat of a dead animal to give to her parents. Also, if any of her relatives die, she can only send money. She is not supposed to perform the traditional rites of the *country-people*. The husband can also give money, but will not take part in the celebrations. The parents of the girl have to accept that she should become a Muslim. Therefore they should not get angry that she does not respect the tradition any longer. (Baba Kande, Misaje, 16/10/01)

Many Grassfields converts, both men and women, consider it important to keep up good relations with their parents and to assist them as much as they can. They tend to interpret religious restrictions laxly and support their relatives by giving them money, ignoring that it may be used to buy alcohol or to consult a diviner. By doing so they

are able to reconcile their social liabilities with their religious conviction, and to do justice to their dual identity as Grassfielders by birth and Muslims by choice.

8.3.4 Comparing Muslim conversion and intermarriage in northern Cameroon and the Western Grassfields

In comparing motivations and processes of religious conversion and interethnic marriage in northern Cameroon and the Western Grassfields, a number of similarities and differences emerge.

In the literature on religious conversion and intermarriage in northern Cameroon (Burnham 1972, 1991, 1996, Gausset 1999, Schilder 1993, 1994, Schultz 1979, 1980, 1984, Regis 2004, van Santen 1993, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) both processes are portrayed as urban phenomena related to labour migration. Moreover, men and women are said to be attracted to intermarriage and Islam by different incentives.

In northern Cameroon (i.e. the Adamaoua, North, and Far North Provinces) Muslim identity has been associated with political power, social status, urban lifestyle, and civilisation. Since the colonial period, members of local non-Muslim groups have been attracted to Muslim conversion and intermarriage with FulBe as a way of upward social mobility. Their incentives were further enhanced when Ahidjo became the first president of Cameroon and granted Muslims privileged access to government jobs and business licences. While these social, economic, and political incentives have facilitated mainly the conversion of non-Muslim men, women have been attracted to Islam and intermarriage by different incentives. According to van Santen (1993, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) whose research centres on Mafa women in Cameroon's Far North, women's motivations include the suggested linkage of Islam (in particular the Muslim marriage system) with civilisation, and improved gender roles. Moreover, Mafa women without sons to care for them in their old age are attracted to Muslim conversion by the prospect of fostering Muslim children and thus attaining social security, an opportunity they lack in their own society.

In northwest Cameroon the situation is a bit different. Here individuals also choose to intermarry and become Muslims in rural areas, such as Misaje. Moreover, as the sample cases of Sam and of Jacqueline and her husband illustrate, more important than an urban environment is the presence of a substantial Muslim community that assists the convert in his/her religious duties. The structural incentives

that facilitate Muslim conversion in northern Cameroon are largely absent in the Grassfields, where the Muslim population does not constitute the ruling class. Furthermore, male and female converts' motivations are largely the same. Slight divergences are observable with regard to Muslim gender roles which tend to be favoured by women more than men. However, critical views of Muslim injunctions on women's economic activities have been expressed by both male and female informants.

The prospect of a social security network provided by the Muslim community is a vital incentive for aspiring converts in northern Cameroon as well as the Western Grassfields. While according to van Santen (1993, 1998a, 1998b) many elderly Mafa women are attracted to Islam by the option of fostering children, this argument has never been mentioned by Grassfields interlocutors; probably because child fostering or adoption is also practiced among non-Muslim Grassfielders. Nonetheless, as outlined above, foster parenting plays a significant role in facilitating Muslim conversion by integrating Grassfields children (instead of Mafa mothers) into a Muslim environment.

While, so far, I have centred my analysis on religious conversion and converts' switching between their ethnic and religious identities, I will now examine the potential correlation of religious and ethnic conversion as it is observable in the Western Grassfields and other parts of Cameroon and Nigeria.

8.4 Correlation of religious and ethnic conversion

In the Western Grassfields Muslim and Hausa identity are seen as largely congruent and interchangeable. Analogously, Grassfields individuals who convert to Islam are seen as becoming Hausa. As outlined in the previous chapter, the first Muslims to settle in the Grassfields were Hausa traders. Other Muslim village dwellers joined them later and were subsumed under the Hausa ethnic category. Mbororo entered the Grassfields around the same period, but were associated primarily with pastoralism. Eventually, the ethnonym Hausa came to stand for Muslims in general. Moreover, the Hausa's conception of ethnicity is much more flexible and integrative than that of the Mbororo. Consequently, becoming Hausa is relatively easy, while becoming Mbororo is virtually impossible. However, the correlation of religious and ethnic conversion is not a necessary given. Alternatively, new ethnic-religious categories could emerge,

such as in the Nso area where Grassfields converts identify themselves as Nso Muslims rather than Hausa.

Similar processes of religious and ethnic conversion have been described for northern Cameroon and northwestern Nigeria and have been termed 'Fulbeisation' and 'Hausaisation' respectively (e.g. Burnham 1991, 1996: 48-56, Gausset 1998, 1999, Salomone 1975b, Schilder 1994: 213-216, Schultz 1979, 1980, 1984, van Santen 1993: 47-57). In the following I will outline some of the main findings on Fulbeisation in northern Cameroon, and draw comparisons with the Grassfields. Finally, I will elaborate on the emergence of alternative ethnic-religious categories in northern Cameroon and the Western Grassfields.

8.4.1 Fulbeisation in northern Cameroon versus Hausaisation in the Grassfields

In northern Cameroon the FulBe have been the politically and economically dominant group since the early 19th century. Consequently, the FulBe ethnonym has come to represent urban Muslim culture. Many local non-Muslim groups opposed the political and cultural hegemony of the FulBe. Others cooperated and were inclined to adopt FulBe lifestyle and religion (Gausset 1999, Schilder 1993). As a consequence, a system of ethnic ranking emerged with the primary distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. While all Muslims were associated with FulBe identity, all non-Muslims were lumped together into the category of *haaBe* – the antonym to FulBe (Regis 2003: 4-5, Schultz 1979: 175, van Santen 1993: 50). Even Mbororo counted as inferior to Town FulBe (Huya) and were stigmatised as backward and only superficially Islamised (Burnham 1991: 84, Schultz 1979: 273).

Two leading anthropologists in the study of Fulbeisation in northern Cameroon are Schultz (1979, 1980, 1984) and Burnham (1972, 1991, 1996). Both demonstrate that ethnic change is possible within one generation; the preconditions being the convert's use of Fulfulde as his/her principal language, open adherence to Islam, and overt consensus with FulBe norms and ideals (Burnham 1996: 48, Schultz 1984). According to Schultz (1979: 240-275), many ethnic groups in northern Cameroon define ethnicity not in terms of descent, but on the basis of social and cultural practices (language, religion and lifestyle). Thus Fulbeisation is only one process of ethnic change among others that have existed before. Its particularity is that it involves an ideology of cultural and ethnic superiority. Because emic concepts of

FulBe identity include descent as an important criterion, local converts have to conceal their original ethnicity so as to count as ‘proper’ FulBe. As Schultz (1979: 290-292) explains, the town of Guider provides a particularly supportive environment for religious and ethnic change. Since ethnically ‘authentic’ FulBe are few, they welcome the integration of converts as a strategy to enlarge their community. In other towns of northern Cameroon, such as Maroua, the situation is different and FulBe identity cannot be claimed so easily.

In comparing religious and ethnic conversion in northern Cameroon and the Western Grassfields, a number of similarities but also striking differences become apparent, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 8.1: Comparing religious and ethnic conversion in the Western Grassfields and northern Cameroon

	Western Grassfields	northern Cameroon
reference group of religious and ethnic conversion	Hausa	FulBe
political status of reference group	marginal minority	ruling class
incentives for religious and ethnic conversion	personal affinity for the Muslim faith and community	upward social mobility
	social security network	political and economic advantages
	improved gender relations	social security network
features of religious and ethnic conversion	at least superficial mastery of Hausa or Fulfulde	use of Fulfulde as the principal language
	open adherence to Islam	open adherence to Islam
	refusal to participate in Grassfields customs that conflict with Muslim ideology	overt consensus with FulBe norms and ideology
attitude to original identity	Grassfielders by birth, Muslim/Hausa by choice	tendency to hide non-FulBe ancestry

One of the major differences regarding ethnic conversion in northern Cameroon and the Grassfields is the source of ethnic ascription and the rigorousness of its application. As outlined above, Muslim converts in northern Cameroon are keen to conceal their original ethnic identity and portray themselves as FulBe. Conversely, the Hausa identity of Grassfields converts is relatively superficial and often ascribed by others, namely non-Muslim Grassfielders. Moreover, while in northern Cameroon ethnic conversion can be attained within one generation, in the Grassfields it takes two generations for an individual to fully count as Hausa.

When analysing these processes of religious and ethnic change in terms of switching identities, Muslim converts in the Grassfields are more flexible in switching

back and forth between different frames of reference, as compared to Muslim converts in northern Cameroon who tend to switch once and forever.

8.4.2 Religious and ethnic conversion disentangled

Recent studies on ethnicity in northern Cameroon indicate that the findings of Burnham and Schultz, which are mainly based on research conducted in the 1970s, are not applicable to the same extent to all communities in northern Cameroon. Moreover they show that over the past decades, alternative notions of religious and ethnic conversion have emerged.

As Schilder (1993, 1994: 157-178, 213-216) argues, among Mundang in Cameroon's Far North, religious conversion has not become as popular as proposed by Schultz in the 1970s. In his reading, it was mainly the chiefs who converted to Islam as an act of political opportunism to Ahidjo's regime, while the majority of the population continued to adhere to their original religious system. Schilder clarifies that those Mundang chiefs who converted to Islam did not take up FulBe ethnicity, but constituted a new category of Mundang Muslims known as *juulBe*, meaning 'those who pray' in Fulfulde.²⁴⁸ Likewise, van Santen (1993: 57, 339) notes in her study on Muslim conversion among Mafa women in Mokolo (in the Far North Province) that none of her informants claimed FulBe identity. She groups the population in her research area into three categories, namely FulBe, *juulBe* (Muslim converts), and *haaBe* (non-Muslims).²⁴⁹

In the Grassfields as well, religious conversion is not always and everywhere equated with ethnic conversion. Muslim converts in Nso, for example, constitute a distinct ethnic-religious category: they are Nso Muslims. The Nso chiefdom in the east of the Grassfields has been exposed to Muslim influence over more than a century through the settlement of Hausa traders and individuals from the neighbouring and related Bamoun sultanate. Its late *fon* was a practicing Muslim, and its capital Kumbo has a large Muslim quarter that is inhabited by Hausa and FulBe, while the majority are Nso Muslims. Kumbo has two mosques and is the only place in the

²⁴⁸ Regis (2004) also conducted fieldwork in Cameroon's Far North. Yet her group of study was FulBe of Mundang descent (mainly of the second generation) who claimed FulBe ethnicity.

²⁴⁹ Similarly, Salomone (1975b: 414) indicates for northwestern Nigeria that, while most Gungawa converts adopt Hausa identity, an exception to the rule occurred at Shabanda in Yauri Emirate where Muslim Gungawa retain their ethnic identity.

Grassfields with a secondary and high school in Islamic or Anglo-Arabic education (see also Ndze 1998). Sarli Sardou Nana, a Mbororo who grew up in Kumbo, the capital of Nso, describes the Nso Muslim community as follows:

[...] The appellation Hausa is used inter-changeably in Pidgin English to mean a Muslim, a person from North Cameroon, or even a Mbororo person. But in Lamnso [Nso language] that translates as *wir Gasa*²⁵⁰, and the Hausa quarter in Kumbo is called *ro Gasa* – meaning ‘down Gasa’. There are these so-called Hausa quarters all over the place, headed by a Hausa chief or *sarkin hausawa*; but they hardly have any Hausa living in them. I can speak for Kumbo, because I know the place quite well. The so-called Hausa chief of Kumbo is a Hausaised Nso person. The two *imams* of the two Friday mosques are Nso people; one Hausaised, one Fulbeised.²⁵¹ Most people who live in *ro Gasa* speak the Hausa language to begin with, but they also speak Fulfulde. I guess this is because Hausa and Fulfulde were the languages of Islam and trade for a long time. Things are changing fast though.

The establishment of Anglo-Arabic schools in the 1960s by Innua Wirba and his supporters has had a huge impact on Islam not only in Kumbo but in Bui Division as a whole. There is a large number of Nso kids who start speaking Arabic at the age of 10, because they go to Anglo-Arabic primary schools. Before the existence of Anglo-Arabic schools, the only way to learn the Koran and subsequent Islamic texts was to undergo many years of study under a *moddiBo* [advanced Islamic scholar] in Fulfulde or Hausa. It is still the case with the majority of Mbororo that to be an Islamic theologian is almost the same as becoming Fulbeised.²⁵² The language used in the *ahaadith* [pl. of *hadith*, narration about the life of Prophet Mohammed] is Huyaare [language of Huya/Town FulBe], and the person has to live among these people for at least two decades to become a *moddiBo*. On the contrary, Nso people now preach in Lamnso. Most of the new generation Muslims have learnt Arabic in the classroom. Many of them obtain scholarships to study in the Middle East or go to Al Azhar University (Cairo) Ngaoundere Campus. They are extremely knowledgeable in Islam and they are neither Hausaised nor Fulbeised, they are if anything Arabised. [...] They do define themselves as Nso Muslims without excluding either identity. But they do not define themselves as either Hausa or FulBe.

²⁵⁰ *Gasa* in Lamnso is the short form of Gashiga, the place where the first Muslims who arrived in Nso came from. *Wir gasa* literally means someone from Gashiga. (Godfrey Tangwa, e-mail communication 26/06/03)

²⁵¹ Sarli distinguishes between Hausaised and Fulbeised Nso converts on the basis of the language and Islamic education that the respective individual adopted.

²⁵² In the context of Mbororo, Fulbeisation means the gradual adoption of the lifestyle and language of Town FulBe (Huya) in northern Cameroon (see also Burnham 1996: 105-108).

With the establishment of an Anglo-Arabic secondary and high school in Kumbo, the creation of a regional secretariat for private Islamic education in Kumbo, and the recent practice of bringing in Egyptian Muslim missionaries to stay and preach in the area, things are shifting towards Middle Eastern ways rather than Hausa or FulBe ways. Hausa and FulBe scholars still visit and preach in the neighbourhood, but the power of the traditional Islamic clerics is fast disappearing. The national secretary of Islamic private education is a Nso person, the regional secretary too is a Nso person. The power of modern Islamic knowledge is fast overtaking the power of traditional Islamic knowledge – with it, the cultural practices are shifting. The dress and the language remain; but many non-Muslims today dress similarly, albeit they do not wear turbans or undertake a pilgrimage to Sokoto to the graveside of [Usman] Dan Fodio [leader of the FulBe *jihad* in the 19th century].

I am sure that economic power has something to do with the creation of the Nso Islamic community. The *alhajis* who returned from Nigeria in the mid 1980s [...] came back with lots of cash and different cultural practices. The biggest shops in the market are owned by Nso hausaised Muslims. The main haulage business is also controlled by the same people. This gave the Muslim community some kind of economic power to do things their own way. An example of their influence is the fact that the late *fon* of Nso converted to Islam and was sponsored to Mecca by the *alhajis*. The children of the returning *alhajis* are now the *nouveaux riches* in Kumbo. You have people going to Mecca and travelling to Europe to buy merchandise before they are even thirty! They are also university and high school graduates, so they combine their Western knowledge with modern Arabic knowledge and wealth. It has become ‘cool’ to be a Muslim in Kumbo [...]. (Sarli Sardou Nana, e-mail communication, 25/06/03)

As the example of Nso Muslims shows, the popular equation of religious and ethnic conversion does not necessarily result from the incompatibility of Grassfields and Muslim ideologies or social practices. It also reflects the historical context of Muslim presence and the nature of socio-political relations between Grassfielders and Muslims in the respective area. In Nso Grassfields converts initially adopted Hausa or FulBe language and comportment, thus becoming Hausaised or Fulbeised. But as Sarli explained, with increasing economic wealth and political influence, they managed to redefine their identity and generated the sovereign category of Nso Muslims. However, the few Nso and Wimbun Muslims living in Misaje are perceived by the local population as Grassfields converts and subsumed under the category of Hausa. Obviously the distinct notion of Nso Muslims has not established

itself outside of the Nso area, although individuals are aware of the long-standing history and strength of the Muslim community in Nso.

8.5 Interethnic friendship in Misaje²⁵³

Having discussed religious and ethnic conversion and intermarriage, processes that generate social ties mainly between Grassfielders and Hausa, I will now focus on social bonds between Mbororo and their Grassfields and Hausa neighbours.

As outlined in previous chapters, the Mbororo play a significant role in the regional economic network, entertaining manifold and changing economic relations with Grassfielders and Hausa. With the latter they also share religious and cultural commonalities which, as we have seen in the context of the investiture conflict (chapter 3), may serve as a socio-political bond uniting Mbororo and Hausa vis-à-vis Grassfielders. In this chapter, my interest is in interethnic friendship as a type of social relationship that generates allegiances across ethnic boundaries. It should be kept in mind, however, that interethnic friendships constitute only a small part of social relations in Misaje, and that friendships among members of the same ethnic group may be more frequent and significant.

In the following I will portray Mbororo informants' perspectives on their interethnic friendships, and consider the significance of these friendships with regard to negotiating farmer-herder relations.

8.5.1 Mbororo understanding and practices of interethnic friendship

Most Mbororo interlocutors counted among their friends Grassfields and Hausa individuals. They referred to them by the terms *soobaaajo* (in Fulfulde) or *kombi* (in Pidgin English), meaning 'friend' or 'comrade'. Most commonly, friendships are confined to acquaintances of the same sex but not necessarily the same age-group. Moreover, they are individual relationships; different, say, from interethnic joking relationships that relate categories of people.

In my subsequent explorations I will draw mainly on conversations with *mallam* Karbura Abubakar and Nyapendo Jainabu, an elderly Mbororo couple living near Nkanchi. Despite a rich repertoire of interviews on interethnic friendship, I decided to

²⁵³ Interethnic friendship in the Western Grassfields has also been the subject of earlier publications (Pelican 2003, 2004a).

concentrate on these two individuals, because their responses reflect the viewpoint of most interlocutors and demonstrate the ways in which male and female perspectives differ even within the same household.

8.5.1.1 *Male perspective on interethnic friendship*

Mallam Karbura spent his youth on the Jos Plateau in Nigeria and settled in the Grassfields in the 1970s. At the time of my research, he was in his late fifties and an experienced cattle herder and herbalist. When I asked *mallam* Karbura about his friendship with non-Mbororo, he gave two examples:

Within the non-Mbororo (Fulfulde: *haaBe*) I have one friend in Nkanchi. I was a friend to his father who died. If I did not have money or oil, I could go to him; he would help me. Then he felt that he was going to die. He called his children and told them to continue the friendship. So, the son John has continued the fashion of his father until now. I took *zinc* [Pidgin English for corrugated iron] from him that I haven't paid for yet. I asked him; he said I should just take it and pay him back when I had the money. Among the Hausa in Misaje I have one friend, Genye. If I need money, we discuss it; he tries to help me to find a way. Concerning my friendship with Genye and John, I also have to support them. If someone is sick, I try to help them with medicine, if I know it. If they have problems, I also try to help them. (*mallam* Karbura, Nkanchi, 14/12/2001)

Mallam Karbura's description of his friendship with John and his late father illustrates that friendship is not necessarily an individual relationship, but may cover entire families and continue over generations. As *mallam* Karbura pointed out elsewhere, he was used to this type of extended friendship on the Jos Plateau, while in the Grassfields it is very rare.

Furthermore, he depicted his friendships with John and Genye in terms of moral and economic support. He sees both as sympathetic and reliable individuals who are willing to help out by granting credit, lending money, and giving helpful advice. The options of borrowing money or buying goods on credit are crucial preconditions for Mbororo men's economic planning. Their main source of cash is occasional sales of cattle, which result in the momentary availability of large sums of money. Most of it is immediately invested in major expenditures (e.g. school fees, cattle tax, farm labour, house refurbishment) and the amortisation of loans. Minor or unforeseen expenditures (e.g. for food items, clothes or hospital bills), that arise between the sales

of animals, are covered by borrowing money from friends or buying goods on credit. In exceptional cases close relatives (e.g. brothers living in the same compound) successfully coordinate their cattle sales so as to have continuous access to money. Generally, however, Mbororo men rely on the assistance of friends, often of a different ethnic background, since they are seen as more reliable than Mbororo acquaintances and as guaranteeing a higher level of privacy. *Mallam* Karbura assessed the honesty of Grassfields and Mbororo friends as follows:

If you have a good friend among the *haaBe* (non-FulBe) who really likes you, it is even better than having a Mbororo friend. If a true *soobaajo kaaDo* (non-Mbororo friend) says that he can help you, he will help you. And if he tells you that he cannot help because he has no money, it is true. But a *pullo* (sing. of FulBe), even if he has the money in his pocket, he may lie to you and refuse to help. (*mallam* Karbura, Nkanchi, 14/12/2001)

Mallam Karbura's assessment of the untrustworthiness of Mbororo has to be seen in the context of *pulaaku* which includes modesty, reserve, and self-control as crucial components (see chapter 5). Grassfielders, on the other hand, are seen as being much more direct and thus more reliable. Yet friendship is not confined to financial assistance. Mutual understanding and moral support are equally significant components. Moreover, *mallam* Karbura stressed its reciprocal character; being an experienced herbalist, he willingly helps his friends with medical advice.

8.5.1.2 Female perspective on interethnic friendship

Nyapendo is *mallam* Karbura's (only) wife and approximately of the same age. At the time of my research, they were married for more than 30 years and had eight children. Their compound was frequently visited by Mbororo and non-Mbororo acquaintances who passed by on their way to Misaje or when seeking work. When asked about her friendship with Grassfields women, Nyapendo told the following story:

I have many friends in Nkanchi. Most of them are young women, they are like my children. If one of my friends delivers and I go to grind corn, I remove one pan full of maize flour and give it to her to make porridge for the child. My best friend is Mami Corinna. She has been coming to work on our farm for about seven years. She likes me a lot. Sometimes she sends me vegetables or something. If my son Unusa passes by, she gives him 100 or 200 FCFA [€0.15 – 0.30]. The friendship developed out of a liking for each other. If she comes to work in our compound I usually keep milk for her. She has

gastritis. If I prepare *fufu* [maize porridge] with milk for her, she is very happy, because it cools down her gastric problem. (Nyapendo Jeinabu, Nkanchi, 14/12/2001)

The friendship between Nyapendo and Mami Corinna developed out of an economic relationship. Mami Corinna had repeatedly been employed to work in *mallam* Karbura's farm. Her gifts to Nyapendo and her children were interpreted as a sign of appreciation and friendship, which Nyapendo reciprocated in her own terms by reserving milk for her friend as a remedy against her gastritis. Following Nyapendo their friendship developed "out of a liking for each other"; a motivation frequently mentioned as the main stimulus for friendship, not only among Mbororo in the Misaje area but also among FulBe in Burkina Faso (Breusers forthc.).

Mbororo and Hausa interlocutors often stated that due to religious and cultural affinities between the two groups they felt closer to each other than to their Grassfields neighbours. Yet friendship relations between women of the two groups are frequently overshadowed by ideological differences concerning Muslim women's public comportment. Most concisely this was phrased by Nyapendo who described her relationship with Hausa women as follows:

My best and only friend in Misaje is the wife of the *imam*, Gambo. [...] I always keep my corn flour or my things with her. I also go to pray in her compound. I got used to her through Hawa, my niece. They are about the same age. Through Hawa who is like my own child, Gambo became not only my friend but like my child. The time I went to visit my mother in Ngaoundéré, she bought *savon* [laundry soap] to take to my mother. Gambo likes me to open her market, even if I do not have the correct money. She sometimes also gives me *makala* [maize-banana snacks] for free. I do not know any other Hausa compound. I do not usually sell milk to Hausa. You know, sometimes they look at you like a dog. Maybe they think you are after their husband or what, I do not know. Really, the Hausa and the Huya [Town FulBe], they look at us Mbororo just somehow. (Nyapendo Jeinabu, Nkanchi, 14/12/2001)

Women of different age-groups tend to model their friendship similar to kinship relations. Nyapendo described her friendship with Gambo as a mother-daughter relationship that is continuously reaffirmed through mutual respect and gifts of appreciation from Gambo's side.

In the second part of the quote Nyapendo pointed at problems that arise from diverging interpretations of the Islamic role model. Among Hausa the ideal of women's seclusion is emphasised. Married women pursue most of their business from

within their compounds and entrust the sales of their produces to children. Among Mbororo, on the other hand, the containment of female mobility is handled more leniently. Women regularly come to the village to do errands or to sell milk. This practice of random milk sales is at the heart of the moral divergence of Hausa and Mbororo, and was conceived by Nyapendo as a factor restricting friendship between women of the two groups. Yet differing interpretations and practices of the Islamic role model also exist among Mbororo in the Grassfields and cause friction between the respective factions (cf. Pelican 2004b).²⁵⁴

In comparing Nyapendo's assessment of her friendship with Grassfields and Hausa women, it appears that religious and cultural similarities may deter rather than support interethnic friendship. Between befriended Mbororo and Grassfields women religious and cultural differences are taken for granted and accepted as such. They tend to focus on commonalities rooted in everyday life, and cultivate their friendship through mutual sympathy and the exchange of small tokens. Conversely, Mbororo and Hausa women are less inclined to downplay divergences in their religious practices.

Friendships between Mbororo and Hausa women are also limited by a number of practical difficulties. Hausa women's restricted mobility confines their realm of social activities to the immediate neighbourhood and to the evening period. They thus have little opportunity to entertain friendships with Mbororo or non-Muslim women living outside of the Hausa quarter. Moreover, Hausa women practice an elaborate system of gift exchange, particularly between friends.²⁵⁵ Most Mbororo women have neither the time nor the finances to participate. Besides, Hausa women have the reputation of gossipers which for many Mbororo women constitutes a valid reason to maintain social distance.

²⁵⁴ Issues arising from selling milk were illustrated to me in role-plays performed by Mbororo and Hausa women's groups. Unfortunately, these role-plays are too complex and the space here is too limited to provide an adequate analysis. However, a short clip (edited and sub-titled in English) of one of the role-plays presented by the Mbororo women's group of Chako is accessible via the virtual archive of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (<http://corpora.eth.mpg.de/>) alongside a brief analysis in appendix E.

²⁵⁵ Although in the Grassfields the ritualised gift exchange, as described by Mary Smith (1965) for northern Nigeria, is no longer practiced in this rigid form, the model of 'the best friend' (*kawa* in Hausa) is still known and shapes friendship relationships among Hausa women in the Misaje area (see also Werthmann 1997: 172-182).

8.5.1.3 Comparing Mbororo men's and women's interethnic friendships

In comparing Mbororo men's and women's interethnic friendships, certain tendencies become apparent. Mbororo men evaluate friendship in terms of trust, sympathy, moral and financial assistance, and reciprocity. Mbororo women, on the other hand, emphasise mutual affection, shared experience, emotional support, and gift-exchange. Thus while men stress the instrumental side of friendship, women accentuate the emotional aspects. A gendered understanding of friendship is also expressed in Nyapendo's comparison of Mbororo men's and women's friendships:

The friendship of *ndotti'en* (male elders) and of women is not the same. You see *ndotti'en* choose their friends according to the truthfulness of the person. A good friend is somebody who sticks to his promise and who speaks honestly with you. Women choose their friends according to who is smiling at you. If you see a person smiling at you all the time you are happy. You too, you smile at her until you become friends. But later on, you see some of them have no truth. They smile at you and, at the same time, they hide things from you. Then they gossip about you. While you hold your friend with one true heart, she on her part holds you with two different hearts. It is not good. So, you see, the friendship of men and women is different. (Nyapendo Jainabu, Nkanchi, 14/12/2004)

Nyapendo portrayed men's friendship as superior and exemplary for women's friendship. Her assessment is embedded in the socio-economic organisation of agropastoral FulBe and reflects the Mbororo gender model. While men are assigned a leading role in the economic and political sphere, women's responsibilities are largely confined to the household (Pelican 1999: 41-49, 110-113). Similar notions of male supremacy and female subordination are entrenched in the Islamic gender ideology and have endorsed the FulBe gender model (Pelican 1999: 120-123, VerEecke 1989, Walker 1980).

The Mbororo's socio-economic organisation accounts also for men's and women's diverging exposure to contacts outside of their immediate social environment. In their duty as household heads and herd managers, Mbororo men tend to frequent villages, markets, mosques, and continually come in contact with members of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, they largely rely on their interethnic friends for credit or loans. Conversely, Mbororo women's realm of action and responsibility is concentrated on the household and the family. Their financial liabilities are much smaller and they primarily rely on their husbands rather than their friends. Their trips to town to do

errands or to sell milk are generally brief and focused. They include little time for socialising with acquaintances or making new contacts. Thus, Mbororo men are more exposed to outside contacts and rely more strongly on interethnic friendship and assistance networks than Mbororo women whose outside contacts are much more limited.

Coupled with the Mbororo's socio-economic organisation is a gendered understanding of men's and women's *personae*. Mbororo women ideally count as emotional and compassionate, while men are portrayed as stern and authoritative (cf. Riesman 1998 [1977]: 200-205). Riesman (1998 [1977]: 85-86) argues that by enacting different characters, Mbororo men and women fulfil complementary roles in child-formation. Similarly, when applied to the context of interethnic relations, their gendered characters generate different modes of interaction. Women tend to maintain mostly informal contacts, while men's relationships are more formalised and coloured by socio-political hierarchy. This interpretation corresponds to interethnic friendships as practiced by Mbororo men and women in the Misaje area.

The formal versus informal character of men's and women's social relationships is also significant with regard to the potential relevance of interethnic friendship in negotiating farmer-herder relations. In the subsequent section I will summarise the findings of Boutrais (1984) and Burnham (1980) for northwestern and northern Cameroon, and draw comparisons with the Misaje area.

8.5.2 Interethnic friendship and the negotiation of farmer-herder relations

Boutrais (1984: 254) attributes a significant role to interethnic friendships in the mediation of farmer-herder conflict. In his view, it is the informal character of women's friendships that help to defuse conflict over crop damage, as it gives women farmers the opportunity to express their grievances against the herders' cattle. Boutrais refers primarily to nomadic FulBe whose social contacts with local farmers emerge from frequent economic transactions, such as sales or barter of milk for grain, which are the domain of women. He further suggests that among the relatively sedentary Mbororo in the Grassfields, women's social contacts with local farmers, as well as their integrative potential, are limited.

I largely agree with Boutrais. As nomadic FulBe women are highly involved in economic transactions, they have ample opportunity to meet women of other ethnic groups and engage in informal discussions. Yet as they continually move on, their social contacts may be less intense and enduring than the interethnic friendships of Mbororo women in the Grassfields. Furthermore, while the subject of crop damage may be closely discussed between women farmers and their nomadic FulBe friends, this is not the case in the Misaje area. Mbororo interlocutors never mentioned crop damage as a topic discussed with their Grassfields friends. As we have seen in chapter 6, in the Grassfields farmer-herder disputes have developed into a long-standing problem with recurring confrontations and established discourses. Thus rather than putting their friendship under strain, both Grassfields and Mbororo acquaintances prefer to downplay or ignore the matter of crop damage, and to focus on positive ties.

A second author studying interethnic friendship between farmers and herders is Burnham (1980: 197-201). In his monograph on the Gbaya in Adamaoua he examines friendship (*soobaaajo*) relations between Gbaya farmers and Mbororo herders which are characterised by the reciprocal exchange of gifts and goods. While Gbaya farmers present their Mbororo friends with agricultural produces, salt, and labour services, Mbororo in return offer gifts of yearling cattle or modern consumer goods (e.g. radios, bicycles). The wives of befriended men often entertain similar friendship and exchange relations, though on a smaller scale. Money is rarely involved in *soobaaajo* relations which, in the view of both parties, distinguishes them from impersonal cash transactions in the market. As Burnham further explains, *soobaaajo* relations tend to be durable, institutionalised relationships that entail a considerable degree of trust. Reciprocity between bondfriends is often delayed, and when Mbororo herders go on transhumance, they take along the entrusted animals of their Gbaya friends.

As Burnham points out, *soobaaajo* relations are beneficial to both parties. While Gbaya farmers often derive economic profit, Mbororo herders benefit in economic and more so political terms. Particularly in those areas where the Mbororo are a minority and politically marginal, *soobaaajo* relations play a significant role in the mediation of farmer-herder conflict; disputes over crop damage are often settled out of court with the help of *soobaaajo* intermediaries. Conversely, in other regions where the Mbororo are politically dominant and thus less dependent on good relations with their farming neighbours, *soobaaajo* relations are largely absent. Here foodstuffs and

labour services are bought and sold for cash, and conflicts over crop damage are resolved in court.

Interethnic friendships in the Grassfields are quite different from *soobaaajo* relations in Adamaoua. As outlined above, friendships between Mbororo and Grassfielders have no institutionalised character; they are a purely individual affair and there is no correlation between the friendships of husbands and wives. While interethnic friendships may fulfil economic functions, particularly with regard to Mbororo men's financial planning, they are of little political significance. Similar to those Mbororo in the Adamaoua who entertain *soobaaajo* relations with their Gbaya neighbours, Mbororo in the Grassfields are politically and demographically marginal. Their economic strength, however, may be a reason for their reluctance to invest in friendships with Grassfields farmers as a strategy to negotiate farmer-herder relations. Another explanation may be derived from differences in the socio-political organisation of Gbaya and Grassfields groups. While the Gbaya are a segmentary society in which conflicts tend to be resolved on the basis of interpersonal relations, most Grassfields groups are organised hierarchically, and political and economic interests are negotiated via good relations with the local chief and the palace hierarchy.

In assessing the functionality of interethnic friendships in the Grassfields, we have seen that interethnic friendships fulfil both economic and social functions for Mbororo individuals. Mbororo men, in particular, tend to rely on their Grassfields and Hausa friends in their economic planning. Mbororo women, on the other hand, seem to be more oriented towards friendships within their own ethnic group. Yet in terms of negotiating farmer-herder relations, friendships between Mbororo and Grassfielders are rather insignificant. Possible reasons include the limited occurrence of women's interethnic friendships among sedentary Mbororo as compared to nomadic FulBe, and the decidedly individual and non-political character of interethnic friendships in the Grassfields as compared to northern Cameroon.

8.6 Conclusion

In concluding the chapter I will summarise its main findings by applying the concepts of identity switching and cross-cutting ties to my material on religious conversion, intermarriage, and interethnic friendship in the Misaje area.

In the Grassfields, ethnic identity switching is linked to religious conversion and interethnic marriage. As outlined above, it is mainly Grassfielders who engage in such processes by converting to Islam, marrying a Muslim partner and consequently adopting Hausa identity. Yet Hausa identity in the Grassfields is a polytactic and inclusive identity that refers to ethnic and/or religious identities, and that permits Grassfields converts to retain their original ethnicity at a sub-ethnic level. Thus Grassfields converts have ample opportunity to switch between different frames of reference and to explore their links with both Hausa and Grassfields communities.

Grassfields converts, Grassfields spouses of Hausa or Mbororo partners, and – to a lesser degree – interethnic friends personify cross-cutting ties between Grassfields and Muslim groups. Due to their familiarity and loyalty to both groups, they often act as conduits and facilitate communication and interaction between Grassfielders and Muslims. Yet their integrative faculties are largely confined to the interpersonal level and to times of peaceful coexistence. In conflict situations their dual loyalties may become untenable. They may need to take sides and, by doing so, run the risk of becoming targets of criticism. To illustrate this argument I will take the example of Amina Mudi, the wife of the Hausa chief in Misaje, and discuss her role in the investiture conflict described in chapter 3.

For many Grassfields women in Misaje who aspire to marry a Muslim or convert to Islam, Amina Mudi serves as a model. Amina is originally a Mbembe woman (neighbouring Grassfields chiefdom) who on account of her marriage with the *sarkin hausawa* attained a position of high status in the Hausa community. She is a sociable and hospitable woman and generally enjoys a good reputation. Her house is frequented by visitors from all ethnic backgrounds, be they Hausa, Mbororo, local Grassfielders, or Grassfields migrants. She has cultivated good relations with the *fon* of Misaje and his family and has successfully kept links with her home community. Amina has two children, raised two of her siblings, and took care of the children of Grassfields friends, all of whom she tried to bring up as ‘good Muslims’. She is also the social guide (*jagora/kollitowo*) to several female Grassfields converts. With her

openness to people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds and her skill in treating them in a way they consider appropriate, she has contributed to the mutual understanding of Grassfielders and Muslims in the Misaje area.

In the investiture conflict Amina Mudi was faced with the predicament of siding either with Grassfielders or Muslims. When the issue arose about the Muslims refusing to take off their caps, and Grassfielders threatened to bring out their dangerous *ngumba ju-ju*, Amina was personally confronted by Nchaney individuals. As she explained, they appealed to her Grassfields background and asked her to mediate on their behalf. Yet being the wife of the Hausa chief, she was bound to side with the Muslim community. Consequently, local Grassfielders accused her of endorsing Muslim aggression and treated her as a traitor. As we know, in the end the conflict was contained through the Divisional Officer's intervention and both parties laid aside their hostility in order to restore peaceful coexistence. At the time of my research, Amina was no longer disregarded by Grassfields interlocutors, but entertained good relations with Grassfielders, Hausa, and Mbororo.

Similarly, as discussed in the beginning of the chapter, Grassfields converts' funerals may arise as a site of contention where religious differences and competing political claims may be played out. In the same way, farmer-herder disputes constitute an arena in which social bonds created through individual friendships between Grassfields farmers and Mbororo herders are frequently overshadowed by economic rivalry. Thus, as these examples illustrate, there is no noticeable correlation between the existence of cross-cutting ties generated through religious conversion, intermarriage or interethnic friendship, and the occurrence or intensity of conflict. These findings support the conclusion of Schlee (2000: 73, 2004: 114) that cross-cutting ties in themselves have no active effect, but may be used as raw material for political rhetoric. Their integrative propensity, however, may be applicable in the aftermath of conflict by facilitating the reinstatement of social relations between members of the conflicting parties.

9 DISCOURSES ON OCCULT ECONOMIES AND INTRA-/INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

In this chapter I engage with another aspect of the religious coexistence of Grassfielders and Muslims in the Misaje area. My focus is on discourses on the occult and their impact on intra- and interethnic relations. More specifically, I will examine notions of occult practices of Grassfielders, Mbororo and Hausa, their particularities, and the groups' mutual perceptions. Furthermore, I will consider the strategies of local authorities, government officials, and NGO activists towards containing alleged occult aggression.

At a first glance, studying discourses on witchcraft and other forms of occult activities may appear as a digression from the subject of interethnic relations. However, as illustrated in the following, the sphere of the occult is another field in which identity, inclusion and exclusion are articulated. Moreover and most crucially, discourses on the occult are at the heart of social life in Misaje. They comment on the morally acceptable and unacceptable, the relationship between the rich and the poor, between villagers and their external elite, and between members of different ethnic groups. They locate Misaje in a truly global world, linking it to urban centres, the coast, and unknown locales in the West. They reflect on licit and illicit forms of wealth accumulation and draw on historical and contemporary experiences of capitalist penetration.

My reading of discourses on the occult in Misaje is inspired by recent approaches, most importantly Peter Geschiere's (1997a) understanding of witchcraft as political discourse and innately modern, and Jean and John Comaroff's (1999a, 1999b, 2001b) interpretation of discourses on the occult as a response to the contemporary expansion of neo-liberal global capitalism which they characterise as millennial capitalism. As indicated in the title of this chapter, I have chosen the term "occult economies" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a) to look at a variety of discourses based on the idea of wealth production through occult means. They refer to different types of witchcraft, trade in human body parts, and the use of scams, spells and medicine to generate wealth or protect oneself against the voracious greed of others. Over the past years, these discourses have gained salience and there has been a shift in their attribution to specific ethnic groups.

In this chapter I argue that Cameroon's political liberalisation of the 1990s with its violent ramifications and the intensification of social and economic insecurity (described in chapter 2) provided a fertile environment for the resurgence of discourses on witchcraft and other forms of occult economies. Moreover, parallel to the ethnicisation of politics, an ethnicisation of discourses on the occult is observable. As argued by Geschiere (1997a: 11) with regard to the national political context, the attribution of particular occult practices to specific ethnic groups may serve as a mechanism of political exclusion and 'othering'. Conversely, on the local level, the recent incrimination of members of all, including Muslim groups in occult activities may be read as an indication of their complex integration into the overarching community. At the same time, Mbororo and Hausa tend to distance themselves from occult economies by stressing their Muslim identity. Yet, as we will see below, both Muslim groups have their notions of occult practices that share similarities with those of Grassfielders. Moreover, Muslim religious specialists are widely known for their protective medicines, which are valued by members of all ethnic groups. The issue of protection and containment of occult aggression equally gained momentum in the course of Cameroon's unruly political transition. The sporadic failure of so-called traditional methods and the subsequent use of violence against suspected witches²⁵⁶ have turned the issue of occult economies into a two-fold problem that includes both abuses by and of alleged witches. Possible solutions proposed by state and non-state actors will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

9.1 Studying occult economies

Over the past fifteen years, the theme of witchcraft, or more generally the occult, has experienced resurgence in anthropology (e.g. Bond & Ciekawy 2001, Clough & Mitchell 2001, Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 2001a, Ellis & ter Haar 2004, Geschiere 1997a, Kapferer 2003, Kiernan 2006, Meyer & Pels 2003, Moore & Sanders 2001a, Stewart & Strathern 2004, Wendl 2004, West & Sanders 2003). Many authors have recognised a significant increase in occult activities in Africa and other parts of the world. They agree that contemporary discourses on occult activities are no simple

²⁵⁶ The term witch is here used in referring to both genders. In common language use in the Western Grassfields both terms witch and wizard are employed relatively randomly, and men as well as women are suspected of participating in occult economies.

reiteration of earlier witchcraft beliefs and practices, but constitute new responses to new challenges.

Already in 1937, in his analysis of witchcraft beliefs among the Azande, Evans-Pritchard stated that “new situations demand new magic” (1937: 513).²⁵⁷ The ‘new situations’ Africans and the rest of the world are facing today are characterised by the expansion of global markets and the advent of millennial capitalism, “invested with salvific force” and the seeming promise of empowerment, demarginalisation, and accumulation (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999b: 19). The ‘new magic’ of this era is innately modern and political, and critically responds to modernity’s ideal of progress, democracy, and transparency (Geschiere 1997a, 2006). It entails novel ways of making sense, and of deploying “a world in which the *possibility* of rapid enrichment, of amassing a fortune by largely invisible methods, is always palpably present.” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a: 293, italics in the original). These novel forms of magic have been termed ‘occult economies’ which Comaroff and Comaroff (1999a) define as follows:

‘Occult economy’ may be taken, at its most general, to connote the deployment of magical means for material ends or, more expansively, the conjuring of wealth by resort to inherently mysterious techniques, techniques whose principles of operation are neither transparent nor explicable in conventional terms. These techniques, moreover, often involve the destruction of others and *their* capacity to create value. Note that we do not seek to define ‘the occult’ substantively. What counts as magic varies across time and place and context, although it is always set apart from habitual, normative forms of production. (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a: 297, italics in the original)

As Nyamnjoh (2001) points out, African notions of witchcraft are rooted in an epistemological framework that differs from the Anglo-European worldview informed by Cartesian rationality. For most Africans “the so-called natural and supernatural, rational and irrational, objective and subjective, scientific and superstitious, visible and invisible, real and unreal” (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29) are all part of the same world, and are mutually constitutive. The supernatural or invisible realm is inhabited by

²⁵⁷ Evans-Pritchard’s argument has been taken up by Gluckman (1963a: 137) and Comaroff & Comaroff (1999a: 284).

ancestors, spirits, witches and other beings, whose deeds may well impact on the visible world.²⁵⁸

According to Geschiere (1997a: 211-214), a significant factor that may explain the continuous relevance of discourses on the occult in Africa is the close link between witchcraft and kinship. In the view of many Africans, the family constitutes the basis of social life and at the same time entails the danger of jealousy and aggression from within, i.e. from those with whom one has to live and cooperate. Anthropologists of the Manchester School (e.g. Douglas 1970, Gluckman 1963a: 137-145, 1973 [1966]: 81-108,) tended to view witchcraft as the antithesis of social order, and suggested that witchcraft discourses may function as mechanisms of social sanctioning.²⁵⁹ However, in many parts of Africa knowledge of the occult is not seen as exclusively negative, but as an indispensable source of power (Rowlands 1987). Hence, the intention of local institutions concerned with the containment of witchcraft is not to eradicate the occult, but to domesticate and use it to the benefit of society.

Concurrently with the recent rise of witchcraft discourses, the demand for effective methods of containing occult aggression has increased. Geschiere (1997a) describes the situation in Cameroon as follows:

In the societies concerned here, we see that the widespread fear that witchcraft is running wild has shocking effects in everyday life – tearing families apart and setting people against each other. Moreover, all this seems to have worsened during the past twenty-five years that I have regularly visited Cameroon. The idea that older ways of protecting oneself are no longer of avail against new transformations of the witches' powers has led to a frantic search for new forms of protection that can have gruesome consequences on their own. This might make one wary of emphasizing too strongly the reality of these beliefs. (Geschiere 1997a: 21)

In several parts of Africa new methods of witchcraft containment have emerged, including self-proclaimed witch-finders (e.g. Auslander 1993) and state-legal witchcraft trials (Fisiy 1998, Fisiy & Geschiere 1990, 2001). Similar tendencies have been observed in the research area and will be analysed below.

²⁵⁸ In his analysis of the recent but widespread phenomenon of child-witches in the Congolese capital Kinsahsa de Boeck (2004, 2005) addresses the question of what may happen when the invisible world takes over or pushes aside the visible.

²⁵⁹ In addition, Gluckman (1963b) argued that gossip may be used as a major mechanism of social sanctioning. Taking into account that witchcraft rumours are based on allegation rather than facts, we may as well apply his argument to witchcraft discourses.

Some notes on my methodological approach. I should emphasise that I focus on discourses rather than actual practices, as occult activities can neither be observed nor proven (cf. Stewart & Strathern 2004: ix-xiv). Furthermore, my elaborations are not limited to Misaje Town, but encompass Bessa and Nchaney villages in the Misaje Sub-Division, and extend further to other regions of the Grassfields, and to the coastal areas in southwest Cameroon where members of the Bessa external elite have mobilised to counter perceived occult aggression ‘from home’.

I base my analysis on conversations with Grassfields, Hausa, and Mbororo interlocutors as well as state agents and NGO activists. Furthermore, I draw on internal documents of BECUDA (Bessa Cultural and Development Association) and of Christian human rights organisations active in the containment of witchcraft. Much of the data has been contributed by my assistant Ngeh Jonathan who conversed with informants in Misaje and the South West Province, and who continued to supply information after my research stay had ended. As discourses on occult economies are a sensitive subject, interlocutors and individuals incriminated in occult dealings are anonymised.

In addition to my research data, I draw on the substantial body of anthropological literature on occult economies in Africa and other parts of the world. Notably, Cameroon (as well as Southern Africa) has long been a focal point in the study of witchcraft, and Cameroonist scholars, such as Edwin Ardener and Peter Geschiere, have made seminal contributions to this field.²⁶⁰ Most relevant for my explorations is Geschiere’s study (1997a) ‘The modernity of witchcraft’ as well as his co-authored articles with the Cameroonian scholars Fisiy and Nyamnjoh (Fisiy & Geschiere 1991, 1996, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998, 2001), which provide comparative dimensions between southern and northwest Cameroon. While critically engaging with these and other contributions, I wish to underline the complementarity of my ethnographic material on the alleged trade in human body parts and on Muslim notions of occult practices, that have largely gone undocumented within the Cameroonian context. Moreover, in line with the overall subject of my thesis, I focus on issues of inclusion and exclusion and identity politics, and thus provide a slightly different perspective from scholars concerned with epistemological, religious or therapeutic connotations

²⁶⁰ Publications on witchcraft in Cameroon include among others Bartelt (2006), Bongmba (1998), Brain (1970), de Rosny (1985), Mbunwe-Samba (1989), Nyamnjoh (2001, 2005b), Pool (1994: 141-176), Probst & Bühler (1990), Röschenhaler (2004a).

of witchcraft. Finally, I would like to thank Francis Nyamnjoh for his vital comments on an earlier draft that have been incorporated into the chapter.²⁶¹

9.2 Discourses on occult economies in the Misaje area

Discourses on witchcraft and other forms of occult economies have long been an integral feature of social life in the Western Grassfields. In the course of Cameroon's economic and political liberalisation, however, these discourses seem to have amplified alongside the demand for more effective methods of witchcraft containment. Instances of illness and death, failure and success, and individual accumulation have increasingly been attributed to occult activities. Moreover, in current understanding, literally everyone is potentially implicated in occult dealings either as victim or perpetrator (Bongmba 1998, Fisiy & Geschiere 1996, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998). In the Misaje area, it is mainly local Grassfielders who seem troubled and afflicted by perceived occult aggression. Suspicions are raised against potential perpetrators on the basis of wealth disparity and sudden individual success. The majority of allegations are directed against members of Grassfields groups, including local Grassfielders as well as migrants from neighbouring and distant Grassfields chiefdoms. Recently, Mbororo and Hausa have also been incriminated.

The following elaborations represent a non-exhaustive account of discourses on occult economies in the Misaje area. In addition to analysing different notions of the occult, I wish to outline the ways in which individuals and groups deal with their afflictions as putative targets or alleged perpetrators. The discourses are grouped into three categories, namely witchcraft accusations within the kin group (*buche* in Ncane, *butse* in Nsari), allegations of zombie enslavement (known as *nyongo* or *kupe* in the Grassfields), and rumours about the trade in human body parts (locally labelled *cut-head*). While the first two categories have been described and analysed for various parts of Cameroon and the Western Grassfields, *cut-head* rumours seem a highly localised variation on the same topic.²⁶²

²⁶¹ I would also like to thank John Comaroff and Martine Guichard for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

²⁶² Alternatively, their absence from academic accounts on the region may be explained by the focus of research on witchcraft to the exclusion of other forms of occult economies.

9.2.1 *Buche/butse: witchcraft within the kin group*

Most prominent in the Misaje area are witchcraft allegations against Nchaney and Bessa villagers for “eating” their better-off relatives, i.e. consuming their life force.²⁶³ This type of witchcraft is perceived as a congenital ability with its purview being restricted to consanguinity. Purportedly, favoured targets are successful and educated community members, often individuals living in the urban and coastal areas. The critical dividing line is between local villagers and members of the external elite, as the latter seem constantly afraid of their rural relatives’ envy and witchcraft assaults.

Buche (in Nchaney), *butse* (in Nsari) refers to the negative occult power of witches (*chwe* in Ncane, *kwi* in Nsari)²⁶⁴ who inflict harm and death on their kin. Similar notions are known among many Grassfields groups as well as in other parts of Cameroon.²⁶⁵ The Nchaney and Bessa understand *buche/butse* as a negative faculty that enables endowed individuals to “prolong their youth” by feeding upon the lives of others. The purview of a person’s *buche/butse* is confined to his/her kin group, and close relations are favoured targets. The main sources of witchcraft assaults are thought to be intra-familial disagreement and quarrels, which trigger jealousy and ill-will among relatives and generate openings for internal and external destructive forces.

The notion of *buche/butse* as located within the kin group forms part of a moral discourse on social, economic, and political responsibilities that are implied by a person’s membership in a kinship unit (cf. Nyamnjoh 2002b). Fisiy and Geschiere (1996: 197; Geschiere 1997a: 212) have referred to this as “the dark side of kinship”. The call to solidarity and sharing within the extended family is particularly significant in the relationship between the external elite and their home community. Many Bessa and Nchaney interlocutors living in the urban centres of southern Cameroon expressed anxiety towards their relatives in the village whom they suspect of jealousy, greed, and evil-mindedness. To them the question of how to prosper and invest in projects at

²⁶³ For a more detailed account on the notion of occult cannibalism and witch-circles see Mbunwe-Samba (1989: 10-12), Pool (1994: 150-159).

²⁶⁴ The Ncane and Nsari terms denote both genders.

²⁶⁵ Among the neighbouring Wimbun *buche/butse* is called *tvu*’ (also spelled *tfu*) and refers to “a hidden, non-hereditary, and non-purchasable force both men and women are born with” (Probst & Bühler 1990: 449; see also Bongmba 1998, Pool 1994: 144-176, Probst 1992: 146-151). The equivalent to *buche/butse* among the Maka in southeastern Cameroon is *djambe* (Geschiere 1997a: 26-60). Geschiere’s informants described it as “a small being that lives inside the belly of its possessor” (Geschiere 1997a: 38). Among the Beti in central-southern Cameroon family-internal witchcraft is known as *evu* (cf. Geschiere 1997a: 62-64).

home without inviting relatives' envy and witchcraft assaults is a vital issue and has been discussed on the level of BECUDA, the Bessa Cultural and Development Association. In the Grassfields the containment of witchcraft is primarily in the hands of local authorities, namely the *fon* and family elders (cf. Fisiy & Geschiere 1991, Geschiere 1996, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998). Yet Bessa elite members see themselves in a precarious situation, as they believe that their chiefs lack the power to protect them from their relatives' occult aggression.

Compared to the large and influential chiefdoms of Bum and Nso, the Bessa – and to a lesser degree the Nchaney – are less centralised. The Bessa area comprises nine villages that are ritually and politically subsumed under three chiefs who have no superior among themselves. Furthermore, they lack central political institutions, such as the regulatory society that assist the *fon* in the implementation of his judicial functions.²⁶⁶ Consequently, Bessa *fons* have little coercive power over their subjects, and the population's respect for their authority rests solely on their moral supremacy and ritual power.²⁶⁷ In order to strengthen the authority of the Bessa chiefs, members of the external elite made pleas to the Bessa population and their *fons* to respect each other and to fulfil their respective duties. They also suggested the introduction of a regulatory society to strengthen the chief's authority. Furthermore, they proposed the accreditation of traditional titles to Bessa individuals who achieved "modern deeds that can be compared to previous traditional deeds like the catching of a tiger [leopard] with bare hands, given that those old deeds are no longer feasible" (Deliberations of the Bessa elite meeting in Douala, June 2000). Such neo-traditional titles are thought to enable external elite members to take part in local politics, and to involve themselves in projects at home without being exposed to their relatives' perceived jealousy and obstinacy.²⁶⁸

Taking into account the considerable anxieties of external elite members, we must question why they are so keen on entertaining good relations with their relatives and

²⁶⁶ I believe, as early authors aimed at defining an 'ideal type' of Grassfields chiefdoms, there has been an overemphasis on political institutions and hierarchical structures (e.g. Chilver & Kaberry 1967, Nkwi & Warnier 1982). The Bessa are not so much a 'deviation' to the 'usual' Grassfields chiefdom but serve as an example for the variety of political structures that exist among Grassfields chiefdoms (see also Dillon 1990: 28-52, Rowlands 1987: 56-58).

²⁶⁷ Rowlands (1987: 60) notes that personal security against occult and physical assaults was thought to be guaranteed better in large chiefdoms with prestigious *fons*.

²⁶⁸ Parallel efforts to modernise traditional titles have also been described for Nso (Fisiy & Goheen 1998, Goheen 1996). Goheen (1996) interprets these attempts as a way "to fuse the power of Nso' tradition, of the pure legitimacy of the ancestors, with the secular legitimacy of the modern state." (Goheen 1996: 161).

investing in their home area. As Nyamnjoh (2001, 2002b) explains, groundedness and active membership in a local community is essential to the concept of personhood and to an individual's identity and subjectivity. Even when living abroad (outside of the village) over a long period and after establishing an alternative or second home, the link to the home community remains vital. "No one, it seems, is too cosmopolitan to be local as well." (Nyamnjoh 2001: 32) This is also reflected in the practice of being buried in the home village, even if this involves transport difficulties and high costs (cf. Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2001: 170-172). Thus understandably, elite members are interested in developing their home area. They aim at creating a comfortable and agreeable environment to retire, and for their children to return in the future. Moreover, they are socially obliged to let their relatives at home partake in their expertise and wealth. They intend to contribute to the improvement and development of the community via investments in the village for which they claim social recognition, for example in the form of neo-traditional titles. Yet their ideal of developing the home area and, in return, being rewarded with an increase in status may not materialise; and they tend to attribute their failure to the villagers' envy and ill-will.

Elite members' anxiety over witchcraft attacks is not limited to visits to the home area. There are also rumours of community members haunted or killed by witchcraft while living abroad (see also Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998, Nyamnjoh 2001). As interlocutors pointed out, it was initially believed that "witchcraft cannot cross water". In recent years, however, witches are said to have invented novel methods to get their prey. Bessa informants living in the South West explained that some of their fellows were killed through magically poisoned letters or kola nuts sent from home. Similarly, local witches in southern Cameroon are suspected of operating on a global scale in cooperation with the Italian mafia (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 3).²⁶⁹ Thus with the expansion of individual mobility and villagers' expectations, their witchcraft has extended as well.

In my reading, the discourse on *butche/butse* speaks to the failure of the expectations of development, particularly in rural areas such as Misaje (cf. Nyamnjoh 2001: 33). Members of the external elite see it as their duty to bring development to the village by building houses, investing in infrastructure, promoting education, and

²⁶⁹ In a recent article Nyamnjoh (2005b) describes witchcraft discourses on a global scale that link Cameroonians living in Europe and the US with their relatives at home.

modernising their group's social and political organisation. Frequently, the realisation of their plans is problematic, and they tend to perceive "village mentality" as the prime obstacle. In this context, the trope of the jealous, voracious relative is invoked, who signifies not only an anathema to development but humanity as such.

Buche/butse has here been portrayed in the perspective of the external elite as a petrifying and socially destructive force; a view largely shared by local villagers. However, as argued by Geschiere (1997a: 10) and Nyamnjoh (2001, 2002b), witchcraft can also function as a levelling mechanism through which disadvantaged community members may remind their better-off relatives of their family obligations as well as of the source of their success and current identity. Accordingly, we might assume that Bessa and Nchaney villagers may counter-accuse their elite members of other forms of witchcraft, namely zombie enslavement, as discussed in the following. However, this is not the case; they rather attribute the seeming wealth of the external elite more to profitable opportunities on the coast and to individual fraudulence (*feymania*) than to witchcraft. In the specific context of Misaje, this discrepancy may be understood against the background of the apparent ethnicisation of discourses on the occult, according to which *buche/butse* is the witchcraft of local Grassfielders while zombie enslavement is attributed to members of neighbouring Grassfields groups.

9.2.2 Nyongo: zombie enslavement by the wealthy

Zombie enslavement, known as *nyongo* or *kupe* in the Western Grassfields and as *famla*, *kong*, or *ekong* in other parts of Cameroon, is at the heart of a second, popular discourse on occult economies in Misaje.²⁷⁰ *Nyongo* is a relatively new discourse that has gained prominence in the Grassfields since the 1960s.²⁷¹ Unlike *buche/butse*, its focus is primarily on the perpetrator rather than the victim. *Nyongo* practitioners supposedly are wealthy individuals, outstanding by their rapid success and asocial demeanour. Purportedly, they no longer eat their victims like in *buche/butse*, but transform them into zombies and put them to work in mystical locations of mass-

²⁷⁰ The most common term in Misaje is *nyongo*, while informants occasionally also talked of *kupe*. *Kupe* is mainly used in southwest Cameroon, while *famla* is the term commonly employed among the Bamiléké in western Cameroon, *kong* among the Beti in the forest area of southern-central Cameroon, and *ekong* among the Douala on the coast.

²⁷¹ For accounts on *nyongo* in the Western Grassfields see e.g. Bongmba (1998), Geschiere (2001b), Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (1998), Nyamnjoh (2001), Pool (1994: 155-158), Probst (1992: 151-159).

production. *Nyongo* is imagined as a witchcraft *njangi* (rotating credit association)²⁷² whose members meet regularly, and take turns in contributing victims to be killed and made into zombies. Different from *buche/butse*, the purview of *nyongo* is no longer confined to the family, but non-kin and members of other ethnic groups may be victimised as well. *Nyongo* allegations in Misaje point mainly to wealthy migrants from the neighbouring Wimum area; yet *nouveaux riches* from other groups are also suspected.²⁷³

The notion of *nyongo* is not confined to the Grassfields. Discourses are even more prominent in the coastal areas, like in the South West Province and the Douala region from where *nyongo* purportedly originated.²⁷⁴ Its genesis is traced back to the arrival of the Europeans in Douala and their introduction of consumer goods into the hinterlands (Fisiy & Geschiere 1996: 206). Yet *nyongo* discourses seem to be rooted even deeper in Cameroon's history. In his seminal study of *nyongo* among the Bakweri in southwest Cameroon, E. Ardener (1970) suggests that similar phenomena have emerged, disappeared, and reappeared cyclically in correlation with changes in socio-economic and physical environments. Geschiere (1997a: 258, 1997b: 352-355) relates *nyongo* beliefs in the Grassfields to pre-colonial experiences and practices of slave trade, in which chiefs and lineage heads sold off cadets of their own kin group to slave dealers.²⁷⁵

In Misaje *nyongo* rumours take a specific form, somewhat different from other parts of the Grassfields. Here, allegations are directed mainly against members of neighbouring Grassfields groups, in particular wealthy Wimum businessmen. The case of Mr A, who has lived in Misaje for the past 20 years, is a classical example of *nyongo* allegations in this region. Rumours are based on a number of intertwined

²⁷² *Njangi* is the Pidgin English term for rotating credit association; its French equivalent is *tontine* (cf. Kapfer 2005: 114-115). Rotating credit associations have been popular and long-standing institutions in many parts of Cameroon (cf. S. Ardener 1964, Ardener & Burman 1995).

²⁷³ As a number of authors (e.g. Geschiere 1997b: 158, Probst 1992: 154) have noted, *nyongo* is generally associated with the rotating credit associations of the Bamiléké. Misaje villagers largely share the same perception. Yet with regard to residents in the Misaje area allegations point mainly at Wimum businessmen, as there are no Bamiléké living in Misaje.

²⁷⁴ See Geschiere (1997a: 137-168, 2001b) and Fisiy & Geschiere (1991) for a concise compilation of regional variations.

²⁷⁵ Röschenhaler (2004a: 133) suggests that societies with a long history in slave trade are particularly receptive to witchcraft rumours and witch hunts, as slave trade experiences have nourished assumptions of individual malevolence and mutual mistrust. On the connection between slave trade experiences and witchcraft discourses see also Argenti (2006: 50), Shaw (1997). Nyamnjoh (2001: 44-46) associates *nyongo* with the concept of *msa*, a place of abundance where good and evil things co-exist and where evil is wrapped in apparent goodness. On the notion of *msa* see also Geschiere (1997a: 257), Nyamnjoh (2002b), Rowlands (1992), Warnier (1993a: 157-161).

features, including rapid economic success, instances of sudden death, and the suspect's asocial demeanour. A Bessa informant recalled the following story:

When I was still in primary school in Misaje, people suspected Mr A of *nyongo*. At that time, he was not accused of killing someone through *nyongo* to get money; but the allegation was that he had compromised his manhood to *nyongo* to become rich. He was said to have sold his penis to *mami wata* [water spirit].²⁷⁶ For this reason he could not make love to any woman. People said that if he dared to do so, he would die. At that time Mr A had no relationship with any girl. Nobody knew his girlfriend and he was never seen with a woman. When he married his wife, some people said it was a camouflage to fool people. They believed that he was unable to make love to the wife. When she delivered her first child, people said he paid somebody to sleep with her, and that the child was not his own. It was after the death of Mr A's half-brother that villagers began to accuse him of killing people through *nyongo* to get money. The second incident that made people to accuse Mr A of witchcraft occurred when he was constructing his multi-story building in the market square. He brought a contractor from Nkambe who was his country-man. [...] One night, when this contractor was asleep, he saw the late half-brother of Mr A with a box of money [in his dream]. The box of money was handed to him, but he refused that he did not want that kind of money. The following day, the contractor revealed what he had seen to the other workers. When Mr A heard of this, he felt threatened and killed the man through witchcraft. The next contractor who continued the work had a similar experience. He revealed what he saw to his workers and also ended up dead. (A.A., Misaje, 24/12/01)

This story reveals two vital aspects of *nyongo* allegations in Misaje. Firstly, *nyongo* is a popular trope, used very broadly when referring to perceived instances of individual accumulation through the sacrifice of life. That is, both Mr A's assumed sterility as well as the deaths of his brother and contractors were interpreted as the result of his engagement in a *nyongo* association. Secondly, *nyongo* no longer presupposes kinship ties between the perpetrator and his/her victims. While in this particular case, Mr A, his brother and contractors were all from the same ethnic group, several villagers claimed to have escaped death by a hairbreadth, and cautioned others to be vigilant in their interaction with Mr A.

²⁷⁶ Nyamnjoh (e-mail communication, 20/08/2004) suggests that in the Grassfields beliefs in *mami wata* are related to plantation work in the coastal areas, as many labour migrants 'disappeared', only to return home empty-handed or in a coffin. For beliefs in *mami wata* in Nigeria and Togo see e.g. Meyer (2004), Wendl (1991).

Another subject elicited in the above story is the tempting yet precarious nature of personal enrichment. Money made through *nyongo* is seen as ‘bad’ money in a twofold sense. By accepting such money, an innocent person enters the vicious circle of the *nyongo njangi*. He/she is obliged to contribute a victim, or else is sacrificed him/herself.²⁷⁷ *Nyongo* money is considered ‘bad’ in a second sense; it is said to turn its owner asocial. A person whose prosperity is based on *nyongo* is thought to be recognisable by the way he uses his money. Rather than enjoying and sharing his wealth with his kin and acquaintances, he is said to become a lonely miser.²⁷⁸

Mr A is not the only person suspected of *nyongo* in Misaje. There are a few other prosperous Wimbun men whose names frequently appeared in *nyongo* rumours. In the view of local informants, many Wimbun migrants supposedly came to Misaje because they were ousted from their home communities due to recurrent witchcraft accusations. As I see it, the association of *nyongo* with Wimbun migrants and, more generally, with members of neighbouring Grassfields groups may be linked to their cultural proximity, whereas spatially or culturally distant groups (such as migrants from the Bamenda area and members of Muslim groups) are rather associated with another form of occult economies, namely discourses on the trade in human body parts, explored below.

Taking into account the prevalence of *nyongo* rumours in Misaje, we may inquire about the common procedures to control and counter such occult activities. As noted earlier, in the Western Grassfields the containment of witchcraft is generally considered the responsibility of the *fon* and the elders. Yet in the case of *nyongo*, the situation is more difficult than with *buche/butse* (family-internal witchcraft). First of all, alleged *nyongo* witches are mostly rich and influential individuals who are often in a better socio-economic position than the *fon*. Since many entertain good relations with their business partners and the administration, the *fon*’s potential sanctions, such as social isolation, have little impact on their dealings. Secondly, *nyongo* suspects are often (but not exclusively) members of neighbouring ethnic groups. Hence the *fon*’s

²⁷⁷ Rösenthaller (2004a: 127) reports similar assumptions about the dangerous character of *nyongo* money among the Ejagham in the Cross River region (southwest Cameroon and eastern Nigeria).

²⁷⁸ Taussig (1977, 1980) studies similar notions of money made through occult means in Colombia. In the Cauca Valley male plantation workers are said to sometimes make secret contracts with the devil in order to increase their work output and consequently their wage. Yet the price for this wealth is high. The individual supposedly is soulless and a mere puppet in the hands of the devil; eventually, he will die prematurely and in agony. Furthermore, the money thus gained has to be spent immediately on luxury consumer items. By no means can it be used as productive capital, as it negatively affects the natural fertility of land, animals and crops.

authority to implement sanctions against non-locals is relatively weak, as those measures have no ritual but only moral efficacy. The *fon*'s ultimate measure, however, is the expulsion of witches and unwelcome migrants from the territory under his control.

Several authors, most cogently E. Ardener (1970) and Geschiere (1997b), have argued that discourses on zombie enslavement are essentially about the distinction of licit and illicit forms of accumulation, and constitute a response to the effects of 'the market'; an interpretation I also endorse with regard to Misaje.²⁷⁹ Yet, *nyongo* not only speaks of the (im)morality of the market and the commodification of life, but also entails a political critique (Bongmba 1998, Rowlands & Warnier 1988). Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (1998) argue that *nyongo* rumours have amplified in the 1990s as a consequence of Cameroon's political liberalisation with its emphasis on 'autochthony' and 'belonging'. Their analysis focuses on the relationship between urban elites and their rural home communities, and highlights the role of the Grassfields chief in mediating mutual witchcraft accusations. As discussed earlier, in Misaje *nyongo* allegations are rarely raised against members of the local Grassfields elite, but refer primarily to migrants from neighbouring chiefdoms. Thus, in the Misaje case, the analogy between *nyongo* and national politics has to be drawn in a slightly different way. In my reading, *nyongo* represents a 'liberalised', 'democratised' model of witchcraft, disentangled from kinship ties. Unlike *buche/butse*, *nyongo* can be acquired with money and its purview is no longer confined to the family. Literally everyone could become a victim or a perpetrator. This seems a frightening scenario. However, despite or maybe because of its detachment from the intimacy of the family – which according to Geschiere (1997a: 211-214) is at the heart of witchcraft discourses – *nyongo* rumours play only a secondary role in Misaje.

²⁷⁹ Discourses about zombie enslavement are also popular in South Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a, 1999b, Niehaus 2005). There, however, the focus is not so much on the perpetrator but the victim. Unlike in Cameroon, zombies are not just seen as dead, but living dead; that is, alive yet lifeless creatures pursuing their daily duties, while slaving away at night to the benefit of their owners. Accordingly, interpretations of zombie discourses in South Africa differ from those in Cameroon. Comaroff & Comaroff (1999b) interpret the trope of the zombie as a symbol for the alienating forces of the labour market currently experienced in South Africa. They link it to the image of the (im)migrant as the epitome of the zombie. Here, an analogy may be drawn to the self-perception of Cameroonian migrants in Europe and the US, as discussed by Nyamnjoh (2005b). They describe their lives in the idiom of the zombie (*nyongo*), as doubly exploited by the vagaries of the labour market that forced them to leave family and home and accept substandard working and living conditions elsewhere, and by their relatives at home for whom they toil without ever being able to satisfy their incessant demands.

9.2.3 *Feymania and cut-head: alternative explanations of rapid progress and excessive accumulation*

Nyongo is only one way among others of explaining instances of sudden success and individual enrichment. *Feymania*, or the art of making one's way through as a *feyman* or confidence man, and the alleged trade in human body parts are alternative explanations popular in Misaje and the Grassfields. However, *feymen* and *cut-head* practitioners are not perceived as witches but as gifted schemers familiar with the operation of the modern world, including practical and magical means.

The term *feyman* was coined in the mid-1990s and refers to the phenomenon of individuals who made a fortune (both in Cameroon's cities and abroad) through large-scale fraudulence, cons, and scams, such as money doubling and pretended investments (see also Chouala 2001, Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a, Malaquais 2001a, 2001b).²⁸⁰ As Malaquais (2001b: 2) explains, *feyman* is a Pidgin English term that is derived from the French word *faire*, here meaning 'to pretend' or 'fake', and the English suffix *man*. According to Fisiy and Geschiere (2001: 242), the term *feyman* applies to "young successful entrepreneurs, with their dandy-like behaviour and their amazing wealth that seems to come from nowhere". In Misaje *feymania* is primarily used to explain the economic success of external elite members. It is rarely applied in the village context where the chances to make a fortune are also much more limited. Nonetheless, as Nyamnjuh (e-mail communication, 20/08/2004) points out, *feymania* has trickled down to the village level in various ways, including gambling, sweet talking, and other forms of trickery.

Alternatively, individual enrichment is associated with the trade in human body parts, in particular in human heads. In the 1990s national news were full of *cut-head* (Pidgin English) stories: human heads were allegedly found in suitcases, taxi boots and bedrooms, and traffickers were suspected of operating in the economically buzzing cities of the North West, West, South, and Central Provinces. As rumour has it, the demand for human heads comes from Europe, the US, and Asia, the countries of technological innovation and the production of modern consumer goods. Human

²⁸⁰ The term *feyman* is equivalent to the Nigerian appellation '419' after the relevant section of the Nigerian criminal code (Apter 1999: 270); on '419' see also D.J. Smith (2001).

heads are thought to be utilised in numerous ways including magical and practical uses.²⁸¹ As one informant put it:

It is said that, for any new machine to function well, a certain part of the human skull is used by the white man for mystic powers and spiritism. It is also said that whites carry our skulls and place them in museums which yields them a lot of money from tourists who visit these sites of attraction. (N.S., Misaje, 28/07/03)

The trafficking of human heads is deemed an arduous and risky but well paid sideline. Supply is thought to be organised from the countryside to urban centres in Cameroon's south where they are sold to 'white', purportedly Lebanese, middlemen who smuggle them out of the country. Individuals suspected of *cut-head* are mostly prosperous entrepreneurs with an extensive business network.

Cut-head discourses are also common in Misaje. While recent allegations point to Hausa and Mbororo individuals, *cut-head* rumours certainly predate the 1990s and might even reach back to the pre-colonial period, referring to experiences of slave abduction. *Cut-head* stories currently remembered emerged in the 1950s and 60s and were linked to the establishment of businessmen from the Bamenda area in Misaje. As several informants recounted, they were constantly admonished as children to be cautious of potential *cut-head* attacks during farm visits. Prime suspects were prosperous Pinyin entrepreneurs who were alleged to transport human heads hidden in *gari* bags. The production of *gari* (grated, dried, and fried cassava) was introduced to Misaje by migrants from Pinyin who organised its export to other areas. Moreover, as a result of their manifold business activities (including cattle trade, import and export of consumer goods, and *gari* business) the Pinyin were considered to have large networks of business partners, including whites who supposedly were interested in the supply of human heads.

According to one of the many stories, a prominent Pinyin businessman living in Misaje was suspected of making his riches from selling human heads. Villagers were afraid of encountering him at night, and children were warned never to enter his car. The rumours were abandoned when he became a devoted Christian who regularly

²⁸¹ *Cut-head* stories frequently include the allegation that not only victims' heads but also their penises are removed and used for the fabrication of potency medicine by African and Asian healers. Rumours concerning the usage of human body parts in the fabrication of medicine are also widespread in Nigeria and southern Africa and are subsumed into the category of 'ritual murders' (e.g. Harnischfeger 1997, Krings 2004, White 1997).

went to church and supported congregational projects, and he was freed from the stigma of *cut-head*.

While Pinyin and migrants from the Bamenda area are the prime targets of *cut-head* rumours, local community members have been incriminated as well. The most prominent example refers to a Bessa *fon* who purportedly sold the head of his father. The story was kept secret, but rumours left the palace and eventually turned into common knowledge. When the *fon* became mentally disturbed, it was interpreted as the ancestors' punishment for his offence against his people and the spirits of the land.

In the early 2000s new rumours emerged incriminating Mbororo and Hausa. The case of an influential Mbororo man resident at Akweto will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. Further allegations were raised against Hausa individuals for beheading the corpses of their dead. Jonathan discussed the issue with a Bessa informant:

Jonathan: I thought that *cut-head* was done only by the Pinyin long ago?

Informant: The Pinyin do not do it again. They have stopped and those who have taken over are the Hausa. If you went to their burial ground, you would find corpses without heads. That is what happened to the corpse of Mr B. A few days after he was buried, people went and discovered his body outside without a head. They do not dig deep graves, only about two feet deep. They do it so that they should easily remove the corpses and cut off the heads. (E.N., Misaje, 28/07/03)

Mr B was a Hausa man living in Misaje. He was sick for a long time, purportedly due to AIDS. When he finally died, his corpse was buried in the Muslim cemetery on the village outskirts. A few days later, heavy rainfall washed away the ground that covered his corpse, and it was found that his head was missing. Later Mr B's sister, a renowned gossip, had an argument with a Hausa neighbour. He called her a big mouth and she countered by accusing him of beheading her brother and enriching himself by selling the head.

While many Hausa interpreted the tale as pure gossip and did not worry about burying their dead in the Muslim cemetery, local Grassfielders and Muslim converts tended to take *cut-head* allegations more seriously. The same Bessa informant told the following story about Mr C, a Bessa convert who died in 2003:

When Mr C died, his cousin Mr D insisted that the corpse should be buried in their compound. It was a serious problem with the Muslims and they were very angry with Mr

D. The latter stood his ground that he would not allow the corpse to go anywhere. They should bury it the way they wanted, but it should be in their compound so that they could always see the grave and take care of it. It ended like that. Until today, all the Hausa in town are very angry with Mr D, and some do not even talk to him. After Mr C was buried, Mr D and the rest of the family had to guard the grave for about a week. Each night a fire was kept burning or a lamp was placed there, and they did not sleep because they were afraid that the corpse would be removed and the head cut off. (E.N., Misaje, 28/07/03)

The story illustrates the ways in which Mr C and his cousin Mr D were influenced by *cut-head* rumours. For most Grassfielders a proper burial is essential so that the dead person can rest in peace. A beheaded corpse constitutes a source of spiritual danger, as the deceased may turn into a restless spirit.²⁸² Hence the faint potential of Mr C's corpse being mutilated had to be avoided. Muslims, on the other hand, have a radically different understanding of a person's afterlife and their relationship to corpses is fairly casual (see chapter 8). Members of the Muslim community in Misaje interpreted Mr D's refusal to bury Mr C's corpse in the Muslim cemetery as an offence, but eventually accepted the relatives' demand in order to avoid further arguments and rumours.

As concerns the neutralisation or containment of *cut-head* attacks, decapitation is considered a 'real' deed that can be proven and legally persecuted. Yet in all the cases I came across, accusations were based on rumours, and no suspect had ever been caught with a head proving his guilt. Moreover, unlike the case of witchcraft, traditional authorities are not deemed capable of containing *cut-head* attacks. They may even be implicated, as the above allegations against the Bessa *fon* suggest. Thus one of the major counter-strategies is to avoid situations prone to *cut-head* attacks, as exemplified in the case of Mr D's refusal to bury Mr C's corpse in the Muslim cemetery. Furthermore, as beheading a corpse is perceived as a polluting act, perpetrators are thought to be punished by the ancestors. Yet sometimes the ancestors may fail, particularly if the perpetrator belongs to another ethnic group with divergent religious beliefs, such as Mbororo or Hausa. As a last resort, legal action may be

²⁸² Grassfielders distinguish between 'good' and 'bad deaths' (Haaf & Fondö 1992: 187-191, Koloss 2000: 342-343, Pool 1994: 80-107). A death is considered 'bad', when an expectant woman dies, someone commits suicide, someone is murdered through a physical attack or through witchcraft, or when someone dies suddenly and unexpectedly (e.g. being struck by lightning, falling from a tree, drowning in a river or dying in a car accident). 'Bad deaths' require specific rituals to neutralise the dangerous spirit of the deceased.

taken. Suspects may be reported to the gendarmerie or police, as in the sample case that will be discussed in chapter 10.

In the absence of clear proofs and effective procedures to counteract *cut-head* attacks, rumours and implicit allegations against suspects seem the most pertinent and efficient way of limiting further assaults. This strategy, however, leads to an endless regress, in which gossip constitutes both the basis and response to *cut-head* issues.

Cut-head rumours have here been presented as part of discourses on occult economies. The notion of ‘trade’ in human heads implies a strong economic connotation, and can be read as a reflection on the commodification of the body, its parts, and life as such. However, taking into consideration other forms of organ trafficking, for example for human transplant surgery (e.g. L. Cohen 1999, 2001, Scheper-Hughes 1996, 2000), one may question how to define the occult nature of *cut-head* practices.²⁸³ In my reading, this cannot be defined analytically, but is shaped by the perspectives of those who engage in the discourse.

Most interlocutors never doubted the reality of corpses being decapitated, but were puzzled about the possible uses of these heads. They ultimately came to the conclusion that they must be used for magical purposes, most likely by whites to produce modern consumer goods, or by so-called traditional doctors to make medicine. In addition, they were convinced that for *feymen* and *cut-head* practitioners to succeed, they needed to have knowledge of the occult.

In my own assessment *cut-head* rumours are based on actual discoveries of mutilated corpses, such as the beheaded body of a Bessa man discovered in the Misaje area during my research in 2001 (see chapter 10) or the 83 bodies found without heads and genitals by the Nigerian police in the south-eastern Anambra state in 2004 (Guardian Weekly 2004: 2). However, the rate and extent of *cut-head* rumours by far exceeds actual evidence (cf. Harnischfeger 1997: 132, Krings 2004: 178-179).

To me, the most intriguing aspect of the *cut-head* discourse is the link it establishes between Misaje and the *whiteman kontri* (Pidgin English for the continents inhabited by whites; including Europe, America and Asia). *Cut-head* rumours literally remove Misaje from its geographical remoteness and place it squarely in a global world, criss-crossed by trade relations, the mechanisms of supply and demand, and

²⁸³ I would like to thank Günther Schlee for drawing my attention to this question (commentary 16/08/2006).

capitalist penetration. By linking the trade in human heads to the influx of modern consumer goods from Europe, America and Asia, *cut-head* rumours reflect the price of participation in the global economy. *Cut-head* rumours also bring to the fore the perspectives of Misaje villagers on the *whiteman kontri* and its perceived mysteries. The idea that human heads are needed for technological innovation is just one among many. As my research collaborators explained, white people are often seen as obscure and pursuing their own hidden agenda, which the “ordinary black man” cannot see through. This also applied to my presence in Misaje, and I am sure, some villagers secretly suspected me of being involved in trafficking heads. Notions of whites as magicians, traffickers or cannibals are not specific to the Misaje area, but have been common in many parts of Africa. Behrends (2004), for example, describes a range of historical and contemporary rumours about Europeans as cannibals that refer to early slave traders, colonial agents, administrators, missionaries, medical personnel, development workers, and anthropologists.

While the literature on Cameroon has been strangely silent on the alleged trade in human body parts, similar stories about organ stealing, headhunting, cannibalism, and ritual murder have been reported from various countries and continents (e.g. Bastian 2003, Comaroff & Comaroff 1999a, Ellen 2002, Gulbrandsen 2002, Harnischfeger 1997, Krings 2004, Scheper-Hughes 1996, 2000, D. J. Smith 2001, Stewart & Strathern 2004, White 2000). Sanders (2001), for example, engages with discourses on the trafficking of human skins in Tanzania, which he interprets as a reaction to structural adjustment. Masquelier (2000), on the other hand, analyses rumours of Nigerian headhunters and cannibals who are said to devour labour migrants from Niger. She locates these discourses in the context of migrancy and commodification, and reads them as a moral response to new forms of wealth creation. White (1997), finally, describes discourses on the trade in human heads in Zimbabwe, which she sees as a comment on the vulnerability of human bodies as well as African borders. Her examples come strikingly close to *cut-head* rumours, although they also entail features absent in the Misaje case, such as the association of the trafficking of human body parts with medicine and transplant surgery.

As these and other examples illustrate, discourses on occult economies are highly localised and often diverge in content and character. They are fluid and malleable, and respond to changes in the social, political and economic environment. Accordingly, they provide room for diverse yet complementary interpretations.

While speaking to different predicaments of contemporary life in Misaje, the discourses discussed in this chapter share in common a critical response to modernity and the limitations of neo-liberal capitalism. The discourse on *buche/butse* may be read as a critique of the ideal of development, *nyongo* as a comment on the (im)morality of the market, and *cut-head* rumours squarely locate Misaje in a global context, in which modern consumerism goes hand in glove with capitalist exploitation. At the same time, these discourses strongly reflect on ethnic coexistence in this region.

9.2.4 Ethnicisation of discourses on occult economies in the Misaje area

Apparently, as compared to other parts of the Grassfields, discourses on occult economies in the Misaje area have a decidedly ethnicised character. Probably, it is Misaje's history as a trading post and centre of colonial administration, its attraction to migrants and entrepreneurs from other parts of the Grassfields, and its accommodation of culturally different population groups that make it simultaneously a remote and cosmopolitan place, which plays out so clearly in local discourses on the occult.

The question of the ethnicisation of witchcraft discourses has also been addressed by Geschiere (1997a) who suggests that in the context of Cameroon's political liberalisation of the 1990s these discourses have become a powerful tool of ethnic stereotyping.

Political debate became rapidly dominated by ethnic stereotypes contrasting the Beti of the Center and the South with the people of the West and the Northwest (Bamileke and Bamenda). Characteristically, these stereotypes referred to particular forms of witchcraft: to *famla*, a new form of zombie witchcraft that supposedly explains the success of the Bamileke entrepreneurs, or to the *evu* that makes Beti civil servants "eat the state" in order to appease the jealousy of their greedy kin. (Geschiere 1997a: 11)

Geschiere situates the ethnicisation of witchcraft practices in the domain of political manipulation. He advises his readers to take these ethnic stereotypes not as self-evident, but as embedded in their respective historical contexts:²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ See also Rowlands (1993) on the cultural and historical background of the stereotype of the entrepreneurial success of Bamiléké and other Grassfields groups.

True, one can distinguish different regional models. But these contrasts, far from being constant 'givens', stem from specific historical articulations in the interactions between state, market, and regional principles of organization. (Geschiere 1997a: 210)

Similar processes of ethnic stereotyping conjoined with specific historical trajectories have also taken place in Misaje; yet on a more localised scale. As outlined earlier, *buche/butse* counts as the witchcraft of the local Grassfielders and points at family internal rivalries. With the rise of economic opportunities through labour migration, discourses on *buche/butse* have come to centre on the ambiguous relationship between external elites and their rural kin. *Nyongo*, on the other hand, is primarily – but not exclusively – associated with the Wimbun. In Misaje only a few local Grassfielders have prospered significantly over the past decades, while the enrichment of Wimbun businessmen has been overtly visible. Moreover, the notion of *nyongo* has remained somewhat opaque and unfamiliar to villagers in Misaje, and may therefore be more likely associated with 'the (ethnic) others' (see also Pool 1994: 155-158). A further distinction is made on the basis of spatial and cultural proximity. While members of neighbouring Grassfields groups are suspected of *nyongo*, migrants from the Bamenda area and Muslims are incriminated in the trade in human body parts. *Cut-head* rumours initially were associated with entrepreneurs from Pinyin on account of their extensive business networks and economic success. However, with individuals' increasing mobility and economic diversification, allegations were also raised against local Grassfielders and recently against Hausa and Mbororo.

While Geschiere views the ethnicisation of witchcraft discourses primarily as a mechanism of political exclusion, the Misaje case raises more complex and somewhat paradoxical implications. Here, the apparent ethnicisation of discourses on the occult goes hand in hand with the proliferation of allegations across ethnic and cultural boundaries. That is, Muslims who were thought to keep aloof from witchcraft are now incriminated in *cut-head*, which has more secular connotations. I thus interpret the inclusion of 'the ethnic and cultural others' into the ranks of potential occult perpetrators as an expression of their gradual integration into the overarching local and regional community. Yet as we will see, Mbororo and Hausa do not voluntarily submit to this kind of socio-cultural integration but decidedly distance themselves from occult activities, attributing them to non-Muslims.

9.3 Muslim perspectives on occult economies

In public discourse, Grassfielders and Muslims tend to emphasise socio-cultural differences and to attribute them moral connotations. While this attitude is particularly pronounced in the context of inter-group rivalry, such as the investiture conflict discussed in chapter 3, it also applies to the domain of witchcraft.

Hausa and Mbororo frequently present themselves as informed by ‘rational’ thinking in contrast to Grassfielders’ ‘superstition’. They claim immunity from witchcraft on account of their disbelief in occult forces, but also on account of the efficacy of Muslim protective medicine. Both arguments serve the purpose of asserting cultural superiority and ethnic boundaries. Despite this rhetoric of cultural difference, Mbororo and Hausa have notions of occult activities that are similar to Grassfielders’ ideas. Purportedly, some practices are even acquired from the latter.

The rhetoric of Muslim superiority in occult matters seems locally convincing, as many non-Muslims enlist the services of Muslim scholars and healers. Muslim scholars, commonly known as *marabout* or *mallam*, provide a variety of mystico-religious services, such as performing prayers or preparing Koranic amulets (cf. Burnham 1996: 58-59). They combine Islamic techniques taught in the Koran and other holy books with alternative methods like herbal treatment and divination. Alternatively, there are Mbororo and Hausa healers (*boka* in Hausa)²⁸⁵ whose proficiency is based on their knowledge of medicinal plants and their personal connection to the spirit world.²⁸⁶ Both categories of Muslim religious specialists are widely respected for their knowledge of the occult, including its positive and negative applications.²⁸⁷ The reputation of Hausa and Mbororo medicine also enhances the attractiveness of Muslim conversion. As a Bessa convert explained, becoming a Muslim may also provide protection against witchcraft attacks.

While Grassfields villagers’ occult activities are a popular theme in Misaje, people rarely talk about Hausa or Mbororo witchcraft. To find out more about the latter’s understanding of occult activities, I asked a number of Muslim friends to name different types of occult practices and to illustrate them with sample cases. Informants

²⁸⁵ The Hausa term *boka* was used by Hausa and Mbororo interlocutors in the Misaje area.

²⁸⁶ As reported for other parts of western Africa, namely Benin (Guichard 1996: 120) and Burkina Faso (Dafinger & Pelican 2006), there is an apparent ethnicisation of the spirit world. Certain bush spirits are attributed a FulBe identity and are thus considered under the control of FulBe ritual specialists.

²⁸⁷ Geschiere (1997a: 36, 113) reports that the Maka in Cameroon’s southeast consider the ‘lightening’ of the Hausa as one of the most formidable occult weapons.

stated that Hausa and Mbororo notions of occult activities overlap to a large extent and cannot be separated. Thus, the following explorations combine accounts by Mbororo and Hausa informants and draw on sample cases from both groups.

9.3.1 Mbororo and Hausa notions of witchcraft

The dealings of evil forces such as spirits and ghosts (*ginaaji* in Fulfulde, *aljani* in Hausa) are acknowledged in the Koran. Mbororo and Hausa have clear ideas of their range and power, and also of effective ways to protect themselves.²⁸⁸ For example, bush spirits (*henndu* in Fulfulde, *iska* in Hausa) are said to wander around at midday and midnight. Their attacks are thought to result in madness, and are best avoided by staying at home at the times of maximum risk. The ghosts of the dead (*kurwa* in Fulfulde, *hawka* in Hausa) are reported to wander around for forty days, before they finally leave the world of the living. During that period they may take possession of individuals who then have to be freed through *bori*, a Hausa possession cult widespread in West Africa, called *girka* in Fulfulde (Bocquené 2002: 91).²⁸⁹ *Bori/girka* is no longer practiced in the Misaje area, but a few Hausa and Mbororo women are still known as skilful *bori/girka* practitioners.

Besides believing in spirits and ghosts, Mbororo and Hausa also have a notion of witchcraft that is similar to the Nchaney and Bessa idea of *buche/butse*. *Deraaku* in Fulfulde and *maita* in Hausa refer to acts of occult aggression by witches against members of their immediate social environment. *Deraaku/maita* is described as a congenital ability, as well as a commodity that can be bought for a token 500 FCFA (€ 0.75). It is considered a versatile faculty that works on everyone, including members of different ethnic groups.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ On spirit beliefs among FulBe groups in northern Cameroon see Bocquené (2002: 97), Regis (2003: 124-134).

²⁸⁹ On *bori/girka* among Hausa and FulBe see Echard (1991), Masquelier (1993, 2001), Mary Smith (1965: 63-65), Vidal (1992).

²⁹⁰ Regis (2003: 118-124) describes witchcraft beliefs among FulBe in Cameroon's Far North that are locally known as *mistiiraaku*. *Mistiiraaku* is associated with occult cannibalism and the desire for prosperity. It is understood as a contagious condition, often unwillingly contracted. The individual affected is said to develop a double personality, signified in a bird creature that pursues and captures victims. Diagnosis and cure of *mistiiraaku* is provided by FulBe ritual specialists. The notion of *mistiiraaku* differs considerably from the related notion *deraaku/maita* in the Misaje area. I interpret this as an indication that local beliefs in witchcraft are shaped by the social environment and the historical background of their proponents. While Mbororo and Hausa in the Misaje area respond to Grassfielders' notions of *butche/butse* and *nyongo*, the FulBe in Regis' account seem influenced by Mundang beliefs in witchcraft, particularly since many among them are of Mundang descent.

Ms E, for example, is a Hausa woman in her mid-thirties who lives in the neighbouring Bum area. She has been suspected of having acquired *deraaku/maita* from local Grassfielders with the intention of killing her co-wife, of whom she was jealous. As the story goes, Ms E developed a taste for human flesh and caught a young, attractive Hausa woman who subsequently fell ill. The girl's relatives suspected Ms E and reported her to the gendarmerie. She was beaten and urged to confess, but she denied the guilt. Finally, she agreed to perform a ritual to liberate the girl, and the issue ended like that. Later on, a similar incident reoccurred but Ms E never confessed to being a witch. Instead, she decided to take the case to the *alkali* court at Ndop. The *alkali* (Muslim judge) gave her a document that would enable her to take the claimants to the High Court, if they called her a witch again. With the help of this document Ms E was able to intimidate her litigants and to avoid further harassment by gendarmes. Her reputation as a witch, however, remained as such. When she came to attend a Muslim ceremony in Misaje in May 2001, people anxiously whispered her name and made sure to protect themselves against her alleged occult powers.

The story highlights a number of popular themes in Hausa and Mbororo witchcraft discourses. Jealousy among co-wives is considered a common feature in polygynous households and is often taken as the source of anti-social acts, including hostility, poisoning, and witchcraft attacks. Furthermore, informants explained that in becoming a witch Ms E developed a taste for human flesh. In their understanding, witches do not kill their victims for the sake of remaining young or becoming rich as in *buche/butse* or *nyongo*, but due to the witches' gastronomic craving and their victims' physical appearance (size, beauty etc.); their assessment of their victims' qualities is thus similar to the assessment of cattle.

In terms of the prosecution of suspected witches, the case of Ms E illustrates the institutions and procedures that Muslims in Misaje consider appropriate. Among Hausa it is relatively common to report troublemakers to the gendarmerie, be they drunkards, scandalmongers, crooks or suspected witches. FulBe, on the other hand, are more cautious in their dealings with law enforcement officers, and are thus reluctant to report witchcraft suspects to the gendarmerie. As a Mbororo informant explained, within Mbororo society the most common way to reprimand a suspected witch is either to move camp and leave the suspect behind, or to isolate and drive

him/her away with medicine. Nowadays, both strategies are difficult to implement, because the Cameroonian government monitors and restricts movement.

In comparing Grassfielders' and Mbororo methods of witchcraft containment, Mbororo informants pointed out significant differences:

The country people [Grassfielders] do not go to the gendarmes to handle such cases. They do it in the palace with the help of their *ngumba* [regulatory society] and the *chombu* [palace police]. Our *arDos* [Mbororo leaders] do not have the *ngumba*. Therefore it is very difficult to send somebody away. You may end up in court and spend a lot of money. It is even better using the money to protect yourself and your family with medicine. (S.H., Misaje, 28/12/01)

The use of protective medicine is generally considered one of the most effective ways to prevent harm and confront suspected witches. Most Mbororo and Hausa, children as well as adults, constantly wear amulets (*laya* in Hausa, *layaaru* in Fulfulde) to shield them against presumed threats. Among the large range of protective medicine, the medicines produced by Mbororo and Hausa ritual specialists are said to be the most effective. Afflicted individuals come from all over Cameroon to consult Mbororo ritual specialists living in the Misaje area and other parts of the Grassfields. Moreover, Hausa and Mbororo know a variety of protective gestures (e.g. biting the tip of one's small finger) that supposedly help to contain occult forces.

The legal prosecution of witches through the *alkali* court is an alternative strategy open to Muslims. To elicit a confession, suspects are asked to swear on the Koran. Yet as a Mbororo informant explained, while under Muslim law the existence of witchcraft is acknowledged, cases can only be judged with the proof of actual damage. For Ms E taking her case to the *alkali* court worked out in her favour. Since no evidence for her alleged occult dealings could be provided, she succeeded in making a case against her accusers for defamation. As we will see below, a similar situation applies to the state legal prosecution of suspected witches. Both legal systems provide no valid alternative to local methods of witchcraft containment.

9.3.2 Mbororo and Hausa spells and medicines

Mbororo and Hausa are familiar with many types of spells and medicines that function to harm a rival or to enhance individual success, beauty, and knowledge. A

vast variety of amulets is produced and sold by Muslim ritual specialists and do not require their clients' acquaintance with occult procedure.

The general Mbororo/Hausa term for spell is *siiri/asiri* (possibly derived from Arabic *siir*, meaning 'secret'). A common spell among Mbororo in the Misaje area is *karfa*, which can be used to protect cattle against thieves (cf. Bocquené 2002: 94) as well as to drive someone away. Informants narrated the story of a Mbororo man living in the Misaje area who experienced a strong desire, urging him to leave his home and roam around for seven years. His wife searched for him and brought him back. He stayed for three months before he disappeared again. The only way of bringing him back was to commission a skilled *mallam* to undo the spell.²⁹¹

Mbororo and Hausa also know of occult means that ensure economic success and individual accumulation. Among Mbororo in the Misaje area, the possession of a *doydowal* is considered a possible path to wealth. A *doydowal* is imagined as a living creature, normally a reptile.²⁹² The owner is required to observe many rules and to yearly sacrifice a person or a cow on whose blood and meat the *doydowal* lives. When it reproduces, its off-springs can be sold. The mother animal, however, should remain with its initial owner. At present, nobody in the Misaje area is known to possess a *doydowal*, and members of the Mbororo lineage (NaatirBe) with whom it is commonly associated left the area decades ago. Purportedly, there are alternative ways of getting rich through occult means. *Lukudi* in Fulfulde, *lugudi* in Hausa is a type of medicine that is prepared by Muslim ritual specialists, and supposedly makes its owner famously wealthy.²⁹³ There are two versions of this medicine: the white or good *lukudi/lugudi* helps its owner to enjoy his/her life, share with others, and accomplish the pilgrimage to Mecca. The owner of the black or bad *lukudi/lugudi*, on the other hand, may become incredibly rich but a miser and a loner. Customers can commission both types of *lukudi/lugudi*. Informants mentioned the case of a Mbororo man in the neighbouring Bum area who was thought to own a black *lukudi/lugudi*.

Alhaji F from Kimbi is a rich man, but he is not making good use of his wealth. He is always dirty and almost looking like a beggar. He cannot go to a restaurant and enjoy good food. If his cattle die, he behaves as if he himself had died. His sense turned only to the cattle; they are the only thing he is interested in. He is living in a shed and people even

²⁹¹ A similar anecdote is told by Ekwensi (1962) in his novel 'Burning Grass'.

²⁹² Martine Guichard (personal communication, 10/06/05) pointed out that among FulBe in northern Cameroon *doydowal* literally means chameleon (see also Noye 1989: 87).

²⁹³ *Lukudi* is also mentioned by Burnham (1996: 59) with regard to FulBe in northern Cameroon.

say his wife is building the house. His children are useless and misusing their father's wealth. *Alhaji* F bought the black *lukudi* before he went to Mecca. When he came back from Mecca, he said he saw Douala was bigger than Mecca. (B.K., Misaje, 30/12/01)

The depiction of *alhaji* F shows him as asocial, egotistic, high-handed and as incapable of enjoying his wealth. His comment that Douala was bigger than Mecca illustrates his loss of reverence to Allah.

In comparing the Mbororo/Hausa notion of black or bad *lukudi/lugudi* with the Grassfielders' concept of *nyongo*, a number of similarities and differences are apparent. In both cases, the owner of a black/bad *lukudi/lugudi* and a *nyongo* witch are socially alienated. Yet *lukudi/lugudi* differs from *nyongo* in the sense that it does not imply a human sacrifice. Moreover, *lukudi/lugudi* is perceived much less of a social threat than *nyongo*.²⁹⁴ As for the white *lukudi/lugudi*, informants could not name any individual suspected of owning one. Moreover, they explained that – in real life, as opposed to theory – it would be socially awkward to attribute someone's benevolence to medicine or occult means.

9.3.3 Muslims' and Grassfielders' approaches to discourses on occult economies

In comparing the ways in which Grassfielders and Muslims in the Misaje area deal with discourses on occult economies, I have noted similarities but also striking differences. While in both societies the respective discourses are adapted to contemporary realities and are used to explain political and socio-economic inequalities, they reflect different approaches to kinship relations and economic success.

As outlined in the beginning of this chapter, many African societies draw a link between witchcraft and kinship (Geschiere 1997a). This applies also to the Nchaney and Bessa and their notion of *buche/butse*. Conversely, Mbororo and Hausa in the Misaje area do not associate occult aggression with the family. Accordingly, their notion of witchcraft (*deraaku/maita*) lacks the decisive quality of intimacy that

²⁹⁴ A similar notion to the Grassfielders *nyongo* is the concept of 'soul-eating stones' of the Hausa in Niger, as described by Schmoll (1993). They believe in a type of sentient black stones that live in a person's stomach and urge their owner to catch people's souls in return for success and wealth. As Schmoll argues the idea of black stones is an old concept referring to the dark side of the human character. Recently, however, soul-eating has become commodified in people's understanding; black stones are no longer only transmitted from parents to children, but can be purchased with money. Schmoll interprets the discourse of soul-eating as a commentary on changing social relationships and values, amplified by capitalism and colonialism.

renders *buche/butse* a disastrous threat to social order within Nchaney and Bessa communities. Secondly, while many Grassfielders see individual enrichment as a socially negative force, Mbororo and Hausa seem less critical and apprehensive of their better-off relatives and friends. For example, most Mbororo deem it relatively normal that some herders have more cattle than others. They tend to explain pastoral success with reference to a person's disposition towards cattle-herding, i.e. an individual may be considered generally lucky in his pastoral activities or naturally talented in dealing with animals (cf. Pelican *forthc.*). Another factor that facilitates the acceptance of individual success among Mbororo and Hausa is their Muslim religion, as it clearly defines the duty of charity (including alms-giving and paying a yearly religious tax) and attributes a person's destiny primarily to Allah.

As a result of these differences, discourses on occult economies seem to have quite different implications for Mbororo and Hausa than for Grassfielders. As compared to Nchaney and Bessa interlocutors for whom rumours on occult economies are an ever-present and terrifying subject, Mbororo and Hausa in the Misaje area are seemingly less affected by the respective discourses, even though Muslim individuals have been incriminated as well. While among the latter, rumours on occult economies may still function as mechanisms of social cohesion – an interpretation advanced by scholars of the Manchester school – they have assumed a different quality among Grassfielders, where they no longer generate social control but anxiety and unrest.

In my reading, the different approaches of Grassfielders, and Mbororo and Hausa to discourses on occult economies are also a reflection of their divergent espousal of modernity and capitalism. Grassfielders, particularly their elites, are highly appreciative of the ideals of development and consumerism, and have a long history of involvement in capitalist networks, including the pre-colonial slave trade. Mbororo and Hausa, on the other hand, seem more reluctant to embrace the ideal of modernity, as expressed, for example, in their misgivings over Western education and their distaste for conspicuous consumption. However, over the past decades, gradual changes have been observable, which may well have contributed to the integration of Grassfielders, Mbororo and Hausa into the shared realm of occult economies.

The diverging implications of witchcraft discourses for Muslims and Grassfielders are also reflected in the ways Mbororo/Hausa and Grassfielders deal with the containment of occult aggression. As outlined above, Muslims are more relaxed. They shield

themselves with protective medicine, and trust in their faith and the capabilities of their ritual specialists. Conversely, Grassfielders seem more vulnerable, and preoccupied with effectively punishing suspected witches.

In the final part of this chapter I will discuss popular approaches to containing occult aggression and restoring public order in the 1990s. In the context of Cameroon's political transition, witchcraft rumours flourished to such an extent that Grassfielders resorted to a variety of strategies involving local authorities, state agents, and NGO activists.

9.4 Containing occult aggression and restoring public order in the 1990s

Concurrent with the rise of discourses on occult economies, the demand for effective methods of containing occult aggression has increased. As the preceding examples have shown, in the Western Grassfields the containment of witchcraft is mainly in the hands of local Grassfields authorities, namely the *fon* and his counsellors. However, in the context of the population's growing anxiety over occult aggression, the efficacy of so-called traditional methods of witchcraft containment has come into doubt. Consequently, individuals have resorted to alternative strategies, such as violent witch-hunts, which triggered the response of state authorities and Christian human rights activists. Moreover, they added a further complexity to the issue of occult aggression: witchcraft has become a two-fold problem, including both the abuse by and of alleged witches.

As we will see in the following, local Grassfields authorities, state officials, and Christian human rights activists differ in their premises and intentions. The ontological question of the existence of witchcraft is generally dealt with pragmatically. But while Grassfielders and their local authorities are preoccupied with disciplining witches and eradicating the sources of occult aggression, government and NGO workers are concerned with controlling acts of self-justice and restoring public order. As in the preceding sections, my elaborations are based on conversations with local informants and a review of the relevant literature. In my discussion of the perspectives of NGO activists, I rely mainly on reports of the respective Christian human rights organisations.

9.4.1 Traditional methods of witchcraft containment

In the Western Grassfields local authorities are generally perceived as the main institution to regulate instances of occult aggression. While the royal counsellors are said to possess occult powers that enable them to identify witches, the *fon* is thought to remain outside of the realm of the occult, and thus holds the final moral authority of handling witchcraft cases in the interest of the local community (see e.g. Geschiere 1996: 316-320, Goheen 1996: 141-148). As informants explained, the persecution of suspected witches is a complex procedure that involves a number of procedures. As a first step, it is the victim's relatives who investigate the act of assumed occult aggression with the help of a diviner. Consequently, they confront the suspects identified by the diviner with the accusation of witchcraft. The latter are generally encouraged to confess their deeds so that their occult powers should be tamed by a ritual specialist, which enables their social reintegration. If this procedure fails, the case is reported to the *fon* and his counsellors who regularly hold court, trying cases of both (alleged) occult and secular transgression. Here again, the *fon* encourages the accused to confess his/her deeds. Alternatively, he may compel the suspect to undergo a poison (*sasswood*²⁹⁵) ordeal to disprove the witchcraft accusation. Poison ordeals are performed by drinking a toxic substance prepared with the bark of the *sasswood* tree.²⁹⁶ Notorious witches are ostracised and eventually ousted from their home community. In pre-colonial times, recalcitrant witches occasionally were abducted into slavery or executed. As some interlocutors mentioned regretfully, these penalties are no longer feasible because they conflict with state law.

In the view of many Grassfielders, the efficacy of traditional methods of witchcraft containment has weakened over the past two decades. Grassfields *fons* have been suspected of being co-opted by witches, in particular by members of the external elite (Fisiy & Goheen 1998, Goheen 1996: 161). Furthermore, the veracity of the *sasswood* ordeal has been questioned. While most interlocutors still believe in the power of *sasswood* as an intelligent substance that is able to distinguish lies from truth and punishes only culprits, they expressed doubts that *sasswood* could not be tricked,

²⁹⁵ Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (1998: 78) identified the *sasswood* tree as *erythrophleum quineense*. According to Rowlands (1987: 61), *sasswood* was an important exchange item between chiefdoms.

²⁹⁶ *Sasswood* ordeals were common in many parts of the Western Grassfields, including Bum (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998: 78), Kom (Nkwi 1976: 103), Meta (Haaf & Fondö 1992: 37) and We (Geary 1976: 203-204). As Geschiere & Nyamnjoh (1998: 78) point out, they were banished in the colonial period but resurfaced in the 1990s.

for example, by vomiting intentionally, or by drinking oil so that the poison should not enter the blood system. Concurrently, accidental deaths of suspected witches as a result of the *sasswood* ordeal have occurred and are generally frowned upon, as the aim of the ordeal is not to kill the culprits, but to make them confess their deeds to be purified and re-socialised. Finally, Grassfields interlocutors were increasingly concerned about the lack of solidarity among family and community members, which constitutes a vital precondition for the efficacy of social sanctions against witches. Thus, with growing doubts in traditional procedures of containing occult aggression, the demand for alternative methods has increased.

9.4.2 State legal containment of alleged witchcraft assaults

One of the main alternatives to traditional procedures of witchcraft containment is the state legal prosecution of alleged witches. The Cameroonian government claims the responsibility to control any transgression of state law, including secular and occult aggression. In the view of state representatives, witchcraft is a socially negative force that impedes progress and development in the rural areas, and thus has to be eliminated. In the mid-1980s, for example, the Cameroonian government commissioned a team of researchers from the Institute of Human Studies in Yaoundé to investigate the extent to which local witchcraft beliefs affect the success of development programmes, and to find solutions to this problem.²⁹⁷

The sincerity of the government's attempts to gain control over occult aggression has been doubted, as the economic and political power of state agents themselves may also be attributed to occult means. In addition, individual politicians and elite members have endorsed the dissemination of witchcraft rumours via the press and public discourse as a way of supporting the fragile basis of their authority (Fisiy & Rowlands 1990: 82-83).²⁹⁸ Moreover, as we will see below, many Cameroonians are

²⁹⁷ Among the researchers was Cyprian Fisiy, a Cameroonian legal anthropologist, who was charged with the examination of the Cameroonian legislation in respect to witchcraft offences (Fisiy & Geschiere 2001: 226). My subsequent elaborations on the state legal prosecution of witchcraft are largely based on his work (Fisiy 1990, 1998, Fisiy & Geschiere 1990, 1996, 2001, Fisiy & Rowlands 1990, Geschiere & Fisiy 1994).

²⁹⁸ Rumours concerning the occult dealings of high ranking politicians are frequent. Former President Ahidjo, for example, allegedly used occult powers in his failed attempt to overthrow his follower Biya (Rowlands & Warnier 1988: 128). This rumour is widely believed despite – or maybe even because – witchcraft was considered a dangerous form of subversion during Ahidjo's regime. Furthermore, President Biya and the Cameroonian media magnate Mendo Ze are said to be

convinced that the state is more inclined to protect alleged witches against false accusations than to assist the victims of witchcraft assaults.

The ways in which witchcraft has been dealt with in the political and legal domain have changed significantly since the advent of colonialism. Different regimes followed different approaches, ranging from the denial of its existence to the manipulation of witchcraft rumours for political purposes. During the colonial period there was no scope for legal prosecution of occult activities (Fisiy & Rowlands 1990: 67-69). While the British refused to acknowledge the existence of witchcraft, the French focused on the fraudulent dealings of witch-doctors. Colonial judges were perceived as allies of witches who were regularly set free for lack of substantive proof. It was only after independence that the Cameroonian government acknowledged the existence of witchcraft. With the introduction of section 251 of the Cameroonian penal code in 1967 acts of witchcraft as well as anti-witchcraft became punishable:

Whoever commits any act of witchcraft, magic or divination liable to disturb public order or tranquillity, or to harm another in his person, property or substance, whether by the taking of a reward or otherwise, shall be punished with imprisonment for from two to ten years, and with a fine of from five thousand to one hundred thousand francs. (Section 251, Cameroonian penal code of 1967; cited in Fisiy & Geschiere 2001: 234)

Accordingly, both occult aggression and aggression against alleged occult perpetrators became an offence against public order. As Fisiy and Geschiere (2001: 230-235) argue, section 251 was introduced as an extension of state control over local communities, since any alternative source of power, not mediated by state institutions, was seen as potentially dangerous. This interpretation should be seen against the background of the autocratic regime of the former President Ahidjo, which nurtured a socio-political climate of distrust and vigilance. Consequently, the population largely refrained from legal prosecution of witchcraft, as they perceived state institutions as a threat rather than an aid to orderly life (Rowlands & Warnier 1988: 127). It is only in the 1980s that the legal prosecution of witchcraft cases increased, most prominently in eastern and southern Cameroon (Geschiere 1997a: 169-197, Geschiere & Fisiy 1994). This development has been interpreted as a long-term effect of labour migration and urbanisation; i.e. with the expansion of social networks in the urban context, the

implicated in mariology and serpentology. Allegedly, their year-long persistence in power is linked to their membership of Rosicrucian and Freemason societies (Nyamnjoh 2001: 34-35).

control of deviant behaviour by local institutions has become more difficult and recourse to state authorities more immediate (Fisiy & Rowlands 1990: 70).

Moreover, section 251 does not provide the court with clear guidelines, but leaves ample room for the judge's discretion. As Fisy and Geschiere (1990, 1996, 2001) point out, most often the proof of witchcraft assaults is based on the defendant's confession or on witch-doctors' testimonies. Both measures distort the meaning of confession as understood in the traditional context, where it is seen as the initial step to neutralising maleficent powers and to the witches' subsequent re-socialisation. Conversely, in contemporary jurisprudence, confession leads to imprisonment and social alienation. Furthermore, the most dangerous secrets are said to be taught in jail where witches meet up with criminals from all over the country (Geschiere 1997a: 196). Hence, detention is deemed to increase rather than contain the menace of witchcraft. In addition, witch-doctors' partaking in the verification of witchcraft accusations casts doubt on the court's impartiality. As witch-doctors are perceived as part of the occult world, they lack credibility and moral authority (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990: 146-147, Geschiere 1997a: 196-197).

Against the background of these discrepancies and misgivings, it is understandable that for many Cameroonians state legal prosecution constitutes no valid alternative to traditional methods of witchcraft containment. Even among state agents, opinions differ about the effective containment of occult aggression. In the following I will illustrate this by discussing the divergent approaches of two consecutive Divisional Officers in Misaje.

9.4.3 Traditional and state legal attempts at containing witchcraft in Misaje

The Divisional Officer (DO) serving at the time of my arrival in Misaje was a man from the neighbouring chiefdom Nso. His proclaimed objectives included the resolution of inter-chiefdom disputes, cattle theft, and farmer-herder problems, while the containment of witchcraft figured only secondarily. Two years later, his successor who originated from southwest Cameroon took over and proclaimed an end to occult aggression in his area of jurisdiction. In his view, witchcraft constituted a serious obstacle to rural development and had to be counteracted effectively. He deemed the methods pursued by local Grassfields authorities as ineffective and contrary to state law and modern values. When in 2002 two elderly women accused of witchcraft died

as a result of undergoing the *sasswood* ordeal, he issued a prefectorial order banning poison ordeals in the Misaje Sub-Division.

The different positions held by the two consecutive Divisional Officers are best understood by taking into account their regional backgrounds. The previous DO belonged to one of the largest and most influential chiefdoms in the Western Grassfields where the containment of occult aggression lies exclusively in the hands of the *fon* and his counsellors. His indifference towards witchcraft may be read as entrenched in his experience and conviction that witchcraft cases are best handled by local Grassfields authorities. By contrast, the successive DO's focus on the eradication of witchcraft arguably is rooted in his southwestern background. In the popular media as well as in anthropological reports (e.g. E. Ardener 1970, de Rosny 1985, Geschiere 1997a) southern Cameroon features as an area where witchcraft rumours are most prevalent. Due to the absence of efficient local institutions, occult aggression is experienced as a predicament that threatens to dissolve the society from within and requires external mechanisms of resolution (Fisiy 1998, Fisiy & Geschiere 1990, 1996). Thus against this background, the successive DO's focus on the eradication of witchcraft is understandable, as well as his conviction that traditional methods are inadequate. However, his radical attempt of banning the poison ordeal and replacing it by legal prosecution did not meet the desired response from the population. Witchcraft accusations were still reported to the palace, and *sasswood* ordeals continued to take place. Even the mayor of Misaje, who was supposed to serve as a leading example for his community, ignored the DO's prefectorial order and reverted to the *sasswood* ordeal, which he obviously considered the most effective method to save his life. Unfortunately, the mayor died about a year after the ordeal, and most villagers were convinced that he was killed by his relatives' witchcraft.

Taking into account the population's disappointment with traditional and legal methods of containing occult aggression, it is not surprising to hear of acts of self-justice and violence against suspected witches. In northwest Cameroon such incidents occurred mainly in the 1990s and triggered a reaction not only from local Grassfields and state authorities but also from Christian human rights activists.

9.4.4 Church and human rights perspectives on witchcraft containment

In the course of Cameroon's democratisation in the 1990s, global discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights gained prominence (see chapter 2). As a result, a vast number of non-governmental organisations with a focus on human rights emerged. Some of these associations originated from a religious background and combined Christian doctrine with a human rights perspective. Their main concern was the decline of moral and social values and the inviolability of human beings in the face of witchcraft and its violent ramifications.

In the following I will present the case study of a conference entitled 'Battling witchcraft in our society' that was organised by three Christian human rights NGOs in 1999 and held in Nkambe, the head-quarters of the Donga-Mantung Division. As the conference took place before my research, my subsequent elaborations are based on three reports by Akuma and Kwai (1999) and Akuma (2000, 2001), which document the progress of the NGO's joint witchcraft-programme.²⁹⁹

The three Christian human rights NGOs were ACAT, EYPIC, and the Peace and Justice Committee of the Kumbo Diocese. ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) is an ecumenical human rights NGO that is represented in various parts of Cameroon and in other countries. It bases its goals on article 5 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights which focuses on the abolition of torture and all forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The northwestern branch of ACAT was founded in 1993; its projects include public education and prison work. EYPIC (Ecumenical Youth Peace Initiative Committee) is also an ecumenical human rights NGO, based in the North West Province. Its activities are concentrated on conflict mediation between local communities. The third organisation, the Peace and Justice Committee of the Kumbo Diocese, is part of the Catholic Church in the North West Province. Members of the three associations shared their understanding of the Church as a secular institution with the social responsibility of educating its members on the inviolability of human beings, as proclaimed by the Christian faith. They saw it as their duty to bring to public attention the atrocities that had been committed against individuals suspected of witchcraft in Donga-Mantung (Akuma & Kwai 1999: i-ii).

According to the ACAT statistics of 1999, six individuals had been executed by enraged mobs during the previous two years. The most severe cases occurred in

²⁹⁹ My thanks go to Joseph Akuma who made these documents available to me.

Binshua village where a group of youths had been installed as an anti-witchcraft force by the local *fon*, and had set up its own laws and procedures of prosecuting suspected witches.³⁰⁰ Victims were threatened, beaten, or confined under house arrest; some were banished from the village, others publicly executed. Confronted with a large, vicious mob, neither government nor local Grassfields authorities intervened. As argued by the conference organisers, the general increase in violence and lawlessness was linked to the country's political transition of the 1990s. As a consequence, many communities put up their own vigilante groups to protect villagers and their property against both physical and occult assaults. These village defence groups, however, had the propensity of turning into a socially destructive force, such as in the case of the Binshua anti-witchcraft force.

The conference was attended by approximately 700 participants.³⁰¹ These included the *fons* of more than 60 polities in Donga-Mantung, representatives of the administration, the judiciary, and the forces of law and order (gendarmerie, police, and army), church and human rights activists, and the general public. The aims of the organisers were to educate conference participants on the adverse effects of illegal sanctions against suspected witches, and to promote dialogue and cooperation between the various institutions of witchcraft containment. For this purpose they invited resource persons to present Christian and human rights perspectives and to clarify traditional and state legal procedures of witchcraft containment.

Organisers and speakers generally acknowledged the existence of witchcraft and interpreted it as a feature of social relations that flourished in the context of poverty, disease, and ignorance. Speakers presenting a Christian and human rights perspective argued against the maltreatment of suspected witches. They appealed for forgiveness, neighbourliness, love, and reconciliation as values promoted in the Bible. Furthermore, they emphasised the inviolability of human beings who were modelled after the image of God. Resource persons who clarified the state legal approach emphasised that, although section 251 of the penal code does not define witchcraft, it provides sanctions for those who practice witchcraft as well as those who illegally punish suspected witches. As they explained, unlawful punishment includes

³⁰⁰ Auslander (1993) describes a similar case for Zambia. Comaroff & Comaroff (1999c) draw a clear link between the rise of unemployment in South Africa and the formation of youth squads preoccupied with witch-finding.

³⁰¹ The conference was funded by international organisations, namely Helvetas and the Swiss Catholic Leten fund.

defamation, forceful displacement, physical harm, and depredation of property. Although these are part of traditional methods of witchcraft containment, they have to be prosecuted under state law.

Various contributors expressed criticism on existing methods of witchcraft containment. They criticised local Grassfields authorities for encouraging mob-action and imposing sanctions that conflicted with state law and human rights. Moreover, they considered the state legal approach not specific enough in defining witchcraft and thus unable to efficiently deal with its manifestations. Finally, they also laid blame on the administration for failing to eradicate the factors that promoted witchcraft, namely poverty, illness, rural-to-urban migration, and lack of development.

As possible strategies to resolve the two-fold witchcraft problem the conference organisers proposed that traditional and state institutions of witchcraft containment should collaborate more closely. Since the authority of local chiefs and their counsellors is highly respected among Grassfielders, the organisers advised the *fons* to alert their subjects to the negative effects of mob-action and violence against suspected witches, and to favour legal prosecution. Moreover, they proposed educational visits to selected polities in order to assist the *fons* in this duty.

The efforts of the conference organisers to provide solutions to the two-fold witchcraft problem were received with positive response by most conference participants. As part of the assessment procedure, the organisers asked conference attendants to fill in a questionnaire that was handed out at the end of the meeting. When asked for their opinion regarding mob-action against suspected witches, 29 out of 35 respondents denied its validity, while the remaining six respondents were either supportive or ambivalent. Concerning their assessment of different methods of witchcraft containment, ten respondents preferred traditional methods, eight favoured legal procedures, and three proposed joint efforts. Finally, participants were asked to identify the weaknesses of the conference. Two major criticisms emerged; the first concerned the priority given to state representatives over local Grassfields authorities. Secondly, conference participants expressed their disappointment with the organisers' focus on assaults against suspected witches rather than the protection of potential victims of occult aggression.

As a result of the conference, 62 *fons* from Donga-Mantung came together a week later in an official meeting and resolved to educate their subjects on the penal code

section 251 on witchcraft prosecution. Furthermore, the Binshua anti-witchcraft force was dissolved, and violent action against suspected witches was reduced. In the subsequent two years, members of ACAT and EYPIC held educational meetings in fifteen chiefdoms in Donga-Mantung which were attended by a total of approximately 7000 people. The majority of attendants were local *fons*, notables, and ritual specialists, but also members of the general public. The *fons* generally promised to educate their subjects on the negative effects of mob-action, and to abolish the poison ordeal and the exiling of alleged witches. They decreed that witchcraft accusations should first and foremost be resolved within the family. Only complicated cases should be reported to the local Grassfields authorities. If no resolution was achieved, the case should be handed over to state legal prosecution. The *fons* also recommended that the divisional administration should encourage members of the external elite to return home and partake in rural development.

Despite the resolutions adopted by most *fons*, the poison ordeal and the exiling of recalcitrant witches continued to be practiced. A particular example occurred in Misaje in 2002 when (as mentioned above) two elderly women died as a result of undergoing the *sasswood* ordeal. Ironically, during the visit of ACAT representatives to Misaje in 1999 the *fon* and his counsellors had publicly refuted the use of *sasswood* in witchcraft trials.

As the preceding elaborations have shown, the issue of containing occult aggression is a serious one that has triggered differing and competing responses by local Grassfields authorities, state agents, non-governmental organisations, and the general public. The approach of Christian human rights activists to witchcraft and its containment corresponds closely to the state legal approach. Both are concerned with public order and the physical ramifications of witchcraft. Conversely, members of the local public and their traditional authorities are more interested in effective methods of containing occult aggression than in protecting the human rights of suspected witches. Nonetheless, the identification, punishment and reintegration of witches remain the prerogative of local Grassfields authorities and ritual specialists. Moreover, state agents and NGO activists look to local *fons* and their counsellors to implement their strategies of containing occult aggression and securing public order. We may thus infer that, while witchcraft and its containment has remained a field of

contention, traditional methods are most trusted by the local public and are tacitly tolerated by state agents, as long as they do not cause further social disruption.

9.5 Conclusion

As illustrated in the chapter, one of the characteristics and attractions of discourses on the occult is their simultaneous flexibility and topicality, thus speaking to varying experiences at different moments in time, and offering themselves to diverse yet complementary readings. Accordingly, contemporary discourses on occult economies in Africa have been interpreted as a critique on the ideal of modernity (Geschiere 1997a), a response to millennial capitalism (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001b), a reaction to structural adjustment (Sanders 2001), to the experiences of migrancy (Masquelier 2000), the commodification of social relationships (Schmoll 1993), the vulnerability of bodies and borders (White 1997), and the AIDS pandemic (Behrends 2004).

The local discourses studied in this chapter correspond with these interpretations. They reflect on the failure of the ideal of development, the (im)morality of the market, and the price of participation in the global economy. At the same time, they comment on intra- and interethnic relations in Misaje. The group most distressed by discourses on occult economies is local Grassfielders, namely Nchaney and Bessa, who perceive threats of occult aggression both from within and without the kin-group. As I have argued, discourses on *buche/butse*, *nyongo*, and *cut-head* tend to be attributed to different ethnic groups, following the criteria of ethnic otherness, and spatial and cultural proximity. While, in the past, Mbororo and Hausa were largely exempted from witchcraft allegations on account of their religious and cultural difference, they too are increasingly suspected of participating in *cut-head* practices which are thought to be of a more secular nature than *buche/butse* and *nyongo*. This development may be interpreted as an expression of their complex socio-cultural integration into the local and regional community. At the same time, it may reflect the declining pertinence of cultural and religious difference in the face of poverty, new riches, and socio-economic disparity.

However, discourses on occult economies entail both faculties of transcending and underlining ethnic boundaries. As explained in the second part of the chapter, Mbororo and Hausa prefer to eschew their alleged involvement in occult activities and stress their religious and cultural otherness. At the same time, their ritual specialists

are widely respected for their knowledge of the occult, in particular their proficiency in preventing and treating the effects of spirit possession. The availability of their services to members of all ethnic groups functions again as a socially integrative factor.

Finally, in the third part of the chapter I have shown that discourses on occult economies also play a role in shaping the relationship between local communities, non-governmental organisations, and the state. Here it is the quest for appropriate and effective methods of containing occult aggression that has set apart Grassfields communities and their chiefs from state agents and Christian human rights activists. Eventually, all parties are interested in the restoration of public order and individual security, which includes both the eradication of occult aggression and the avoidance of violence against individuals suspected of witchcraft.

10 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND LEGAL PLURALISM IN THE EARLY 2000s

Having described different understandings of ethnicity as well as the interplay of integrative and dissociative factors in interethnic relations, I will now return to the subject of conflict management. The chapter presents the situational analysis of a conflict that occurred in 2001 and involved members of the local Grassfields and Mbororo communities. The story starts with the murder of a Bessa man who was found decapitated at a riverbank on the fringes of the Misaje Sub-Division. Circumstantial evidence pointed to an influential and wealthy Mbororo man, whose family had been staying in the Misaje area for more than 60 years.

My focus is not on the actual murder and its exposition, but on the ensuing conflict between Bessa and Mbororo individuals which developed into a conflict between the two communities. It will henceforth be referred to as 'the murder conflict'. My analysis of the incident integrates a number of subjects elaborated in previous chapters, notably farmer-herder relations, cattle theft, interethnic friendship, and occult economies. Moreover, it introduces a further crucial factor in shaping individual and group strategies, namely Cameroon's plural legal framework and its corrupted variations.³⁰²

In chapter 3, I presented the case study of the investiture conflict of 1997. As I have argued, the incident was shaped by the socially destabilising effects of the country's political liberalisation, and reflected a heightened tendency towards violent forms of conflict resolution. By the time of my fieldwork in the early 2000s, local approaches to conflict resolution had changed. As we will see in this chapter, individuals and groups tended to adopt procedural strategies, such as political lobbying and litigation. These strategies, while having existed before, gained popularity in the light of global discourses on human, minority, and civil rights, and of the activities of non-governmental organisations, in particular human rights and ethnic elite associations.

It is my aim in this chapter to situate current strategies of conflict management in their political and legal context, and to examine the degree to which they contribute to social cohesion in the Western Grassfields. By way of example I will analyse the

³⁰² I would like to thank Fernanda Pirie for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

murder conflict of 2001 and relate it to Cameroon’s plural legal system. Similar to chapter 3, I will apply the extended case method and draw on the conflict theories of Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) and the Manchester School (Gluckman 1955, Gulliver 1979). In addition, I will engage with the concepts of legal pluralism and corruption.

10.1 Procedural strategies of conflict resolution

As outlined in chapters 1 and 3, Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) developed a model in which conflicts are ordered in a field of four poles, namely destruction, warring, procedure, and avoidance. These poles are situated along the two axes of more or less violence and stronger or weaker social embedding.

Diagram 10.1: Elwert’s field of four poles (Elwert 2001: 2544)

		More violence v	Less violence v
Stronger embedding >		warring	procedure
Weaker embedding >		destruction	avoidance

In analysing the investiture conflict of 1997 (chapter 3), I concluded that the main strategies employed by Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa in managing interethnic conflict were avoidance and destruction. By the early 2000s these were no longer preferred strategies. Individuals and groups reverted to approaches that in Elwert’s model belong to the pole of procedure. Drawing on Luhmann (1969), Elwert (2001) defines procedure as follows:

A procedure is distinct from daily interaction by its form and ordered sequence of action. Elections, court cases, and auctions have also been seen as conflict resolution procedures. During a procedure some power differentials are suspended. It may, for example, be excluded that a stronger person physically harms a weaker person during the procedure. A procedure has an outcome with consequences in action. Who will profit from the outcome is, in principle, open. It should be called a procedure only when it ends in a conclusion which has meaningful consequences for action. (Elwert 2001: 2544)

Elwert further distinguishes between conclusive and pending procedure. While a pending procedure may have the ritual form of procedure, it does not result in consequential conclusions.

Thus, the pending procedure is not a way of conflict resolution but a way of conflict perpetuation. Pending procedures can have a high annoyance potential and are rather forms of warring with reduced violence. (Elwert 2001: 2544)³⁰³

Elwert's distinction between conclusive and pending procedure will be instrumental in analysing the integrative or dissociative potential of current procedural strategies of conflict management used in the Misaje area. We may remember, as outlined in chapter 6, that the colonial and post-colonial administrations instituted a number of procedures to resolve farmer-herder conflicts. Yet, as these procedures never resulted in constant and consequential conclusions, they had no lasting avail, but contributed to the perpetuation of conflicts and corresponding discourses.

I would like to add a cautious note concerning my application of Elwert's conflict model to the Cameroonian case. I fully agree with Bierschenk (2004) – and I think my case material supports this assumption – that neither of the conflict categories suggested by Elwert refers to exclusive or alternative strategies; rather they should be seen as complementary and combinable. Accordingly, by describing avoidance and destruction as the dominant conflict strategies of the 1990s, and procedure as a popular strategy in the early 2000s, I do not indicate absolute categories but a historical and regional trend. Moreover, I acknowledge the possibility of actors exploring multiple and situationally changing strategies, as happened in the investiture conflict when individuals alternated between strategies of avoidance and confrontation (see chapter 3).

The procedural approaches I am concerned with in this chapter are political lobbying and litigation. Both strategies have been applied by individuals and groups in the murder conflict. As noted above, the recent popularity of these strategies is related to global discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights, entailing political and legal responses by the Cameroonian state, and the regional and local activities of non-governmental organisations.

As outlined in chapter 2, the Cameroonian government responded to the demands of the UN, World Bank, IMF, and other international organisations to introduce a democratic system, to respect human, minority, and cultural rights, and to adjust its legal frameworks accordingly. Among other measures it introduced press freedom,

³⁰³ A comprehensive discussion of procedure is provided in Elwert (2005: 23-35).

enabled the registration of political parties and ‘socio-cultural and development associations’, and incorporated the rights of minorities into the Cameroonian constitution. Furthermore, the government ratified human rights conventions. For example, as one of the gendarmes in Misaje proudly pointed out, it adopted regulations condemning the use of torture by state functionaries (law no. 97/9 of 10 January 1997, section 132(a) of the Cameroonian Penal Code).

In the same way as the Cameroonian government responded to global discourses and international pressure, local population groups and individuals reacted to the upsurge of new political and legal avenues. As outlined in previous chapters, a number of non-governmental organisations emerged, many of which adopted programmes advocating human rights and civil society, such as the three Christian human rights associations operating in Donga-Mantung (see chapter 9). In the Misaje area the organisation most active in the field of legal counselling at the time of my research was Ballotiral, the partnership programme of MBOSCUA (Mbororo Social and Cultural and Development Association) (see chapter 5). Although Ballotiral does not figure prominently in the murder conflict, I will briefly outline its paralegal programme, as its activities provide a fair idea of the ways in which the local population has gradually been familiarised with procedural strategies of conflict resolution.

The Ballotiral programme ‘Access to justice’ was initiated in 1998 and was run by a qualified lawyer and a psychologist together with their Ballotiral colleagues.³⁰⁴ They trained Mbororo individuals as paralegals (community-based resource persons) and provided psycho-legal counselling to Mbororo community members. For example, from March 2000 to October 2001 the Ballotiral team assisted in 23 cases.³⁰⁵ These included eleven cases of abuse of office by state functionaries, six farmer-herder disputes, three cases of alleged cattle theft, two offences against women and one case of legal interference in a case handled by the *alkali* court. The Ballotiral staff supported their Mbororo clients by discussing possible legal strategies and by submitting depositions and petitions to the relevant legal bodies. Mbororo individuals who decided to pursue a lawsuit were required to engage a legal counsel.

³⁰⁴ In the meantime, the psychologist has dropped out of the programme and the focus is more on legal than psychological counselling. On the Ballotiral paralegal programme see also Duni et al. (2005), Hickey (2002: 852-853).

³⁰⁵ The information was provided by the Ballotiral staff who permitted me to study their documents on paralegal counselling.

The primary aim of the Ballotiral paralegal programme was to inform the Mbororo population about their civil rights and to encourage them to challenge the extortionist practices of public officials. While many Mbororo have been the targets of extortion and abuse due to their illiteracy and relative wealth, most have shied away from exploring legal avenues because they lack the necessary familiarity with the state legal system. This predicament is not particular to the Mbororo, but is widely shared by the rural population of the Grassfields. One of Ballotiral's main achievements in the Misaje area in 2001 was the demotion and transfer of the then gendarmerie commandant, whom they repeatedly reported to the divisional court for false accusations, unlawful detention, and extortionist practices. While Ballotiral centred its assistance on cases against government functionaries, it largely refrained from intervening in disputes between Mbororo individuals, and between Mbororo and members of neighbouring communities.³⁰⁶ Nonetheless, many Mbororo are enthusiastic about political lobbying and litigation as effective strategies of conflict resolution and would apply them to other conflict situations, such as land disputes and leadership rivalries. While the growing inclination for procedural strategies has been most evident among Mbororo, other population groups explore similar strategies, as the case study of the murder conflict will show.

10.2 Legal pluralism in northwest Cameroon

In order to assess current procedural approaches to conflict resolution and their impact on interethnic relations, it is important to analyse the legal framework to which they relate. Here the concept of legal pluralism is relevant (e.g. F. von Benda-Beckmann 1994, 1997, K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001, 2003, Galanter 1981, Griffiths 1986). It refers to the coexistence of plural normative orders and also points to the different origins, interpretations, and applications of laws within these normative systems. In the following I will briefly delineate its connotations in the Cameroonian context.

The Cameroonian legal framework includes a number of parallel, partly overlapping, partly rivalling normative systems. As a consequence of the legacies of French and British colonial administration, Cameroon simultaneously operates with two systems

³⁰⁶ In chapter 5, I indicated a legal case between rivalling Mbororo leaders in which Ballotiral was involved, and that in hindsight would have been better resolved by Muslim clerics than through litigation.

of state law, namely English Common Law and French Administrative Law which are applied in the Anglophone and Francophone provinces respectively. Furthermore, institutions of customary and Islamic law are integrated in the state law systems and operate alongside local normative forums.

K. von Benda-Beckmann (1981) introduced the notion of “forum shopping and shopping forums” in referring to clients choosing between legal forums and the competition for cases between these forums. This notion also applies to the Cameroonian context where clients have a wide choice of different forums of negotiation, mediation, and adjudication. They tend to base their choice on their familiarity with the respective normative order applied in that forum, and on their socio-political or economic ability to influence adjudicators in their favour. Besides, they frequently pursue changing or parallel avenues. Conversely, the forums also compete for cases. The examples I know best concern land and farmer-herder disputes (see also Fisiy 1992). The forums that are officially entitled to resolve land and farmer-herder disputes are the land administrative board and the farmer-herder commission respectively. Both are administrative institutions composed of members of the sub-divisional administration and representatives of the local communities. Other institutions that claim responsibility to adjudicate land and farmer-herder disputes are the traditional council (the primary legal institution of Grassfields communities) and the forces of law and order (police and gendarmerie). The latter tend to label such cases not as land or farmer-herder disputes, but as criminal offences, such as ‘trespassing’ or ‘destruction’. The reasons that account for these forums’ competition over land and farmer-herder disputes are of political and economic nature: control over land implies power, and each negotiation entails the opportunity to extort a bribe. In reviewing administrative files on farmer-herder and land disputes, I came across cases in which several legal avenues were pursued in parallel, leading to contradictory judgements, procedural confusion, and considerable expense on the claimant’s and defendant’s side.

It is important here to note that – more often than not – clients are not fully aware of all available legal forums, their respective requirements, and procedures. Similarly, mediators and adjudicators frequently ignore the possibility of multiple applications of Cameroonian legislation. In this context non-governmental organisations with paralegal programmes (such as Ballotiral) have a strong impact. They advise forum shoppers in their choice of legal alternatives. Furthermore, by highlighting

irregularities and failures, they induce mediators and adjudicators to be aware of legal developments and to honestly and responsibly fulfil their roles.³⁰⁷

The following table gives a rough idea of the plural legal avenues that are open to forum shoppers in northwest Cameroon. I should clarify, however, that not all forums are equally applicable to all conflict situations and that their jurisdictions vary, ranging from mediation to arbitration and adjudication. The table is complemented with brief descriptions of the forums' primary liabilities.

Table 10.1: Schematic illustration of legal forums operative in northwest Cameroon

Levels		State law		Local law	Muslim law
	<i>administrative institutions</i>	<i>judiciary</i>	<i>law enforcement agencies</i>		
<i>national</i>		Supreme Court			
<i>provincial</i>		Appeal Court	military tribunal		
<i>divisional</i>		High Court			<i>alkali court</i>
<i>sub-divisional</i>	Divisional Officer, land administrative board, farmer-grazier commission		gendarmarie, police	customary court	
<i>village</i>				traditional council	
<i>community</i>				Grassfields (sub-)chief	Mbororo and Hausa leader

The legal authority contacted first is normally the community leader who assumes the role of a mediator in family and community-internal matters, such as marriage disputes, power struggles, witchcraft allegations, and land disputes. If an agreement cannot be achieved on this level, the case is taken further, often to the traditional council, the main adjudicative institution of Grassfields chiefdoms. Its members are village elders and notables who convene their meetings under the chairmanship of the local *fon* (Grassfields chief). Muslims tend to eschew the traditional council and to report cases to the *alkali* court. The *alkali* court and the customary court were introduced by the British colonial administration and their jurisdictions are limited to marital, inheritance, and contract matters.

Individuals frequently opt to consult the Divisional Officer in a wide variety of conflict matters. The Divisional Officer only provides a forum for negotiation and mediation, while legal adjudication within the state system entails reporting the case

³⁰⁷ However, some NGO workers may be inclined to use their position for their personal benefit or to manipulate procedures.

to the judiciary. Matters reported to the gendarmerie assume the character of a criminal offence and are supposed to be prosecuted on the level of the High Court. From here, cases may be taken further to the Appeal Court and Supreme Court for final judgement. In exceptional cases, a criminal offence may be judged by the military tribunal. This happened for example in 2002, when four Mbororo were arrested and condemned to ten years imprisonment on the basis of participating in a collective attempt to recover community territory. The Mbororo's solicitors claimed that the procedure was inappropriate, and with the support of international human rights organisations they succeeded in reversing the judgement (see chapter 5).

Another factor complicating Cameroon's plural legal system is corruption, which many informants and authors (e.g. Bayart 1993, GERDDES 1999) have described as an integral feature of the Cameroonian state. It is important here to clarify my use of the term corruption, as references to allegedly corrupt government officials and local chiefs have been made throughout the study, most pronouncedly in relation to farmer-herder conflicts explored in chapter 6.

Interlocutors (including farmers, herders, journalists, academics, politicians, and government officials) frequently invoked corruption as one of the main reasons for the malfunctioning of the Cameroonian state. The features they referred to include bribery, extortion, and the misappropriation of public resources. Furthermore, corruption comprises transactions of money as well as the exploitation of socio-political networks. It is difficult, however, to assess the degree to which the frequent rumours and allegations of corruption are based on actual fact, as corrupted practices are generally characterised by an aura of secrecy. This also applies to the conflict studied in this chapter, in which a number of actors were suspected of corruption.

The subject of corruption has been popular in the literature on Cameroon and Western Africa (e.g. Bayart et al. 1999, Bierschenk 2004, Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2001a, Chabal & Daloz 2002, Fombad 2000). Best known is Bayart's (1993) study 'The state in Africa' where he describes the Cameroonian state as a rhizome (or neopatrimonial) state that is characterised by actors' exploitation of networks of family ties and patron-client relationships. In describing the political logic supporting this system, he uses the Cameroonian expression 'the politics of the belly' which has numerous equivalents throughout sub-Saharan Africa:

It [the politics of the belly] denotes at the same time the accumulation of wealth through tenure of political power (implied in the proverb 'the goat grazes where it is tied'), the symbolic reference to family lineage and to witchcraft, and the physical corpulence which is felt to be appropriate in 'big men' or powerful women. (Bayart et al. 1999: 8)

As Bayart (1993) points out, the politics of the belly is a complex mode of government with roots in the past and the present. Corruption is thus not a new phenomenon; although it rose to an issue of public contention in the second half of the 1990s, when the Cameroonian government officially addressed the subject in response to corresponding demands by the international community (Eboussi Boulaga & Zinga 2002: 25, 31-32). In 1997 a group of Cameroonian scientists, the *Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherche en Démocratie, Développement Economique et Sociale* (GERDDES), carried out research on corruption in Cameroon, the results of which were published two years later. In 1998 the Cameroonian government launched a sensitisation campaign as part of the national governance programme. In the same year as well as in the following year Cameroon was ranked first in the corruption perception index of Transparency International, a German based NGO (GERDDES 1999: 181-184).

In the meantime, Cameroon is no longer at the top of the world's purportedly most corrupt countries. Nonetheless, as Eboussi Boulaga & Zinga (2002) pointed out, the government's attempts at eradicating corruption were superficial and largely futile. In 2000 the government instituted an anti-corruption observatory that paid control visits to five ministries (national education, transport, public service, administrative reform, public health, post, and telecommunication); yet its recommendations were never implemented (Eboussi Boulaga & Zinga 2002: 34-45, 50-53). Moreover, according to GERDDES (1999: 129), legal provisions for the prosecution of corruption are sufficiently provided in the Cameroonian Penal Code (sections 123, 130, 134, 134(a), 161, and several others that supplement or relate to them). The crucial problem, however, is the lack of their implementation. In a similar vein, in autumn 2000 I was able to observe the reduction of roadblocks in response to the government's ruling that only police officers, and no longer gendarmes, were entitled to control public transport. This development lasted for a few months before law enforcement officers

returned to their previous practice of asking taxi drivers for “money for a beer” (cf. Fombad 2000: 245, GERDDES 1999: 69-72).³⁰⁸

In the view of many interlocutors and international donor organisations, corruption is a negative factor that impedes the successful functioning of the state. Conversely, some authors (e.g. Bierschenk 2004 with regard to the judiciary in Benin) argue that corruption may also have positive implications, and actually enable the operation of state sectors that otherwise would collapse due to the lack of resources and personnel. Similarly, the Cameroonian anti-corruption observatory reported upon their visit to the Ministry of Public Services that the lack of office equipment endorsed acts of corruption, as clients freely offered to pay for some of the services that otherwise could not be accomplished (Eboussi Boulaga & Zinga 2002: 37).³⁰⁹ According to the national survey of GERDDES (1999: 31), 31% of their informants admitted to freely offering gifts, money, and other things to state functionaries in order to obtain services to which they were entitled. As GERDDES concludes,

[f]or these people, corruption has ceased to be considered a social evil, it has become a way of life, a social act that has become so much a part of them that they perform it spontaneously.” (GERDDES 1999: 31)

By embedding corruption in the framework of legal pluralism, I interpret it as part of an institutionalised practice that is structured by certain rules and that provides alternative avenues to official administrative and legal procedures (cf. Mooij 1992). Moreover, by relating corruption to the conflict model of Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005), we may see it as a factor that undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of legal procedural strategies. Moreover, in many cases it results in pending procedures and thus promotes the perpetuation rather than the resolution of conflict.

Having sketched out procedural approaches to conflict management and Cameroon’s plural legal framework, I will now turn to the murder conflict of 2001, which will

³⁰⁸ In a collection of popular anecdotes edited by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2000), corruption is paraphrased as *gombo*, a local term for okra (see also GERDDES 1999: 104-110). “From the smallest office clerk to the powerful Vizier [Prime Minister] closest to the Sultan [President] you will obtain whatever favours you desire so long as you give out “gombo” as they call it. “Gombo” is a local vegetable that can enable you swallow a porcupine, for as you can well imagine, it renders dry and hard foods smooth and slippery. Gombo ... what an image!” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2000: 15). For a popular semiology of corruption in West Africa see Blundo & Olivier de Sardan (2001b).

³⁰⁹ GERDDES (1999: 54) assessed the judiciary in Cameroon as equally understaffed and under-equipped, and thus exposed to corruption.

provide further examples of local actors' strategies in dealing with conflict and legal pluralism in the Misaje area.

10.3 The murder of Mr X

In examining the murder conflict I will employ the extended case method of the Manchester School. While the investiture conflict studied in chapter 3 was analysed within the framework of the social drama, the murder conflict lacks the decisive phases of breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. It is thus better analysed as a social situation, which Mitchell (1983) defines as follows:

A social situation is a collocation of events which the analyst is able to construe as connected with one another and which take place in a relatively restricted time span. (Mitchell 1983: 193)

In my depiction of the murder conflict I will focus on the events between July and November 2001. They form part of the legal exposition and subsequent litigation that was concluded in 2003.

The following explorations are based on participant observation and interviews with 19 interlocutors. In collaboration with my assistant Jonathan, I addressed the subject in conversations with persons directly implicated in the issue, notably the murder suspect and his alleged prime opponent, members of the local population including Bessa and Mbororo, the two subsequent sub-divisional administrators, active members of BECUDA (Bessa Cultural and Development Association) both in the Misaje area and in the South West, and external observers, such as the Ballotiral staff who were involved in an ongoing project with the Bessa and Mbororo communities of Akweto. Among our prime informants were a Bessa journalist and active member of BECUDA who investigated the case meticulously, as well as an Nchaney journalist who published an article on the incident in the local newspaper (The Post 13/08/2001). In addition, we participated in several BECUDA meetings, including the BECUDA annual conference in Akweto in November 2001. Jonathan's participation in researching the murder conflict was a crucial factor; his Bessa background sanctioned my interaction with Bessa informants who otherwise saw me as a sympathiser of the Mbororo and thus questioned my impartiality.

At the time of my research, the murder conflict was still ongoing and no single, consistent account had yet been established. The version presented below is a

composite of different informants' accounts, and is intended to depict the major events as well as individuals' and groups' responses. To help the reader understand the murder conflict in its complexity, I have integrated a number of explanatory and analytical statements. At a later stage I will introduce the standpoints of some of the key actors in order to clarify the multiple layers of conflict and the diverse strategies of conflict resolution that characterise this social situation.

10.3.1 Dramatis personae

The *dramatis personae* in the murder conflict are individuals and collectives. The main collective actor is BECUDA, the Bessa Cultural and Development Association, whose activities have been described in previous chapters (see chapters 4, 6, 9). The individual actors are members of the Bessa and Mbororo communities living on the territory of Akweto, one of the three Bessa chiefdoms situated within the Misaje Sub-Division. At this point I will concentrate on three key figures, namely the victim, the alleged murderer, and the latter's prime opponent. Other players, like the suspected murderer's accomplices, the *fon* of Akweto, and the Divisional Officers, will be introduced in the course of the story. For obvious reasons I will keep individuals anonymous.

The victim of the alleged murder was Mr X. He was a native of Akweto and a farmer living at a considerable distance from the village. He regularly visited the Akweto market to sell farm produce and palm oil. Mr X was generally considered a social outsider. He allegedly smoked marihuana, repeatedly harassed his relatives, and was known as a notorious palm nut, sheep, and cattle thief.

Alhaji Y is the prime suspect of the murder case. He belongs to the Jaafun (Mbororo sub-group) and is the son and successor of an *arDo* (Mbororo leader). His father settled in the area in the 1930s and was installed *arDo* in the late 1940s. *Alhaji* Y controls a large cattle grazing area, part of which adjoined the farm land of Mr X. He is one of the few highly educated Mbororo in the Western Grassfields. He attended primary and secondary school in Cameroon and studied business administration in Nigeria. He has been working for the Ministry of Industrial and Commercial Development for more than fifteen years, and has been stationed at Nkambe since 1992. *Alhaji* Y is married to a European who spent some time in his compound and

eventually returned to the Netherlands. They have a child together and pay each other sporadic visits. *Alhaji Y* is generally described as a proud and difficult person.

Mr Z is said to be one of *alhaji Y*'s key opponents. He is a member of the Bessa elite and works at the legal department in Nkambe. In the context of the murder case he acted as a spokesperson of the Bessa community and facilitated the case through his connection with the legal department. The enmity between *alhaji Y* and Mr Z is said to be rooted in earlier incidents. They competed for a political post in the regional branch of the ruling party (CPDM sub-section president) which eventually was given to Mr Z. Furthermore, the younger brother of *alhaji Y* and the daughter of Mr Z had a love affair that culminated in the birth of an extramarital child, a development disapproved of by both Mr Z and *alhaji Y*.

10.3.2. The course of events

In describing the murder conflict I will distinguish three major phases, each of which includes a series of events and actions that relate to the initial incident. I will depict the happenings in chronological order and end by summarising the state of affairs in 2004.³¹⁰

Phase 1: The discovery of the corpse

On July 19, 2001 a corpse was found at the bank of River Kinken which separates the Sub-Divisions of Misaje and Ako. It was beheaded, and as diverging accounts indicated, the genitals and heart had been removed and veins extracted from the legs. The corpse was in a state of progressive decay and had been lying there for approximately two weeks. The people who found it were from a nearby village in the Ako Sub-Division. Since nobody was missing in their area, they sent news to Akweto. A group of men went to the riverbank to examine the corpse which was soon identified as the body of Mr X. They reported the case to the gendarmerie in Nkambe who undertook an investigative trip to the scene of the crime on the following day.

Circumstantial evidence pointed to *alhaji Y* who, more than two weeks earlier, had reported a cattle theft to the *fon* of Akweto. He also informed the *fon* of his plan to send his herdsmen to find Mr X whom he suspected of the act. This was not the

³¹⁰ The information on the situation in 2004 was provided by a Mbororo acquaintance (e-mail communication, 24/05/05).

first incident of this kind and *alhaji* Y seemed committed to hunting down the suspected thief. As his herdsmen did not know the exact location of Mr X's compound, they were guided by a Bessa man who had occasionally been working for *alhaji* Y.

The day the corpse was found, *alhaji* Y was absent from his home. He had gone to the capital Yaoundé to arrange his papers, since he planned to visit his wife in the Netherlands. In his absence, the herdsmen he had sent to investigate were arrested and imprisoned together with their Bessa guide. As a relative of *alhaji* Y explained, the herdsmen were severely tortured and eventually confessed that they had found Mr X in his hut and may inadvertently have beaten him to death in an act of self-defence. Yet they strongly repudiated the accusation of having molested and dragged the corpse to the riverbank so that the traces of their crime should be washed away.

A few days after the herdsmen's detention, *alhaji* Y returned to Nkambe. He took immediate action and contacted the higher judicial authority, namely the Procureur Général of the Appeal Court in Bamenda, to intervene against the imprisonment of his men. Three days later, the legal department at Nkambe received the instruction to release the suspects on bail. While the herdsmen were bailed the same day, their Bessa guide remained in custody for ten more days until he, too, was bailed by his Mbororo friends. After the release of *alhaji* Y's herdsmen on bail, the gendarmes suspended their prosecution.

Phase 2: Bessa counteraction

By the time *alhaji* Y and his herdsmen resettled in their homes, the atmosphere in Akweto was loaded with suspicion and fear and with rumours about *alhaji* Y's involvement in the *cut-head* business. According to different accounts, *alhaji* Y allegedly had a contract with a white partner to supply a total of 28 heads for which he was paid an enormous sum of money. Purportedly, Mr X's head was already the 26th. Other rumours indicated that Mr X's head was the seventh and was to be sent to *alhaji* Y's wife in the Netherlands. That was also the reason for *alhaji* Y's journey to Yaoundé. These and similar rumours circulated among the Bessa community of Akweto and were spread throughout the Misaje Sub-Division. While many Grassfields interlocutors told these stories with conviction, Mbororo and Hausa informants were more reluctant to believe that a Mbororo man should participate in

the *cut-head* business. Yet ultimately, they left the question open while hinting at *alhaji Y*'s ruthless character.³¹¹

The Bessa community was apprehensive of further attacks, and potential strategies of defence and retribution were discussed at the level of BECUDA. On August 25, members of the BECUDA homechapter (the association's branch in the Bessa home area) convened a meeting in which they came up with a number of resolutions to guide the future approach of the Bessa population towards *alhaji Y* and the Mbororo community. They recorded their resolutions in an official document and communicated them to the Bessa population at home and in the coastal areas, to representatives of the Mbororo community, and the sub-divisional administration. The document included a total of twelve resolutions, which I will discuss by focusing on three crucial issues, namely the demand to return the missing head, the appeal to trust in traditional and legal prosecution, and the plea to boycott all socio-economic relations with their Mbororo neighbours.

In the view of local Grassfielders, it was a crucial requirement that the crime against Mr X should be expiated and the head returned so as to enable a proper burial. The murderer was expected to acknowledge the deed and to apologise to the deceased's family. By denying his involvement and refusing to produce the victim's head, *alhaji Y* was seen to offend Mr X's relatives and to endanger the Bessa community, as the deceased may turn into a haunting spirit if not given a proper burial (see chapter 9). To counteract this possible consequence, Bessa specialists performed so-called traditional rites that were intended to affect the family of *alhaji Y* and make them leave the Bessa area. Following Bessa informants' accounts, similar measures had been taken before, but had not been fully effective, because disloyal Bessa individuals had "spoiled the medicine" by providing *alhaji Y* with counter-medicine. To avoid a similar outcome, the BECUDA homechapter emphasised the urgency of collaborative action and solidarity among members of the Bessa community.

In a second cluster of resolutions, the BECUDA homechapter pleaded to the Bessa population to refrain from violence and trust in ritual and legal prosecution. Many Bessa resented *alhaji Y* for his immediate intervention in the legal investigation. They

³¹¹ It is not my intention here to prove or disprove the possibility of *alhaji Y*'s involvement in the *cut-head* business. Rather I am interested in informants' assessments which help us to understand the social position of *alhaji Y* within the wider Akweto community. What actually happened to the head of Mr X, if it was removed intentionally, if it was carried away by the river, if it was sold or hidden away, will most probably remain a secret.

assumed that he would try to further obfuscate the matter by using his political influence and wealth. The BECUDA homechapter appealed to the external elite to counteract *alhaji* Y's attempts by tabling protests to higher judicial authorities. Furthermore, it was alleged that *alhaji* Y was lobbying for the transfer of two Bessa individuals who were instrumental in the murder investigation; one was a police officer, the other was Mr Z who worked with the legal department. Members of the external Bessa elite were thus encouraged to exploit their political connections and to oppose their fellows' transfers.

Thirdly, the BECUDA homechapter proposed a boycott on all social and economic interaction between Bessa and Mbororo in order to reinforce their claims to the return of the victim's head and to reassert Bessa customary rights to land and landed resources. They validated the resolution by referring to previous violent encounters between Bessa and Mbororo and to long-standing grievances over crop destruction and rivalling land claims. While *alhaji* Y was accused of monopolising Bessa land, other Mbororo were blamed for selling Bessa land to a third party.

By initiating a boycott on all interaction with Mbororo individuals, the BECUDA homechapter attempted to ethnicise the conflict. They justified extending the ban to the entire Mbororo community with the argument that some Mbororo leaders had morally and financially supported *alhaji* Y and thus needed to be reprimanded. Furthermore, BECUDA officials had identified the lack of common initiative and solidarity among Bessa as a major obstacle to successfully counteracting *alhaji* Y. They aimed at fostering a sense of unity by framing the conflict in ethnic terms.

The resolution was endorsed by the Bessa communities of Akweto and Kamine. The village of Mbissa kept a neutral stance on the grounds that their territory was distant to Akweto and their Mbororo neighbours had no relations with the Mbororo of Akweto. In order to reinforce the agreement, the representatives of the two Bessa communities performed traditional rites with the effect that every person who collaborated with the Mbororo should be punished by the ancestors and be afflicted by illness and death.

In the long run, however, BECUDA's attempts to ethnicise the conflict by opposing the Bessa to the Mbororo failed. Many Bessa individuals were unwilling to relinquish their work and friendship relationships with their Mbororo neighbours, as they constituted an important source of income and assistance. Moreover, they defused the danger of ritual sanctions by using protective medicine. BECUDA

members blamed the failure of the boycott on the weakness of Bessa institutions of social control and the cowardly character of their people. The stereotypes of Bessa cowardice and pacificity were a consistent theme in interviews with Bessa informants.

Three days after the BECUDA homechapter had made its resolutions, it invited *alhaji* Y for a meeting. *Alhaji* Y first paid a visit to the *fon* of Akweto before he proceeded to the meeting place. On the way there he was blocked by a tree lying across the road and threatened by Bessa attackers. He immediately turned back to the *fon*'s palace where he left his motorcycle and went home on horseback. A few hours later, Mbororo youths entered Akweto armed with bows and arrows and intimidated Bessa villagers. Similar incidents had happened before, and the Bessa were aware of the Mbororo's fighting skills. Eventually, a cohort of gendarmes descended from Nkambe to Akweto and arrested some Mbororo youths.

As *alhaji* Y admitted in an interview, he was frightened by the Bessa roadblock which he perceived as a deliberate threat to his life instigated by Mr Z. In a meeting with the Senior Divisional Officer, which took place a few days after the incident, *alhaji* Y attributed the mutilation of Mr X's corpse to the two Bessa elite members Mr Z and his colleague, the policeman. He suggested that the two men had found the corpse, cut off the head, and buried it with the aim of aggravating the charge against him from a case of theft and self-defence to a case of calculated occult murder. The complaint was registered, but due to lack of evidence no further action was taken.

On September 2, the Divisional Officer of the Misaje Sub-Division, in whose constituency the murder had occurred, organised a meeting in Akweto to which he invited the heads of the gendarmerie, the police, and the rural council of Misaje, as well as the *fon* of Akweto, his notables, and representatives of BECUDA. The Divisional Officer expressed his sympathy for the family of the deceased and the Bessa community of Akweto. He instructed them to trust in legal procedure and to abstain from any further acts of violence. Furthermore, he urged them to desist from generalising their sanctions to the entire Mbororo community, as many Mbororo were themselves critical of *alhaji* Y's comportment. Finally, he insisted on being informed immediately of all incidents in order to enable a fair prosecution of the matter. The meeting was documented and the minutes distributed to the participants. As the Divisional Officer confided to me in a personal interview, he actually sympathised with the Bessa population of Akweto, as he himself had come to know *alhaji* Y as a very difficult person with considerable economic and political influence. However, in

his position as administrator he could not officially take sides, since he primarily had to protect the peace and guarantee fair treatment to all population groups.

On the day of the meeting with the Divisional Officer, BECUDA elite members filed a petition with the Ministry of Justice, demanding the protection of their rights as an indigenous minority, as stipulated by the national constitution. They urged the government to ensure the legal prosecution of the murder of Mr X and to clarify land rights issues between the Bessa and Mbororo. They never received an answer and filed a second petition in spring 2002. As a qualified lawyer and staff member of Ballotiral explained to me, the Bessa side lacked a decisive individual to follow up legal action against *alhaji* Y. Because the deceased's relatives were unwilling to file a charge and hire a lawyer, the prosecuting party in the legal proceedings was the Cameroonian government, which had little incentive to pursue the case. Conversely, BECUDA's strategy of writing petitions and effecting collective action against its opponent was of no consequence.

Phase 3: Further developments

The months of September and October were relatively quiet, but the social climate between Bessa and Mbororo remained tense.

On November 4, 2001 eighteen soldiers stationed at Nkambe passed through Akweto on their way to a village market. They stopped their truck in front of Mr Z's house and informed him that they had been sent by *alhaji* Y to warn him. They beat Mr Z and caused him serious injury for which he had to be treated in hospital. They harassed other villagers and eventually left for the village market.

Mr Z filed a complaint with the legal department at Nkambe. It transpired that, although the soldiers were in uniform, they were not on duty that day. Their venture was deemed illicit, and Mr Z was assured that they would be detained and punished for their offence. However, it remained unresolved by whom their action had been instigated. According to information I received in August 2002, the lawsuit was ongoing, and *alhaji* Y purportedly hired a defence counsel for the soldiers.

On November 18 and 19, BECUDA held its annual conference in Akweto. It was a major event which was well attended by BECUDA delegations from the coastal areas, the local Bessa population, members of neighbouring groups (including Mbororo), as well as representatives of the sub-divisional administration, the

gendarmerie, the police, and the educational department. The meeting was inaugurated by the BECUDA president, an external elite member living in the South West Province. In his opening speech he addressed the murder conflict. He requested a minute of silence in commemoration of Mr X and confirmed the measures against the Mbororo community that had been instituted in August 2001. After the president's introduction the representative of the BECUDA elite circle addressed the Bessa population's most urgent problems, including infrastructural deficiencies and farmer-herder conflicts. He linked the murder of Mr X to ongoing disputes over crop damage and land. Next, the resolutions of the August meeting were read to the public. Then the floor was handed over to the new Divisional Officer who had replaced his predecessor in late October 2001. He expressed his sympathy with the community of Akweto because of the death of the Mr X of which he had read in a newspaper article. He assured his support to the Bessa community in hunting down the murderer, but advised them "to keep a cool head" and only pursue legal avenues. He also affirmed his intention to resolve land disputes and farmer-herder conflicts in accordance with the corresponding administrative regulations. The Divisional Officer's speech was received with appreciation by the Bessa population and BECUDA officials who saw him as being on their side.

The conference programme included additional speeches and entertainment such as traditional dances, choir presentations, and the award of a football cup. The occasion was attended by a number of Mbororo, mainly youths, who were attracted by the cultural performances. Some Mbororo girls had come to the village to grind corn and were curious to hear what the conference organisers had to say about the murder issue. From conversations with Mbororo interlocutors it became clear that they disapproved of the generalised sanctions BECUDA had instituted against the Mbororo community. They thought it unfair to hold all Mbororo responsible for the alleged fault of an individual. Yet, as I observed during the conference, they largely kept their objections to themselves and interacted with their Bessa neighbours on normal terms. *Alhaji Y* and his close relatives stayed away from the event.

During the BECUDA conference the social atmosphere in Akweto was noticeably tense. My assistant Jonathan and I repeatedly witnessed incidents in which Bessa individuals publicly expressed their contempt for their Mbororo neighbours, pointing accusing fingers at Mbororo by-passers and denying them the right to stay on Bessa

land. Yet these eruptions were contingent on the occasion. Once the conference had passed, Bessa individuals were far less outspoken in confronting Mbororo.

In an interview carried out in December 2001, a BECUDA official stated that the boycott on interaction with the Mbororo had been lifted and ritual sanctions against the collaborators neutralised. He explained that eventually Mbororo individuals had apologised for the death of Mr X and had pleaded that the matter should not be generalised. Moreover, the Divisional Officer had encouraged the groups' reconciliation.

When I left Cameroon in January 2002, legal prosecution was stagnating. Via e-mail conversation I was informed that the legal proceedings of Mr X's murder continued until 2003. Several court hearings took place at Nkambe and *alhaji* Y was required to bring forward all suspects released on bail. One of them had escaped to Nigeria and it took some time to bring him back. Due to repeated adjournments the *fon* of Akweto pleaded to the judge to be exempted from attending the court hearings on the grounds of health problems. This move was interpreted both as a sign of the *fon*'s unwillingness to testify against *alhaji* Y and of his corruption. Eventually,

[the Bessa witnesses] refused to give evidence and the matter was dismissed from the court after millions [of francs CFA, equivalent to thousands of Euro] exchanged hands. (D.J., e-mail communication, 24/05/05).

Concerning the outcome of the lawsuit of Mr Z against the military I have no further information. Yet I was told that Mr Z was transferred in 2002 from Nkambe to Bamenda. He welcomed the transfer as a way of evading witchcraft attacks from within his family. His elite colleague who worked with the police at Nkambe was also transferred to a distant location in north Cameroon. Thanks to the intervention of BECUDA elite members with good connections to the police, it was possible to revoke his transfer and get him back to Nkambe.

In early 2004 the father of *alhaji* Y died. One week later, *alhaji* Y was installed as the new leader (*arDo*) of the Mbororo community of Akweto. Yet as Mbororo interlocutors pointed out, he faced a lot of opposition among his own people.

10.4 Analysis of the murder conflict

The case study integrates a number of issues elaborated in previous chapters, including occult economies, farmer-herder disputes, and cattle theft. Furthermore, it depicts actors' deployment of procedural strategies of conflict resolution within Cameroon's plural legal framework.

In the following I will develop two subjects that are of particular relevance to the theme of my study, namely the conflict's transition from an individual to an ethnic conflict, and the actors' exploration of plural legal avenues. Both subjects relate to secondary issues that will be further substantiated in the ensuing analysis of individual perspectives on the murder conflict.

10.4.1 From *cut-head* to ethnic conflict

The murder conflict arose from an incident of occult economies which was attributed to an economically and politically influential individual who was renowned for his asocial demeanour and difficult character. The *cut-head* accusations raised against *alhaji* Y were based on his declared enmity with Mr X and were an expression of Bessa criticism of his apparent individual accumulation (see chapter 9).

In the initial phase of the murder conflict, the ethnic backgrounds of the victim and the indicted murderer were of secondary importance. As many Bessa informants argued, *alhaji* Y was seen as "a son of the soil" and a member of the elite of Akweto. They expected him to comply with Bessa conventions which include apologising to the victim's relatives and undergoing ritual cleansing. *Alhaji* Y, on the other hand, portrayed himself as a member of the Akweto community who was temporarily ostracised on the basis of false allegations.

In identifying the source of the enmity between Mr X and *alhaji* Y, interlocutors increasingly perceived and portrayed the conflict in economic and ethnic terms. From a Bessa perspective, the murder conflict was grounded in long-standing farmer-herder problems and land disputes between Bessa and Mbororo. In the view of Mbororo informants, Mr X's death was the result of Bessa farmers' envy for the wealth of Mbororo graziers and the farmers' involvement in cattle theft. These arguments will be elaborated in more detail in the later discussion of individual assessments.

Furthermore, by attributing the origin of the murder conflict to underlying disagreements between the two population groups, the conflict was elevated from an

individual to an ethnic conflict. Although BECUDA ultimately failed in its attempt to mobilise the Bessa against the Mbororo, the murder conflict continued to be perceived in ethnic terms as an argument between the Bessa community and the Mbororo individual *alhaji Y*.

10.4.2 Legal avenues explored by individual and collective actors

The main opposing parties in the murder conflict were BECUDA (representing the Bessa community) and *alhaji Y*. Both pursued legal procedural strategies in resolving the conflict, which differed in their character and efficacy.

Alhaji Y is an educated and influential individual. By skilfully navigating the state legal system and its corrupted variations he was able to defy the charge of premeditated murder. Conversely, the Bessa side opted for political lobbying and collective strategies within the local and state legal systems. They were less successful in their forum shopping, as they lacked the socio-political and economic means of their opponent.

The following table gives an overview of the normative and legal institutions that in one way or another were involved in negotiating, mediating, and adjudicating the murder conflict.

Table 10.2: Forum shopping in the murder conflict (in chronological order)³¹²

legal forum	approached by BECUDA/ Bessa community	approached by <i>alhaji</i> Y
gendarmerie	investigated the murder, after they were informed of the discovery of the corpse	
Procureur Général, Appeal Court, Bamenda		effected the release on bail of the detained herdsmen
traditional council	performed traditional rites to drive away <i>alhaji</i> Y and to reinforce the boycott on interaction with Mbororo	
Senior Divisional Officer, Nkambe		called both parties for a reconciliatory meeting
outgoing Divisional Officer, Misaje	demanding to be informed and advised on legal strategies	
Ministry of Justice	was solicited by BECUDA to ensure the Bessa people's civil and land rights; no reply	
incoming Divisional Officer, Misaje	attended BECUDA annual conference and assured state legal prosecution	
High Court, Nkambe		dismissed the case eventually because witnesses refused to testify

The murder was classified as a criminal offence against the Cameroonian state and was prosecuted by the divisional judiciary which provided the final judgement. The legal institutions addressed by BECUDA and the Bessa community included the traditional council, the sub-divisional administration, the gendarmerie, and the Ministry of Justice. They supported the Bessa cause to varying degrees, but were unwilling or lacked the competence to intervene in the state legal prosecution. Thus, while BECUDA's strategy of mobilising personal connections was effective in revoking the transfer of their elite colleague the Bessa policeman, their political lobbying did not produce the desired results.

Alhaji Y focused his forum shopping on higher legal institutions. He intervened at the level of the divisional administration, and the provincial and divisional judiciaries. Furthermore, he invested in preserving good relations with the *fon* of Akweto so as to have a supporter within the traditional council. The decisive factor leading to the acquittal of *alhaji* Y and his herdsmen, however, was his ability to induce the relevant forums to decide in his and his herdsmen's favour. It is generally assumed that *alhaji* Y used his socio-political and economic influence to corrupt local and state legal institutions as well as Bessa witnesses.

³¹² I excluded the attack by Nkambe soldiers against Mr Z and the ensuing litigation from this table, as it remained unproven if the soldiers were instigated by *alhaji* Y.

10.5 Individual perspectives

The following statements are extracted from interviews with four key informants, namely *alhaji* Y, the Bessa elite member Mr Z, and two local journalists (one Bessa, one Nchaney) who both investigated the matter in detail. I have arranged informants' assessments thematically, starting with the relevance of land disputes and cattle theft for the murder conflict, followed by informants' assessment of the case's legal prosecution, and a final review of the social status of *alhaji* Y within the Akweto community.

10.5.1 Land disputes, cattle theft, and the murder of Mr X

One of my prime informants on the murder conflict was a Bessa journalist who at the same time was the secretary of the BECUDA homechapter and meticulously investigated and documented all events of the conflict. He had a personal interest in the matter due to his affinal relationship with the deceased Mr X whose sister was his wife. In his view, the present crisis had its origin in competing land claims by Mbororo graziers and Bessa farmers. Numerous incidents of crop damage and farmers' exclusion from grazing land caused growing dissatisfaction among the Bessa population who, on the basis of their anteriority, considered themselves the "owners of the land". A major farmer-herder conflict occurred in 1996 and required the intervention of the army to prevent violence. Consequently, some farmers began to retaliate by injuring or stealing cattle.

[Bessa] women were farming about 5km from the village. But *alhaji* Y came and claimed the land as his grazing area, producing a map from the Ministry of Territorial Administration. We refused that map since our fathers have lived in this area for more than 150 years, while *alhaji* Y's father came only 50 years ago. So we believe, if somebody has stayed for more than 100 years in a place before another person followed, the latter has no right to claim the land. [...]

Cattle theft was actually caused by farmer-herder problems. *Alhaji* Y's father compensated people whose farms were damaged, but *alhaji* Y told him that he was a stupid man. Since they had a land certificate there was no reason to compensate anybody. So people became angry and began to injure cows found in their farms. Wounded animals can easily die and people are interested in the meat. Others began to steal animals. That is how cattle theft started in the area. (Bessa journalist, Misaje, 22/12/01)

The Bessa journalist pointed to a pertinent issue that came up as a consistent theme in Bessa informants' assessments of the murder conflict, namely *alhaji Y*'s claims to exclusive property rights over his grazing land. The extent of *alhaji Y*'s alleged control over Bessa territory became intelligible in an interview with an Nchaney journalist who had interrogated *alhaji Y* on this issue:

From the documents I saw, they [the family of *alhaji Y*] have an authorisation to run a ranch³¹³. Now, you know what a ranch is! That ranch is estimated at 1,600m² or something like that, if my brain does not fail me.³¹⁴ Imagine that estimated area, which means they have almost three quarters of the village land. Now, all this has been through the arrangements of the *fons* who, once in a while, gave them land in exchange for money, gifts of cows, and all the like. It would appear, after some time the *fon* regretted being exploited in that way. Sometimes he, too, encouraged villagers to encroach into that ranch land. So that is the whole secret. The whole secret is the farmer-herder problem or rather the encroachment into the ranch. (Nchaney journalist, Misaje, 13/11/01)

Thus the land dispute between the Bessa community and *alhaji Y* should be seen in the context of conflicting legal frameworks. Members of the Bessa community derived their claims from the customary land tenure system which defines land and landed resources as a communal property and attributes use rights according to the principle of anteriority.³¹⁵ *Alhaji Y*, on the other hand, claimed exclusive property rights over his grazing area on the basis of a land certificate that was obtained in accordance with state legislation.

Both state and customary land tenure systems are operative in Cameroon. The state claims all lands as national property and provides the option of converting parts of national lands into private property. As the respective administrative procedures are relatively complicated, costly, and time-consuming, the majority of the population relies on customary land tenure arrangements. Nonetheless, well-to-do individuals involved in profitable agricultural and pastoral business ventures have increasingly invested in land. Consequently, land has become a major subject and resource of economic and political power struggles, both within and between communities (cf.

³¹³ The term ranch here refers to the administrative category of a pastoral enterprise that supposedly operates according to the principles of market production. Ranching is seen as opposed to the extensive grazing system commonly practiced by Mbororo agro-pastoralists.

³¹⁴ 1,600m² is approximately 0.4ha which is the legally prescribed maximum size of a farming plot in the grazing area (chapter 6). If the Nchaney journalist's memory is accurate, it means that *alhaji Y*'s registered landholding does not exceed the legal limits, while his actual grazing area may be many times larger.

³¹⁵ On the customary land tenure system of Grassfields groups see Kaberry (1950, 1960), Fisiy (1997).

Dafinger & Pelican 2002, 2006, Diduk 1992, Goheen 1988, 1989, 1992, Fisiy 1992).³¹⁶

In the view of *alhaji* Y, the murder conflict was not so much rooted in competing land claims as in the considerable occurrence of cattle theft which had increased since the mid-1990s. In his opinion, farmer-herder problems could be resolved amicably by showing good will and following the administrative guidelines. Cattle theft, however, was an illicit and intolerable measure of retribution that had to be counteracted effectively. That is also the context in which *alhaji* Y placed the killing of Mr X:

Mr X used to steal cows, butcher them in the bush, and eat the meat. He has stolen more than 50 of my cattle and almost finished a whole herd of sheep. [...] When my herdsmen went to find out about the missing cow, they met Mr X in his hut drying the meat over the fire. He had a gun and a cutlass. The herdsmen saw the danger and started a fight. They wounded him seriously and left. He died afterwards from the injuries. When the village people came, they cut the head and buried it somewhere. They showed the decapitated body to the gendarmes and said it was us who removed the head to sell it. But this is not true. It was only a plan to incriminate my family so that it should look like a different story and not like a theft or a case of self-defence. [...] Since the villagers had a grudge against my family, they decided to use the incident. The real claim is that they accuse us of appropriating their land. Mr X was only used as a pretext. (*alhaji* Y, Nkambe, 20/11/01)

Alhaji Y deliberately distanced himself from the *cut-head* allegations. He denied his involvement in occult economies on the grounds of his Muslim and Mbororo identity, while attributing the deed to his Bessa opponents. Furthermore, by portraying himself as the victim of Bessa villagers' malice, he deployed a strategy common among Mbororo of depicting themselves as a vulnerable and exploited minority group. However, *alhaji* Y framed this argument in a particular way, stressing his outstanding educational background as the reason for his social marginalisation. In his view, it was his knowledge of his land and citizenship rights and his position as a government employee that rendered him a crucial opponent in the eyes of the Bessa villagers.

³¹⁶ The subject of competing land claims has been popular in research on Africa. The most recent publications include Basset & Crummey 2003, Evers et al. (2005), Juul & Lund (2002), Kuba & Lentz (2006).

10.5.2 (In)effectiveness of state and local legal prosecution

All parties involved in the murder conflict insisted on state legal prosecution, each trusting in the validity of their claims and the effectiveness of their individual and collective strategies.

From the Bessa viewpoint, *alhaji* Y offended the Bessa community twice, by allegedly murdering their member and by corrupting the case's prosecution. As the Bessa journalist pointed out, many Bessa considered *alhaji* Y's intervention at the appeal court in Bamenda as untimely and insolent. In their view, *alhaji* Y intended not only to effect the release of his followers, but to demonstrate his power and thwart Bessa opposition. If he had waited with his intervention until the suspects were taken to Bamenda, the situation would have been interpreted differently.

Moreover, the Bessa journalist was concerned about the interference of the Procureur Général, as BECUDA lacked the crucial network to counteract *alhaji* Y's influence:

I hold the judiciary responsible. I do not hold the gendarmes nor the state counsel [divisional judicial authority] in Nkambe responsible. I hold the authority of the Court of Appeal in Bamenda, the Procureur Général, responsible. [...] The Procureur Général, who does not even know Akweto, instructed that those people who had committed the murder were released barely four days after they had been arrested. How did the Procureur Général even know that the land is *alhaji* Y's grazing land? I believe that he was corrupted. Until today I know people who are boasting that they have corrupted justice. We will see the end. (Bessa journalist, Misaje, 03/10/01)

The sub-divisional administration required both sides to be law-abiding and patient and to await the outcome of the state legal prosecution. As we know, the case was finally dismissed from court because the Bessa witnesses withdrew their statements.

The venality not only of the judiciary but also of Bessa individuals was another crucial weakness consistently pointed out by Bessa and non-Bessa interlocutors. Accusing fingers pointed at the *fon* of Akweto who was seen as profiteering from conflicting land claims and whose stance in the murder conflict appeared to vacillate. A second person denounced for his alleged venality and deceit was the Bessa man who had guided the Mbororo herdsmen to the farm of Mr X. He purportedly witnessed the murder, but kept quiet. When his participation was proven by ritual specialists, he was officially exiled from the village. He refused to obey the judgement

and declared himself no longer a Bessa but a Mbororo. For many Bessa and BECUDA members this man was a traitor and represented the enemy from within.

10.5.3 Alhaji Y's social status in the Akweto community

Alhaji Y was distressed by the social atmosphere that ensued from Mr X's murder. He felt threatened by the Bessa faction that demanded the boycott on all interaction with Mbororo. Concurrently, he felt attached to Akweto where his family had been residing for more than sixty years and where he had accomplished his career as a government worker, a successful agro-pastoralist, and the prospective leader (*arDo*) of the Mbororo community.

Yes, I feel very insecure. My life is threatened. I cannot leave the area. I do not know where to go elsewhere. I have a lot of cattle, I have improved my compound, and I cannot go anywhere. [...] I have been born here and grew up with them [the Bessa]. So I feel like part of them. The only problem is that they should not steal my cows. I am very ready to be with them. They should not feel that I am a threat just because I am educated. (*alhaji Y*, Nkambe, 20/11/01)

Alhaji Y stressed that many Bessa individuals were on his side and ignored the instituted boycott. Furthermore, he pointed out that he was willing to support his Bessa neighbours and to participate in the development of the Akweto community.

Shortly before the emergence of the murder conflict, *alhaji Y* had agreed to collaborate in a school project initiated by Ballotiral. The project entailed the construction and running of a new primary school that was open to both Mbororo and Bessa children living in the surrounding of *alhaji Y*'s compound. Despite the tense atmosphere between Bessa and Mbororo during the murder conflict, the school project evolved successfully. Parents on both sides agreed that their children's education should not be affected by communal and individual differences. The Ballotiral staff corroborated the parents' approach and cautiously avoided any involvement in the conflict and its legal prosecution.

Finally, some Bessa informants argued that even though not everyone observed or agreed with the boycott, *alhaji Y*'s social status in the Akweto community was no longer the same as before the murder conflict. Possibly, *alhaji Y*'s alleged involvement in the *cut-head* business will be a long-remembered story, and the incident may occasionally be evoked to endorse hostility against *alhaji Y* and the

Mbororo community in general. In the long run, however, members of the Bessa and Mbororo community may opt for tacitly ignoring the incident, thus adopting a strategy of functional indifference, as exemplified in the investiture conflict (chapter 3).

Informants' assessments of *alhaji* Y's social situation within the Akweto community show that, while he succeeded in ensuring his liberty and rights by exploiting the state legal system and supposedly its corrupted variations, he inadvertently manoeuvred himself into a situation of social isolation. This finding is relevant to the theme of this chapter, as it illustrates the potentially adverse effects of legal procedural strategies on individual and collective social relations.

10.6 Conclusion

The murder conflict constituted a complex social situation in which multiple layers of individual and collective conflict converged, and which the participants attempted to resolve via procedural strategies, namely political lobbying and litigation. We could describe the murder conflict as an argument about land and cattle, expressed by an occult murder, perceived as an offence by one community to another, and complicated by the ambiguities of Cameroon's plural legal framework and its corrupted variations.

In concluding this chapter I will focus on two subjects relevant to the overall theme of this study, namely the role of ethnicity in the portrayal and perception of local-level conflict, and the possible long-term impact of legal procedural strategies of conflict resolution on interethnic relations in the Grassfields.

As I have argued in the beginning of this chapter, individuals and groups increasingly employ discourses of human, civil, and minority rights to provoke and ensure legal action. The analysis of the murder conflict, however, has shown that the successful exploration of legal avenues ultimately depends on the actors' socio-political and economic influence. Against this background it is striking that the murder conflict and related issues, such as conflicts over land and landed resources are rarely expressed in terms of socio-economic differences, but tend to be phrased in the idiom of ethnic conflict. The reason may lie in the divergent validity of the respective discourses (cf. Schlee 2002: 15-18). In the context of Cameroon's political liberalisation and international emphasis on human, minority, and civil rights, ethnicity has become a respectable and popular idiom for expressing local-level

conflict. Conversely, class and elite discourses tend to be associated with witchcraft and other forms of occult economies, and are largely excluded from official discourse (cf. Rowlands & Warnier 1988).

The second subject concerns the potential impact of procedural strategies on interethnic relations. Considering Cameroon's plural legal framework and its corrupted variations, the question emerges of the degree to which procedural strategies, such as political lobbying and litigation, promote the opponents' reconciliation and social integration. As we have seen in the murder conflict, they may reinforce ethnic and social divides, as individuals' and groups' attempts to realise their rights are often frustrated.

In applying Elwert's (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) conflict theory to the murder conflict, it becomes clear that litigation in Cameroon frequently evolves into pending rather than conclusive procedure. As Elwert (2005: 28-34) points out, conclusive procedure is defined by six indispensable criteria, namely an ordered sequence of action, the suspension of power differentials, autonomy in time, the indeterminacy of its outcome, a conclusive decision, and meaningful consequences for action. In the Cameroonian case, the suspension of power differentials, the indeterminacy of the procedure's outcome, and the meaningful consequences for action are often impeded by the practice of corruption. In considering the judiciary in Benin, Bierschenk (2004) argues that, on the one hand, corruption constitutes a necessary strategy to relieve the system, as the legal sector is generally understaffed and underequipped. On the other, it rescinds elementary principles of justice and thus undermines the legitimacy of the state. The same applies to Cameroon with the effect that litigation often does not result in the aspired resolution of the initial conflict, but increases the frustration and mutual resentment of the conflicting parties.³¹⁷

Similarly, successful political lobbying is closely tied to exploiting critical socio-political and economic networks. Thus, while in the murder conflict BECUDA largely failed to mobilise the respective networks, Ballotiral and MBOSCUA

³¹⁷ In his commentary (16/08/2006), Günther Schlee argues that a crucial factor determining the integrative propensity of a specific legal plural system is the presence or absence of a meta-platform on which the relationships between the various legal forums and their responsibilities are regulated. In the Cameroonian case such a platform obviously does not exist, and justice depends on the litigants' stamina and skills in forum shopping. Moreover, devising a comparative framework, Schlee proposes to distinguish three types of legal plural systems: those that impair social integration (as in the case above); those that have no impact; and those that contribute to social cohesion through general consensus.

(Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association) have generally been more successful in effecting legal action against state functionaries; firstly, because they took advantage of the government's recent (though superficial) campaign against corruption; and secondly, because they enjoy international backing (see chapter 5). Moreover, while on the local level the Mbororo may be an ethnic minority, on the national level they constitute a sizeable population group, which substantiates the relevance of MBOSCUDA vis-à-vis the state. The diverging success of ethnic elite associations in realising their claims towards the state may thus endorse the perception of conflict in ethnic terms and ultimately reinforce interethnic tension.

Finally, to assess the potentially integrative or disintegrative faculty of legal procedural strategies, we may turn to the findings of the Manchester School. As Gluckman (1955: 357-367) and Gulliver (1979: 1-24) point out, individuals with multiple and enduring cross-cutting ties more readily resolve their conflicts via negotiation and mediation on the local level, while individuals with single-stranded relationships tend to seek adjudication by state institutions (cf. K. von Benda-Beckmann 2003: 237). If we invert this argument, we may conclude that the promotion and pursuance of legal procedural methods inadvertently undermines interpersonal communication, joint decision-making, and compromise, all of which are strategies that contribute to the bolstering of multi-stranded social relations and endorse social cohesion.

At this point it is too early to provide a general assessment of the long-term impact of procedural strategies of conflict management on interethnic and interpersonal relations. Yet, we may suggest tentatively, that rather than reducing the potential for interethnic conflict and facilitating social relations, state recognition of citizenship, land, and minority rights has tended to discourage integration on the local level and to promote the polarisation and politicisation of interethnic relations.

11 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to consider the factors that support the coexistence of different ethnic and cultural groups in a state political context in which ethnicity has been endorsed as a key category of identification and representation. As the examples of Rwanda and Ex-Yugoslavia have shown, ethnic and cultural difference may potentially become the focus of violent conflict, particularly in a political setting that stresses these dividing lines. Cameroon of the early 1990s was a country in political transition, and incidents of interethnic violence occurred in the north-central part of the country and cost the lives of some fifty to one hundred people (Burnham 1996: 1-2). Against this background, I chose the Western Grassfields for my research where interethnic relations were equally strained but less affected by violence.

As a particularity of my work, I have employed a comparative and comprehensive approach, examining the coexistence of three ethnic groups in one location, rather than focusing on one group and their relations to their neighbours. Moreover, I have chosen a fieldsite that stands out through its multiethnic and cosmopolitan character rather than an established history and elaborate socio-political structures, for which the Grassfields are widely known. I thus complement the existing literature on the Grassfields with insights from thematic and regional angles neglected in previous studies.

My work also contributes to the considerable body of FulBe and Hausa studies. As compared to most pastoral FulBe groups elsewhere, the distinct socio-political development of the Mbororo in the Western Grassfields illustrates the relevance of historical contingencies, and suggests that there are no general criteria of 'FulBeness' that apply to all groups considered FulBe or Mbororo. Consequently, as Diallo, Guichard and Schlee (2000) have suggested, it is crucial to study FulBe groups in relation to their neighbours and as part of a regional unit. Conversely, in Hausa studies there has been no comparable tendency to diminish the diversity of Hausa communities found throughout Africa, probably because most Hausa themselves describe their group as heterogeneous. My contribution to the field of Hausa studies is mainly of an ethnographic nature, complementing the existing literature on the Hausa in the Western Grassfields with a female perspective.

The analytical framework of this work is theories of ethnicity, and integration and conflict. My study shows that Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa have different

conceptions of ethnicity, which shape their interaction but cannot account for their contrasting politicisation. Furthermore, in addition to considering the role of the state in shaping interethnic relations, I suggest including international actors and global discourses in our analysis. Finally, as concerns theories of integration and conflict, my study expands on Schlee's (2000, 2001a, 2004) concept of integration through difference and his elaborations on cross-cutting ties, as well as the conflict theories of Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) and the Manchester School.

Ethnicity in the Grassfields

In the course of this study I have engaged with a variety of emic and etic conceptions of ethnicity. While some of these models include a more essentialising view of ethnicity, others emphasise its instrumentalisation. In my understanding, which I share with most contemporary anthropologists, ethnicity entails the two dimensions of meaning and political mobilisation. In the Western Grassfields both dimensions are relevant. As I have outlined throughout the study, ethnic awareness and the recognition of cultural difference are critical factors that shape the self-understanding of individuals and collectives as well as their interaction with each other and the state. In this respect, the Grassfields resemble Mauritius where according to Eriksen (1998: 15) "the very construction of the social person is based on ethnicity".

In line with many authors inspired by Barth's (1998 [1969]) interactionist theory, my explorations have shown that ethnic identities are not primordial but socially construed and continuously adapted to changing circumstances and encounters with other groups. At the same time, a radical constructionist view of ethnicities as colonial inventions, as promoted by Amselle (1998, 1999 [1985]) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), has proven inapplicable to the research area. As shown in chapter 4, the current ethnic self-understanding of the Nchaney is rooted in processes of inclusion and exclusion that preceded the colonial period. I thus agree with Burnham (1996: 158-159) who argues with regard to northern Cameroon that ethnic identities have not been created solely by colonialism, but that the colonial period was a particularly productive moment for their politicisation.

Another finding concerns the coexistence of different emic conceptions of ethnicity. As my elaborations have shown, Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa differ considerably in the ways they view themselves and their relationship with each other.

They may thus be described as different kinds of ethnicities as well as different ethnic groups. A similar argument has been put forward by Feyissa (2003, see also Schlee 2003c: 54) in his study of Anywaa-Nuer relations in western Ethiopia, where he describes the Anywaa as representing an emic primordialist conception of ethnicity, while the Nuer stand for an emic constructionist interpretation.

The self-understandings of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa in northwest Cameroon differ somewhat from the Ethiopian case. The Nchaney conception of ethnicity may be characterised as interactionalist, a category absent in Feyissa's (2003) study. As exemplified in chapter 4, Nchaney self-understanding is three-layered and reflects subsequent stages of their historical encounters with other population groups and the colonial and post-colonial administration. Furthermore, it is highly inclusive and accommodative to ethnic and cultural difference. The relevant others are not ethnic others but politically autonomous groups, i.e. other Grassfields chiefdoms. Mbororo, Hausa, and Grassfields migrants resident on Nchaney territory thus count as members of the Nchaney 'clan', while those living on Bessa territory are considered members of the Bessa 'clan'. This model of identification is common to all Grassfields groups and has been adopted by the colonial and post-colonial administration.

Conversely, the Mbororo conception of ethnicity may be seen as representing a primordialist model, similar to the Anywaa in Feyissa's (2003) study. As outlined in chapter 5, FulBe tend to essentialise their ethnicity as an inherent moral quality that distinguishes FulBe from non-FulBe (*haaBe*). Furthermore, the Mbororo in the Grassfields define membership via patrilineal descent on both parents' side, which renders their ethnicity highly exclusive. The ideology of moral superiority applies to the ethnic as well as sub-ethnic level, and entails a variety of we – them distinctions, the relevance of which is defined by historical and regional contingencies. In the Grassfields the main categories of Mbororo identification are Jaafun and Aku, which emerged as a result of diverging migration trajectories and gained relevance in the absence of the Town FulBe category, here subsumed under the Hausa category. Mbororo identification is thus best understood as a dialectic process in which the presence or absence of ethnic and FulBe 'others' plays a decisive role. Moreover, changing political and legal frameworks have equally impacted on Mbororo self-understanding, as illustrated by the recent consciousness of a pan-Mbororo and indigenous identity.

As concerns the Hausa conception of ethnicity, we may interpret it in line with Cohen (1969, 1974, 1981) as exemplifying an instrumentalist or constructionist model. Similar to the Nuer in Feyissa's (2003) study, Hausa acknowledge the heterogeneity of their ethnic category and keep group boundaries permeable. As I have argued in chapter 7, Hausa self-understanding is not the same for all Hausa communities across Africa and has changed over time. While in the initial phase of their settlement in the Grassfields, Hausa ethnicity was closely tied to their occupational identity, this connection later subsided and it became defined primarily in terms of religious identity. Moreover, the Hausa conception of ethnicity is inclusive, yet in a different way than the Nchaney conception. As described in chapter 8, inclusion into the Hausa community is made possible via conversion to Islam and intermarriage, which entail that the individual switches his/her ethnic and cultural allegiances. Taking into account the small size of the Hausa community in the Grassfields and its lack of economic influence, ethnic incorporation is a relevant strategy to ensure the continued existence of the Hausa category.

Feyissa (2003: 440-441, see also Schlee 2003c: 56) argues that, whereas in anthropological debate primordialist and constructionist models are seen as mutually exclusive, in western Ethiopia the corresponding emic conceptions coexist and share reality. The same applies to the Western Grassfields where the two emic conceptions coexist besides a third, interactionalist one. In addition, I would like to emphasise that, while anthropological models stress either the cognitive or instrumental side of ethnicity, for people in the Grassfields their ethnic identity entails both dimensions.

The following diagrams attempt to illustrate the ways in which Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa group themselves and their relevant others. To add an etic perspective, I have included my initial working model introduced in chapter 1.

Diagram 11.1: Author's working model of relevant ethnic and cultural categories

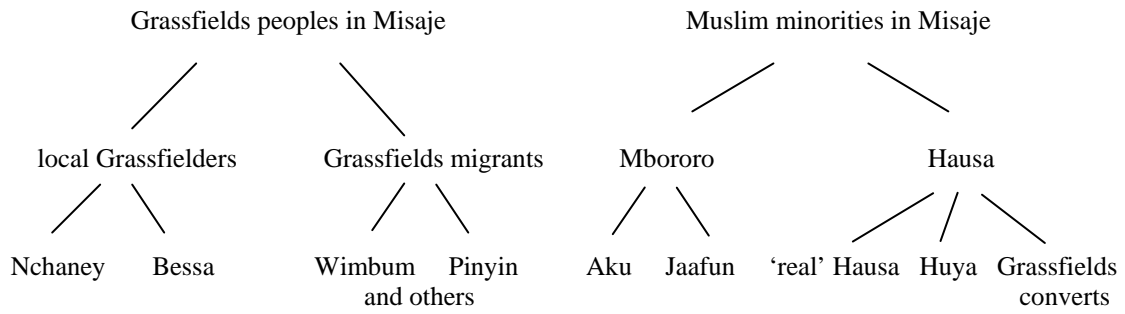


Diagram 11.2: Nchaney and Bessa model of ethnic identification

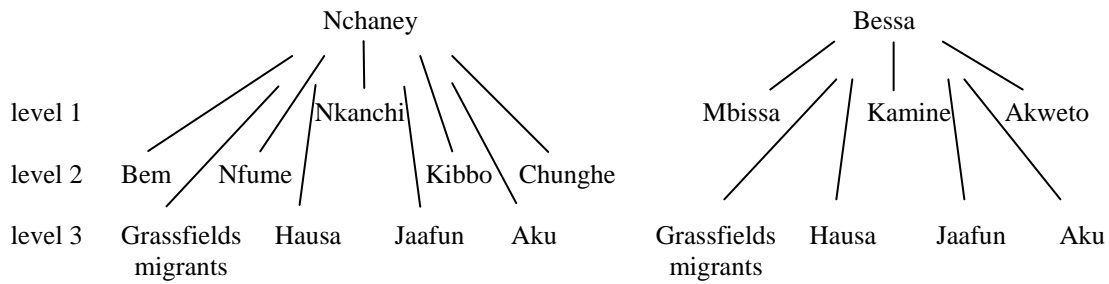


Diagram 11.3: Mbororo model of ethnic identification

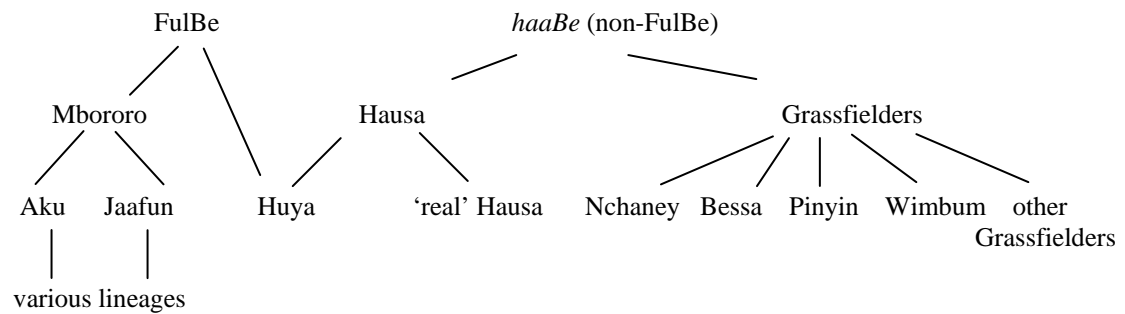
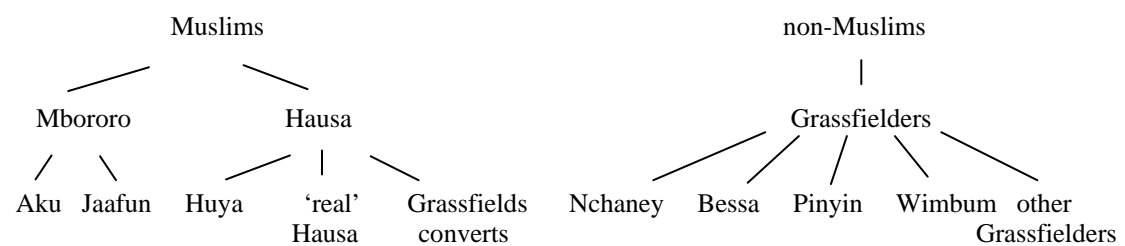


Diagram 11.4: Hausa model of ethnic identification



The different emic conceptions of ethnicity entail different ways of relating to each other. This study has provided comprehensive material to illustrate the contrasting expectations and approaches, or as Burnham (1996: 6) calls it, the divergent “cultural logics” of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, which colour and sometimes obfuscate their interaction and communication.

Corresponding to their inclusive self-understanding, the Nchaney expect their members to prioritise their political and territorial identity over their ethnic and cultural identities. Moreover, they tend to assess ethnic others by their own cultural standards. Thus, in the context of *fon* Richard Chefon’s investiture the Nchaney palace hierarchy called on the Mbororo and Hausa to comply with Nchaney imperatives (chapter 3). In farmer-herder conflicts Grassfields farmers expect Mbororo herdsmen to be sympathetic and apologise for crop damage (chapter 6). Similarly, in the murder conflict the Bessa applied ritual sanctions against their Mbororo opponent, assuming their efficacy across ethnic and cultural boundaries (chapter 10).

Conversely, the Mbororo with their exclusivist and discerning attitude are not willing to comply with Nchaney principles, nor do they apply their own standards to non-Mbororo. Starting in the colonial period with the Fulani Council, Mbororo have challenged the political authority of local Grassfields communities and have aspired autonomous integration into the regional community (chapter 5). Regarding conflicts over land they claim equal rights with their Grassfields neighbours on account of their long-standing establishment in the region (chapters 6, 10). In the social domain they have retained some distance; and while individuals may entertain personal friendships with Grassfielders and Hausa, and some youths may have love relationships, intermarriage with non-Mbororo partners is extremely rare (chapter 8).

The Hausa, finally, manoeuvre between stressing sameness and difference in their relations with their Mbororo and Grassfields neighbours. This has become obvious in the investiture conflict where the Hausa vacillated between resolving issues pragmatically and asserting their religious and cultural autonomy (chapter 3). While in political and economic terms Hausa often tend to comply with both Grassfielders and Mbororo (chapter 7), they emphasise difference in the religious domain, as illustrated by their denial of the numinous nature of Grassfields masks (chapter 3), and by distancing themselves from Grassfielders’ discourses on occult economies (chapter 9).

In the same way as the different emic conceptions of ethnicity influence the interaction of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, they may also shape their relations with the state. We may thus inquire if some emic conceptions support the politicisation of ethnic identities more than others, as Burnham (1996: 168) has suggested for northern Cameroon.

When studying different ethnic groups in one region, such as in the Western Grassfields or in northern Cameroon, one may be tempted to associate different conceptions of ethnicity with contrasting strategies of political representation. However, in a regional comparison this hypothesis proves inapplicable. To illustrate my argument I will compare Mbororo and Hausa strategies of political representation in the Western Grassfields and in northern Cameroon and southern Nigeria, as described by Burnham (1996) and Cohen (1969).

In his study 'The politics of cultural difference in northern Cameroon' Burnham (1996: 168-171) outlines what he calls "the ethnic projects" of Town FulBe, Mbororo, and Gbaya in the Mbéré Department in Adamaoua. He describes the Town FulBe as highly incorporative, the Mbororo as exclusivist, and the Gbaya as socially encapsulated. Regarding the groups' political mobilisation in the early 1990s, Burnham notes considerable differences. The FulBe who constitute the dominant population throughout northern Cameroon politically aligned themselves with the main Muslim opposition party. Conversely, the Gbaya formed an ethnic elite association to represent their interests to the state and neighbouring communities. The Mbororo, finally, did not come up with any collective voice but remained politically marginalised.

Burnham's assessment of the politicisation of Mbororo ethnicity is limited to the early 1990s, as the latest information integrated in his analysis is from 1994 (cf. Burnham 1996: 139-140). He thus could not take into account the emergence of MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association) and its political ascendancy of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which I have described in chapter 5. While MBOSCUDA's most active branches are in the North West Province and in the urban centres of southern Cameroon, it operates on a national scale and claims to represent the interests of all Mbororo. Thus Burnham's (1996: 168) implication that the Mbororo ethnic project was ineffective for political mobilisation is debatable. As the existence of MBOSCUDA shows, Mbororo ethnicity, despite its exclusivist character, can sustain political mobilisation under the condition that key

factors, such as an educated Mbororo elite with influential economic and political networks, are operative.

Similar findings apply to the Hausa case. As Cohen (1969: 190-194) shows with regard to the 1960s, the Hausa migrant community in Ibadan stood out for its politicised ethnicity, geared at securing economic and political privileges. By contrast, the Hausa of northwest Cameroon have not politicised their ethnicity in response to the political changes of the 1990s, but continue to pursue their interests via good relations with their Grassfields and Mbororo neighbours (chapter 7). Hence, as the two examples of Hausa immigrant communities illustrate, their emic conception of ethnicity may or may not support its political mobilisation.

We may thus conclude that there is no correlation between the kind of ethnicity – be it more inclusive, exclusive, primordialist, constructionist or interactionist – and its potential for political mobilisation. Rather, it is historical, material, and political factors that account for differences in the politicisation of ethnic identities. As concerns the contrasting strategies of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, I have suggested a number of contributing factors, including differences in group size and socio-economic influence, the groups' differential treatment by the colonial and post-colonial administration, and the presence or absence of an educated elite with international connections (chapters 7, 10).

A major actor in the politicisation of ethnicity is the state with its changing political and legal frameworks. Yet in the same way as local actors respond to new political avenues, national transformations are embedded in international and global politics.

Considering local, national, international, and global dimensions

Over many decades, it has been argued in anthropology that in studying a village or ethnic group we must broaden our scope from the local to the regional, national, and international level so as to develop a comprehensive understanding of the many factors that influence people's acting and thinking. Moreover, academic debates on globalisation have raised awareness of the global dimension, and the linkages between local phenomena and transnational or global processes. In my study I have attempted to integrate the different levels of analysis, and have considered the linkages between

local political strategies, national politics, international development policies, and global rights discourses.

As argued in chapter 2, Cameroon's democratisation was initiated in response to international pressure, and the constitutional changes of 1996 complied with global discourses on minority and cultural rights. The ensuing politics of belonging valorised ethnicity as a key category of identification and representation, and encouraged the formation of ethnic and regional elite associations. In response, local actors adopted the political discourses promoted by the Biya regime. While Grassfielders tie in with discourses of autochthony, emphasising their status as first-comers and 'natives' of the area (chapter 4), Mbororo link up with minority discourses and also claim indigeneity, arguing that their establishment in the region encompasses several generations and that they have no other homeland than the Grassfields (chapter 5).

Considering the linkages between the local and the global, the Mbororo example is particularly illustrative. As outlined in chapter 5, the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) is well connected to international development and global rights organisations, a linkage that has been facilitated by Mbororo migrants living abroad and by the recent accessibility of global communication technologies (e-mail, internet, mobile phones). It has been beyond the scope of this study to extensively engage with the Cameroonian diaspora in the Western and Arab worlds and its impact on local and national politics, though this remains a subject to be further explored and may become ever more relevant, as an increasing number of Cameroonians envisage a future abroad. Moreover, the government's acknowledgement of the Mbororo as a marginalised population group must be seen against the background of global discourses on minority and cultural rights. As a pastoral people the Mbororo correspond to Western notions of endangered cultures. Ironically, their assumed nomadic lifestyle may be less 'endangered' by national policies than by the Mbororo's desire for a more comfortable life.

Despite the significance of national and global policies, we should not ignore that the bases for current political claims of Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa are rooted deeper in history. As I have argued throughout the study, colonial policies were relevant in shaping the groups' self-understanding and their coexistence. As indicated above, the colonial distinction between 'natives' and 'strangers' is still employed by Grassfielders in pressing their claims on neighbouring groups and the state. Moreover, without the support of the German and British colonial administration, Mbororo and

Hausa may never have settled in the Grassfields. While they were subsumed under the political authority of local Grassfields chiefs, as required by the British system of indirect rule, the Mbororo benefited from administrative privileges which, early on, may have contributed to bolstering their political self-confidence evident today (chapter 5, 6). This argument has been further substantiated in a comparative article on herder-farmer relations in southern-central Burkina Faso and northwest Cameroon (Dafinger & Pelican 2002, 2006) where we discuss the effects of differing colonial and post-colonial frameworks on local conflict strategies.

Between integration and conflict

One of the key objectives of this study was to consider the factors that support the coexistence of different ethnic and cultural groups despite adverse political conditions. In outlining these factors I have drawn mainly on Schlee's (2001a) model of integration through difference and his elaborations on cross-cutting ties (Schlee 2000, 2004), as well as on the conflict theories of Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) and the Manchester School (Gluckman 1973 [1966], Turner 1967).

As I see it, the Grassfields constitute an example for Schlee's (2001a) model of integration through difference. Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa differ in many respects; they have different conceptions of ethnicity and political structures, and also differ in their economic specialisation and religious orientation. While in the early phase of their coexistence, these differences were more strongly pronounced, they have gradually subsided during the second half of the 20th century, with noticeable effects on inter-group relations. In chapters 6 and 7, I have shown that, as a result of economic diversification, competition over natural resources and market niches has increased. In the religious domain, the conversion of Grassfields individuals to Islam has resulted in conflicting claims to their identities, expressed at converts' funerals, as well as difficulties in managing multiple liabilities (chapter 8). Moreover, the inclusion of Muslims into the ranks of potential occult perpetrators has augmented the fear of occult aggression (chapter 9). As a consequence of the politics of belonging, established ethnic hierarchies have been contested and renegotiated, as illustrated in the investiture conflict (chapter 3). And finally, the Hausa's appeal to the Mbororo to consider both groups as part of a wider Muslim community with shared political interests has been viewed critically by the Mbororo (chapter 7).

While these examples illustrate some of the ambivalent effects of diminishing difference, the groups' growing integration has also been accompanied by the emergence of cross-cutting ties between Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa, particularly in the economic and social domain. Native graziers, for example, share the same economic interests with their Mbororo neighbours, and both groups of graziers are exposed to conflict over crop damage and cattle theft (chapter 6). As shown in chapter 8, Grassfields converts and Grassfields spouses of Muslim partners share allegiances with Muslim and Grassfields communities. They often act as conduits and facilitate communication and interaction between members of the two groups. Similarly, interethnic friendships bolster social and economic relations between Mbororo and Grassfields individuals.

Yet, as I have pointed out, the integrative faculties of cross-cutting ties are largely confined to the interpersonal level and to times of peaceful coexistence (chapter 8). In the face of political or economic rivalry, such as in the investiture conflict or in farmer-herder disputes, they easily lose their influence. Moreover, individuals with cross-cutting allegiances are required to take sides and may become favoured targets of criticism. At the same time, as evident in the investiture and murder conflict, cross-cutting ties facilitate the groups' reintegration after the conflict has passed (chapters 3, 10). My findings thus support Schlee's (1997, 2000, 2004) theory that cross-cutting ties have no active integrative or dissociative effect, but may be used by actors for either purpose, and generally help to overcome the disruptive consequences of conflict.

In considering conflict in the Western Grassfields I have structured my analysis around the following questions. What types of conflict are we dealing with? In which terms are conflicts perceived and what are the contributing factors? Which conflict strategies are prevalent and how have they changed in the context of recent political developments?

In my study I engaged with two types of conflicts; on the one hand, major, single confrontations that attracted general attention, such as the investiture and murder conflicts. On the other, minor but recurrent conflicts, namely farmer-herder disputes, cattle theft, and confrontations resulting from discourses on occult economies.

As we have seen throughout the study, there is a tendency in the Grassfields to perceive and portray conflicts in ethnic terms. The investiture conflict, for example, was phrased as a dispute over ethnic and cultural difference, while it was aimed at the

renegotiation of local power relations (chapter 3). Similarly, in the murder conflict, members of the Bessa Cultural and Development Association (BECUDA) attempted to define the issue as an ethnic conflict, whereas the underlying cause was personal rivalry over political office and access to land (chapter 10).

As concerns minor conflicts, my study has shown that they, as well, are rooted in diverging economic and political interests and that the conflicting parties do not correspond to ethnic groups. As outlined in chapter 6, in farmer-herder disputes, claims are raised against Mbororo as well as native graziers. Likewise, cattle theft affects both groups of graziers, though seemingly to differing degrees. Nonetheless, discourses on farmer-herder conflict and cattle theft tend to be framed in ethnic terms. Similarly, discourses on occult economies have increasingly been ethnicised. While conflicts over witchcraft allegations involve mainly local Grassfielders and their external elites, new potential for disagreement and conflict has emerged with the recent incrimination of Mbororo and Hausa in occult economies (chapters 9, 10). Moreover, villagers' distrust of traditional forms of witchcraft containment has engendered violent ramifications that have affected the relationship between local communities and the state (chapter 9).

I want to stress that ethnicity is only one dimension of conflict besides many others, although a prominent one. Gender and age differences as well as economic and social diversification are equally crucial factors that engender conflict within and across ethnic groups. As I have indicated in chapter 6, gender inequalities within Grassfields groups are a vital factor contributing to the exacerbation of farmer-herder conflicts. Similarly, contrasting conflict strategies of Mbororo youths and elders have bearing on the resolution of farmer-herder issues, and also affected the development of MBOSCUDA (chapters 5, 6). The antagonism between urban educated elites and the rural population is particularly pronounced in the context of discourses on occult economies (chapter 9). Moreover, as outlined in chapter 10, it is mainly socio-economic differences that account for individuals' more or less successful exploration of legal strategies.

As my findings indicate, ethnicity has become a respectable and popular idiom for expressing local-level conflict, while alternative idioms, such as class and elite membership, are largely excluded from official discourse. The factors that have contributed to this development are basically the same that account for the current significance of ethnicity as a key category of identification and representation.

Particular relevance should be attributed to the politics of belonging and the promotion of ethnic and regional associations, which obviously tend to portray conflict in ethnic terms, as illustrated by the role of BECUDA in the murder conflict (chapter 10).

Against the background of the unfavourable political and socio-economic conditions of the 1990s, it is notable that none of the conflicts considered in this study escalated in mass violence, as happened in north-central Cameroon (Burnham 1996: 1-2). Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that in the Western Grassfields there was also a strong tendency towards confrontational strategies, as exemplified in the investiture conflict and the violent persecution of suspected witches (chapters 3, 9). However, by the late 1990s and early 2000s alternative strategies of conflict management prevailed, which, as I have illustrated in chapter 10, have been inspired by global discourses on human, minority, and cultural rights, and have been promoted by international and regional NGOs. This tendency from more confrontational to more procedural methods of conflict management is not particular to the Grassfields, but may apply to the whole of Cameroon and probably many other countries that have been exposed to the same international development discourses and have undergone similar political transformations.

In analysing local conflict strategies I have applied the theories of Elwert (2001, 2002b, 2004, 2005) and the Manchester School, and have developed them further. I suggest combining Elwert's static model with the processual approach of the Manchester School, in particular Turner's (1967) concept of the social drama, as outlined in chapter 3. In the investiture conflict, actors alternated between avoidance and confrontation, which illustrates the possibility of exploring multiple and situationally changing strategies within one conflict. Moreover, I agree with Bierschenk's (2004) criticism that the conflict categories suggested by Elwert should not be seen as exclusive or alternative, but as complementary and combinable. In addition, I consider it valuable to extend the significant contributions of Eckert's (2004) edited volume, and to add more examples of avoidance and procedure.

In the investiture conflict two different strategies of avoidance became apparent. Firstly, by systematically circumventing the ceremonial ground and by situationally ignoring individuals wearing caps, Muslims and Grassfielders could have avoided the upsurge of conflict, particularly as such strategies of avoidance and mutual concession are relatively common in the interaction between the two groups. A second kind of

avoidance was practiced in a later phase of the conflict, when the two opposing parties deployed a strategy I termed functional indifference. By ignoring the existence of inherent contradictions and leaving the issue of cultural and religious differences during royal investiture rites unresolved, Grassfielders and Muslims achieved a temporary compromise that facilitated their reintegration and their continued coexistence (chapter 3).

As concerns procedural conflict strategies, I have engaged with political lobbying and litigation as well as the possible effects of pending procedure. As my elaborations have shown, it is extremely fruitful to integrate theories of legal pluralism in the analysis of conflict, particularly against the background of the recent proliferation of global rights discourses and notions of civil society, and their adaptation by local actors. As I have argued in chapter 10, in Cameroon the successful exploration of legal avenues depends on the actors' socio-political and economic influence. Moreover, due to the high degree of corruption, litigation often does not result in conclusive but pending procedure with the effect of exacerbating the conflicting parties' mutual resentment. I thus have suggested tentatively that state recognition of citizenship, land, and minority rights may promote the polarisation and politicisation of interethnic relations rather than facilitating the groups' integration.

To substantiate this statement I refer to discourses on farmer-herder conflict, which may be read as an example of the potentially negative effects of external intervention and pending procedure. As I have argued in chapter 6, discourses on farmer-herder conflict are largely the result of changing, but ineffective colonial and post-colonial policies that were aimed at resolving farmer-herder conflicts via prescribed procedure. Over the years, these discourses have assumed certain autonomy, and perpetuate the perception of Mbororo and Grassfielders as rivals over natural resources, while portraying community leaders and state agents as biased and corrupt. In consequence, farmer-herder conflicts have come to be seen as a problem, even in areas where actual incidents are rare. Moreover, actors occasionally revert to destruction and violence in resolving issues over crop damage and access to land, as they have lost confidence in procedural strategies.

Similar tendencies have been evident with regard to the containment of occult aggression, but diminished as traditional methods regained credibility (chapter 9). We may interpret this development as an indicator that – where available – local procedural strategies of conflict management tend to be more effective than state legal

methods, which are less socially embedded. With regard to Elwert's conflict model, I thus suggest distinguishing not only between conclusive and pending procedure, but also considering the degree of social embedding of different methods of procedure.

In the introduction to this study I outlined my understanding of interethnic relations as a bundle of multiple social, religious, economic, and political relations, which differ in their character and have transformed over time. Thus rather than searching for a single analytical concept to describe interethnic relations in the Grassfields, I have integrated a variety of concepts, such as inclusion, exclusion, sameness, difference, complementarity, competition, uneasy coexistence, and accommodation, which all relate to theories of integration and conflict, and which taken together may account for the complexity and historical dimension of ethnic coexistence in the Grassfields.

Such a differentiated approach towards interethnic relations may also help us understand the absence of conflict escalation in the Grassfields in the 1990s, and local people's pragmatic commitment to 'getting along' with their neighbours, the state, and their lives.

ACRONYMS

ACAT	Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (human rights NGO)
APESS	<i>Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane</i> (Burkina Faso based NGO)
BECUDA	Bessa Cultural and Development Organisation (regional NGO)
CDU	Cameroon Democratic Union (political party)
CFA	<i>Communauté Financière Africaine</i> (the franc CFA is the currency used in Western Africa)
CNU	Cameroon National Union (political party)
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (political party) also interpreted as <i>Chop People Dem Moni</i> in Pidgin English, meaning 'the party that eats people's money'
DO	Divisional Officer (administrative head of the Sub-Division)
EYPIC	Ecumenical Youth Peace Initiative Committee (human rights NGO)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FENAC	<i>Festival National des Arts et de la Culture</i> (organised by the Cameroonian government)
GERDDES	<i>Groupe d'Études et de Recherche en Démocratie, Développement Économique et Sociale</i> (group of Cameroonian scientists)
HIV-Aids	Human Immunodeficiency Virus, a retrovirus that causes Aids (acquired immune deficiency syndrome)
IMF	International Monetary Fond
KECUDA	Kemezung Cultural and Development Organisation (regional NGO)
MBOSCUDA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (national NGO)
MELA	Misaje Area Elite Association (regional NGO)
NACUDA	Nchaney Cultural and Development Organisation (regional NGO)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NOWEFA	North West Fons' Association (NGO with political aspirations)
NOWEFCO	North West Fons' Conference (NGO with political aspirations)
NOWEFU	North West Fons' Union (NGO with political aspirations)
NWLF	North West Lamidos Forum (NGO with political aspirations)
NUDP	National Union for Democracy and Progress (political party)
SCNC	Southern Cameroons National Council (political party)
SDF	Social Democratic Front (political party) also interpreted as <i>Suffer Don Finish</i> in Pidgin English, meaning 'the end of suffering'

SDO	Senior Divisional Officer (administrative head of the Division)
SIRDEP	Society for Initiatives in Rural Development and Environmental Protection (national NGO)
SODELCO	<i>Société de Développement d'Élevage et du Commerce</i> (national NGO, rival organisation of MBOSCUDA)
SODEPA	<i>Société de Développement et d'Exploitation des Productions Animales</i> (parastatal enterprise)
UN	United Nations
WADA	Wum Area Development Authority (regional NGO)

GLOSSARY

<i>abakuru</i>	Hausa; groundnut snack
<i>adashi</i>	Hausa; saving group, rotating credit association equivalent in Pidgin English: <i>njangi</i> , in French: <i>tontine</i>
<i>addu'a/do'a</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; prayer recitation or formula
<i>aku</i>	Fulfulde; hello, former greeting common among Aku (Mbororo sub-group)
<i>akuji</i>	Fulfulde; white zebu cattle, literally 'Aku cattle'
<i>alhaji</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa (from Arabic); courtesy title for a man who accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca (<i>hajj</i>)
<i>aljani/ginnaaji</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; evil spirits
<i>alkali</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa (from Arabic); Muslim judge
<i>alkyaba</i>	Hausa; coat
<i>anlu</i>	Grassfields language (Kom); women's socio-political institution of protest (alternative term: <i>takumbeng</i>)
<i>arDo</i> (sing.), <i>arDo'en</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde; Mbororo leader, especially of a migratory group
<i>ardorate</i>	administrative English; territory under the control of an <i>arDo</i> (Mbororo leader)
<i>arrondissement</i>	French; administrative unit, equivalent to a sub-division in Anglophone Cameroon
<i>asali</i>	Hausa; origin, lineage
<i>asiri/siiri</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; spell
<i>bahaushe</i> (sing.), <i>hausawa</i> (pl.)	Hausa; Hausa man, Hausa people
<i>ballotiral</i>	Fulfulde; working together, here name of a non- governmental organisation/partnership programme
<i>bami babi soshung</i>	Ncane; the people of those who are seven, name for the seven king makers of the seven founding families of Nkanchi
<i>banza bakwai</i>	Hausa; fake (Hausa) states
<i>baralla</i>	Fulfulde; Mbororo youth dance
<i>bi</i>	Fulfulde; child/son of
<i>bibbe gassungol</i>	Fulfulde; children of the packing net, here name of an internet discussion group
<i>boDeeji</i>	Fulfulde; red zebu cattle
<i>boka</i>	Hausa; ritual specialist, traditional healer
<i>bonba Yahdo</i>	Ncane; children of Yahdo
<i>book work</i>	Pidgin English; studies
<i>bordel</i>	Pidgin English; prostitute, prostitution
<i>bori/girka</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; possession cult
<i>boubou</i>	French; gown
<i>boyjo/ boy na'i</i>	Pidgin English (adapted from Fulfulde); Grassfields herdsman
<i>buche/butse</i>	Ncane/Nsari; family-internal witchcraft (alternative terms: <i>djambe</i> , <i>evu</i> , <i>tvu'</i>)
<i>bugaje</i>	Hausa; ethnonym for Hausa of Tuareg slave descent
<i>butinu/butene</i>	Ncane/Nsari; sassafras tree

<i>chwe/kwi</i>	Ncane/Nsari; witch (both genders)
<i>chombu ju-ju</i>	Ncane/Pidgin English; mask of the palace, acting as messenger and local police
<i>cobbal/fura</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; maize or millet dumplings, normally consumed with milk
<i>country-boys</i>	Pidgin English; Grassfields youths
<i>country-fashion</i>	Pidgin English; custom, socio-cultural practices
<i>country-man</i>	Pidgin English; ethnic fellow, Grassfielder
<i>country-people</i>	Pidgin English; Grassfielders, ‘natives’ (colonial term)
<i>country-witch</i>	Pidgin English; Grassfields witch
<i>cover shoes</i>	Pidgin English; lace-up shoes
<i>cut-head</i>	Pidgin English; trade with human body parts, in particular human heads, category of occult economy
<i>daddawa</i>	Hausa; spice
<i>daneeji</i>	Fulfulde; white zebu cattle
<i>dangi</i>	Hausa; relative(s), relation(s)
<i>deetawal</i>	Fulfulde; abduction marriage
<i>département</i>	French; administrative unit, equivalent to a division in Anglophone Cameroon
<i>deraaku/maita</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; witchcraft
<i>djambe</i>	Maka term (southeastern Cameroon); family-internal witchcraft (alternative terms: <i>buche/butse, evu, tvu</i>)
<i>do’a/addu’a</i>	Fulfulde; prayer recitation or formula
<i>dogari</i>	Hausa; escort, palace servant(s)
<i>doydawal</i>	Fulfulde; literally chameleon, here an occult medicine of enrichment
<i>ekong</i>	Douala term (coastal Cameroon); zombie enslavement, witchcraft of new riches (alternative terms: <i>famla, kong, kupe, nyongo</i>)
<i>evu</i>	Beti term (southern-central Cameroon); family-internal witchcraft (alternative terms: <i>buche/butse, djambe, tvu</i>)
<i>famla</i>	Bamiléké term (western Cameroon); zombie enslavement, witchcraft of new riches (alternative terms: <i>ekong, kong, kupe, nyongo</i>)
<i>fatake</i>	Hausa; long-distance trader
<i>fembene</i>	Ncane; home or palace of Mbene, historical settlement site of the Nchaney
<i>fewong</i>	Ncane; head of the village, our country, here the sacrificial site of Nkanchi
<i>feyman</i>	Pidgin English; confidence artist, conman
<i>feymania</i>	Pidgin English; (occult) fraudulence, confidence art
<i>fon (also spelled as foyn or mfon)</i>	Grassfields languages; Grassfields chief
<i>fondom</i>	Pidgin English and administrative English; territory under the control of a <i>fon</i> , equivalent to chiefdom
<i>fufu</i>	Pidgin English; porridge
<i>fura/cobbal</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; maize or millet dumplings, normally consumed with milk

<i>gaynaako</i> (sing.), <i>waynaaBe</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde; herdsman
<i>gaynaako bee saare</i>	Fulfulde; herdsman with a family
<i>gaynaako bee sawru</i>	Fulfulde; herdsman with a herding staff
<i>gaynaako coggal</i>	Fulfulde; cattle drover
<i>gari</i>	Pidgin English; grated, drained, and fried cassava
<i>ginaaji/aljaji</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; evil spirits
<i>girka/bori</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; possession cult
<i>goggo</i>	Fulfulde; paternal aunt
<i>gombo</i>	Pidgin English: okra, lady fingers
<i>gudaali</i>	Fulfulde; cattle breed from northern Cameroon, stocky, short-legged zebu
<i>Guinea corn</i>	Pidgin English; sorghum
<i>haaBe</i>	Fulfulde; non-FulBe people
<i>hadith</i> (sing.), <i>ahadith</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde/Hausa (from Arabic); narrations about the life of Prophet Mohammed
<i>hajja</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; courtesy title for a woman who accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Hausa bakwai</i>	Hausa; Hausa states
<i>hawka/kurwa</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; ghost of the dead
<i>henndu/iska</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; bush spirit
<i>imam</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa (from Arabic); Muslim cleric, religious leader of Muslim community
<i>iri</i>	Hausa; offspring(s)
<i>iska/henndu</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; bush spirit
<i>jagora/kullitowo</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; guide, helper, here social guide for Muslim convert
<i>jakka/zakka</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa (from Arabic); religious tax, alms
<i>jangali</i>	Hausa; cattle tax
<i>jihad</i>	Arabic; Islamic holy war
<i>ju-ju</i>	Pidgin English; individual mask, medicine
<i>juulBe</i>	Fulfulde; Muslim converts, literally ‘those who pray’
<i>kaaDo</i> (sing.), <i>haaBe</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde; non-FulBe, black African
<i>kaafahi</i>	Fulfulde; sword
<i>kafala</i>	Arabic; foster parenting, sponsorship
<i>kai!</i>	Fulfulde; exclamation, really!
<i>kaigamma</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; chief of slaves or serfs
<i>Kamerun</i>	German; name of the German protectorate
<i>kanwa</i>	Pidgin English; potash, also locally known as lime stone
<i>karfa</i>	Fulfulde; spell used to protect cattle against thieves and to drive someone away
<i>kariya</i>	Hausa; protection, here staff-hurling performance of Aku herders
<i>karuwa</i> (sing.), <i>karuwai</i> (pl.)	Hausa; ‘free woman’, woman between marriages
<i>katanga</i>	Pidgin English; cow skin, here name of a quarter of Misaje
<i>kawa</i>	Hausa; best (female) friend
<i>kawtal pulaaku</i>	Fulfulde; FulBe meeting, name of a Mbororo women’s group

<i>kendo</i>	Japanese fighting technique with sticks
<i>kibalaki</i>	Ncane/Pidgin English: the German barracks
<i>kiji</i>	Ncane; meeting place, group, original Ncane name for Misaje
<i>kilah</i>	Ncane; mask in charge of protection, owned by the Yahdo family of the Nchaney
<i>Kiloweh</i>	Nsari; original name of Bridge Five, a settlement on Bessa territory
<i>ki-nyo/le-nyo</i>	Ncane/Nsari; occult place of riches (alternative term: <i>msa</i>)
<i>kombi</i>	Pidgin English; friend, comrade
<i>kong</i>	Beti term (central-southern Cameroon); zombie enslavement or witchcraft of new riches (alternative terms: <i>ekong, famly, kupe, nyongo</i>)
<i>koroowal</i>	Fulfulde; chair
<i>kullitowo/jagora</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; guide, helper, here social guide for Muslim convert
<i>kupe</i>	Bakweri term (South West Cameroon); zombie enslavement or witchcraft of new riches (alternative terms: <i>ekong, famla, kong, nyongo</i>)
<i>kurwa/hawka</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; ghost of the dead
<i>kwi/chwe</i>	Nsari/Ncane; witch (both genders)
<i>kwifon</i>	Grassfields language (Kom); regulatory society
<i>lamidate</i>	administrative English; territory under control of a <i>laamiiDo</i> (Fulbe superior chief)
<i>laamiiDo</i>	Fulfulde; FulBe superior chief
<i>ladde</i>	Fulfulde; bush
<i>laya/layaaru</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; protective amulet
<i>lenyol</i> (sing.)	Fulfulde; lineage, descent group, ethnic group
<i>lenyi</i> (pl.)	
<i>luong</i>	Ncane; name of a Grassfields mask
<i>lugudi/lukudi</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde, medicine of enrichment
<i>madugai</i>	Hausa; caravan leaders
<i>madujo</i>	Fulfulde; old woman, grandmother
<i>mai gida</i>	Hausa; head of a household, landlord
<i>mai kalangu</i>	Hausa; professional drummer, literally ‘master of the drum’
<i>mai saje</i>	Hausa; master of the beard, origin of the toponym Misaje
<i>maita/deraaku</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde; witchcraft
<i>makala</i>	Hausa; maize-banana snack
<i>mallam</i> (sing.), <i>mallum'en</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde (from Arabic); Muslim scholar, person who completed reading the Koran
<i>mallam</i> (sing.), <i>mallamai</i> (pl.)	Hausa (from Arabic); Muslim scholar, person who completed reading the Koran
<i>mami wata</i>	Pidgin English; water spirit or goddess
<i>maquisards</i>	French; rebels in the Bamiléké area, early 1960s
<i>marabout</i>	French; Muslim scholar
<i>masa</i>	Hausa; maize snack
<i>matango</i>	Pidgin English/local Grassfields languages; sweet palm wine

<i>mbororoji</i>	Fulfulde; red zebu cattle, literally ‘Mbororo (Jaafun) cattle’
<i>Mbororojo</i> (sing.), <i>Mbororo’en</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde; a Mbororo person, Mbororo people
<i>meetaleewol</i>	Fulfulde; turban
<i>mimbo</i>	Pidgin English; alcohol
<i>mistiiraaku</i>	Fulfulde (Far North Cameroon); cannibal witchcraft
<i>mi yetti Allah</i>	Fulfulde; I thank God, name of a cultural association of FulBe in Nigeria
<i>moddiBo</i>	Fulfulde; Muslim cleric
<i>msa</i>	Grassfields language (Bum); occult place of riches (alternative term: <i>ki-nyo/le-nyo</i>)
<i>murshid</i>	Arabic; Muslim spiritual and legal guide
<i>na’i</i>	Fulfulde; cattle
<i>nchinda</i>	Grassfields languages; palace steward
<i>nchan</i>	Ncane; original ethnonym of the Nchaney
<i>nchanti</i>	administrative English; British colonial ethnonym for Nchaney
<i>ndotti’en</i>	Fulfulde; male elders
<i>ngambe</i>	Pidgin English; soothsaying
<i>ngambe-man</i>	Pidgin English; soothsayer
<i>ngare</i>	Hausa; embroidered gown
<i>ngumba</i>	Grassfields languages/Pidgin English; regulatory society
<i>ngumba ju-ju</i>	Ncane/Pidgin English; mask of the regulatory society
<i>ngwerong</i>	Grassfields language (Lamnso); regulatory society
<i>njangi</i>	Pidgin English; saving group, rotating credit association equivalent in French: <i>tontine</i> , in Hausa: <i>adashi</i>
<i>nji</i>	Grassfields languages; Grassfields sub-chief, advisor
<i>ntaa tvu’</i>	Grassfields language (Limbum); witch-market
<i>ntoh</i>	Ncane; palace, name of a quarter of Misaje
<i>nyamfuh</i>	Grassfields languages; mask that represents a beast
<i>nyongo</i>	Pidgin English (term common in the Grassfields); zombie enslavement or witchcraft of new riches (alternative terms: <i>ekong, famla, kong, kupe</i>)
<i>pettoowu</i>	Fulfulde; rinderpest
<i>pulaaku</i>	Fulfulde; FulBe complex of moral values and social practices, FulBe code of conduct
<i>pullo</i> (sing.), <i>fulBe</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde; FulBe man/woman, FulBe people
<i>ramadan</i>	Arabic; Muslim month of fasting
<i>renakama</i>	Hausa; name of a Hausa saving group in Misaje
<i>riga</i>	Hausa; gown
<i>Rio de Camaroes</i>	Portuguese; Prawn River, initial name for the Wouri Estuary that gave Cameroon its current name
<i>ro Gasa</i>	Grassfields language (Lamnso); name of the Hausa quarter in Kumbo (capital of Nso chiefdom)
<i>sadaka</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa (from Arabic); charity, alms
<i>salama</i>	Hausa; greeting, here name of a Hausa saving group
<i>salamu alaikum</i>	Hausa (from Arabic); greeting, ‘peace be upon you’
<i>salla</i>	Hausa; prayer, main religious festivities

<i>Sandi</i>	Fulfulde; Fulfulde ethnonym for Nchaney
<i>sannu</i>	Hausa; greeting, ‘hello’
<i>sarki</i>	Hausa; leader, chief
<i>sarkin hausawa</i>	Hausa; head of a Hausa settlement, Hausa chief
<i>sarkin pawa</i>	Hausa; chief of the butchers
<i>saro</i>	Hausa; inner garment
<i>sasswood</i>	Pidgin English; tree used for poison ordeal
<i>savon</i>	French/Pidgin English; laundry soap
<i>sawru</i>	Fulfulde; herding staff
<i>shah</i>	Grassfields languages/Pidgin English; maize beer
<i>shah house</i>	Pidgin English; local bar selling maize beer
<i>shari’a</i>	Arabic; Muslim law
<i>shey</i>	Ncane; title for an ex-chief
<i>siir</i>	Arabic; secret
<i>siiri/asiri</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; spell (probably from Arabic <i>sirr</i> , meaning secret)
<i>sippoygo</i>	Fulfulde; to sell milk
<i>soobaajo</i>	Fulfulde; friend
<i>soobaajo kaaDo</i>	Fulfulde; non-FulBe friend, Grassfields friend
<i>sooro</i>	Fulfulde; competitive stick beating contests between Jaafun youths
<i>suudu</i> (sing.), <i>suudi</i> (pl.)	Fulfulde; house, hut, also section of a lineage
<i>suudu baaba</i>	Fulfulde; father’s house, name for cultural associations of FulBe in Ghana
<i>tabital pulaaku</i>	Fulfulde; FulBe tradition, name of a cultural association of FulBe in Mali
<i>takumbeng</i>	Grassfields language (Mankon); women’s socio-political institution of protest (alternative term: <i>anlu</i>)
<i>tetchi nganko</i>	Ncane; the stones of Nganko, sacred sites of the Nchaney, also called ‘the stone that carries another’
<i>tie heart</i>	Pidgin English; persevere, take courage
<i>tokkere</i>	Fulfulde; herd of cattle comprising 50 to 80 animals
<i>tontine</i>	French; saving group, rotating credit association equivalent in Pidgin English: <i>njangi</i> , in Hausa: <i>adashi</i>
<i>tvu’</i> (also spelled <i>tfu</i>)	Grassfields language (Limbum); family-internal witchcraft (alternative terms: <i>buche/butse</i> , <i>djambe</i> , <i>evu</i>)
<i>unguwa</i>	Hausa; quarter
<i>unguwa rogo</i>	Hausa; cassava quarter (name of a quarter in Misaje)
<i>wainaaBe</i>	Fulfulde; herdsman
<i>wajiiri</i>	Fulfulde; messenger
<i>wakiili</i>	Fulfulde/Hausa; assistant of FulBe or Hausa chief
<i>wanzami</i>	Hausa; barber-surgeon
<i>wir Gasa</i>	Grassfields language (Lamnso); person from Gashiga
<i>yan kasuwa</i>	Hausa; sons of the market, stationary market traders
<i>yan koli</i>	Hausa; itinerant haberdashers
<i>yaro</i>	Hausa; domestic servant
<i>yelwa</i>	Hausa; freedom, wealth, abundance, here the Hausa name initially given to Misaje

<i>zakka/jakka</i>	Hausa/Fulfulde (from Arabic); religious tax, alms
<i>zinc</i>	Pidgin English; corrugated iron
<i>zuriya</i>	Hausa; descendant(s)

Technical terms

<i>bovine trypanosomiasis</i>	cattle fever
<i>cola anomala</i>	indigenous species of kola nuts in the Western Grassfields
<i>erythraphleum quineense</i>	sasswood tree
<i>phylum</i>	language superfamily, highest recognized level of hierarchy in language classification
<i>potassium carbonate or hydroxide</i>	potash
<i>sodium bicarbonate</i>	salt for animal treatment
<i>sodium chloride</i>	salt for human consumption
<i>sporobolus africanus</i>	aggressive weed, also known as Parramatta grass or African dropseed grass

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To download or view the video files, readers are advised to use Windows Media Player or VLC media player.

REPORT

by
Michaela Pelican
Ngeh Jonathan

MISAJE FILM FESTIVAL **26 - 28th October 2007**

organisers:

Michaela Pelican (Aishatu)
(MPI for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany)
Mfume Godfrey (The Post Newspaper)
Nji Ignatius Muluhtekwi (Microphotobarb Studio)
Abubakar Ahmadu (Ballotiral Nkambe)



Bah Jerome, Bebi Halima, Nji Ignatius, Haruna Kadiri, Michaela Pelican, Mfume Godfrey, Buba Ahmadu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our thanks go to all those who assisted in the organisation of the Misaje Film Festival which took place 26 - 28/10/2001 in Misaje Town, Misaje Sub-Division, Donga-Mantung Division, North West Province, Republic of Cameroon.

Our thanks also go to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale in Germany which sponsored the event. Additional assistance came from Ballotiral which supported the organisers with the technical equipment and expertise.

I am especially indebted to Günther Schlee, director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany, who encouraged me in using an audio-visual approach in my research; and also to Nuhu Salihu Jafaru, the Africa project coordinator of Village AiD, Britain, who lent his enthusiastic encouragement to the project.

We are equally grateful to the administration of Misaje Sub-Division for authorising the event.

Michaela Pelican, known in the Misaje area by the name Aishatu

December 2001
Misaje, Cameroon

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1. INITIAL PROGRAMME DESIGN

The initial programme was distributed and posters were hung in public places in Misaje and other villages of the Misaje Sub-Division. It was also presented in the Catholic, Presbyterian, and Baptist church, in the mosque, and at the meeting of the Islamic Youth Association in Misaje.

MISAJE FILM FESTIVAL 26-28th October 2001

organisers:

*Michaela Pelican (Aishatu)
(MPI for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany)
Nfume Godfrey (The Post Newspaper)
Ignatius Nji (Microphotobarb Studio)
Abubakar Ahmadu (Ballotiral Nkambe)*

Programme

Friday, 26/10/2001: The Muslim community in Misaje Sub-Division (for the Muslim community)

Jingi's video place, 2 pm – 5 pm

- Prayers at the compound of the Hausa chief and
Child naming ceremony at Musa Bala's compound 2 – 3:30 pm
- Graduation ceremony of Koranic students, compound of *alhaji* Yero 3:30 – 4 pm
- Role-play performed by the Mbororo women's group *kawtal pulaaku*
on the relationship between Mbororo and Hausa women 4 – 5 pm

Strictly for Muslim women only!

Holy War (meeting hall), 2 pm – 4 pm

- The life and customs of the Mbororo in the Misaje Sub-Division 2 – 3 pm
- The Muslim community of Misaje: Muslim holidays 3 – 4 pm

Saturday, 27/10/2001: Market day in Misaje and Misaje Drama Group presentations (for the general public)

Market Square, 3 pm – 5 pm

- Misaje Drama Group presents: Islamic Education (role-play) 3 – 4 pm
- Misaje market documentary 4 – 5 pm
- Misaje Drama group presents: African marriage (role-play) 5 – 6 pm

Sunday, 28/10/2001: National events celebrated in Misaje, Lake Nyos documentary, and Lake Nyos drama (for the general public)

Holy War (meeting hall), 4 pm – 7 pm

- Youth Day 2001
- Women's Day 2001 4 – 5:30 pm
- National Day / 20th May 2001
- Lake Nyos documentary (09/02/2001 & 05/04/2001) 5:30 – 6:30 pm
- Misaje Drama groups presents: The creation of Lake Nyos (role-play) 6:30 – 7:30 pm

(token fee of 100 FCFA)

Gala Night at Holy War, from 8 pm

(token fee of 200 FCFA)

2. FINAL PROGRAMME

Because of a number of unforeseen circumstances the programme had to be modified in order to suit the audience and achieve maximum response.

Friday, 26/10/2001: The Muslim community of Misaje

Morning session: Muslim Women's section (9:30 am - 1:30 pm, compound of Michaela)



Film languages: predominantly Hausa and Fulfulde

- Prayer at the Hausa chief's compound, 17/05/01 (ca. 30 min.)
- Prayer at the compound of *alhaji* Mbiame, 06/04/01 (ca. 20 min.)
- Graduation ceremony of Koranic students at the compound of *alhaji* Yero, 25/05/01 (ca. 30 min.)
- Child naming ceremony at the compound of Musa Bala, 30/09/01 (ca. 30 min.)
 - interviews with Ja'o Yaroko, Gaya Bala, and Suaibu Hamidu slaughtering the ram, and with the compound head Musa Bala by Buba Ahmadu
 - interviews with Larey Yusufa, Uwa, Halima, Husseina, and Asabe cooking for the occasion, with the grand-mother of the baby *hajja* Mohamadou, and the first wife Maimuna Wanzam by Bebi Halima and Talatu Yusufa.
- Marriage ceremony of Bala and Rukeiatu, 15/10/01 (ca. 30 min.)
 - interviews with the Muslim stepmother of the bride Baaba Kande, and the best friend of the bridegroom Kimbah Stanley by Talatu Yusufa
 - interviews with *mallam* Musa Sulei of the Islamic Youth Association and Bastos by Haruna Kadiri
- role-play presented by members of *kawtal pulaaku* (Mbororo women's group Misaje), 19/04/01 (ca. 40 min.)
 - scene 1: selling milk
 - scene 2: A Mbororo woman becoming a 'native'

Afternoon session: Muslim Men's section (2-3.30 pm, 4-5:30 pm, Holy War)

Film languages: predominantly Hausa and Fulfulde

- The Muslim community of Misaje (ca. 30 min.)
 - part I: Muslim holiday 'end of Ramadan', 27/12/01:
 - prayer ground
 - compound of the Hausa chief *mallam* Mudi Sarkin
 - part II: Muslim holiday 'feast of the ram', 06/03/01:
 - prayer ground
 - compound of *alhaji* Yero
 - compound of the Hausa chief *mallam* Mudi Sarkin
 - compound of Adamu Chinese
 - Islamic Youth Association
- The life and customs of the Mbororo in the Misaje Sub-Division, 2001 (ca. 1:10h)
 - compound of *mallam* Garba, Kidom, 10/4/01
 - compound of *alhaji mallam* Raago, Kimelin, 14/01/01
 - Chako area, 22-24/01/01: dry season pasture of *wakiili* Riku, compound of Orti, Islamic Primary School Chako, Chako market day
 - the cattle market in Misaje, 11/01/01, 12/04/01
 - marriage of Adamu Affang, Chako, 20/01/01

prayer break

- child naming ceremony of Mohammadou Basiru, compound of Danagu'en, Kimelin, 07/01/01
- youth dances at the compound of Suaibu Affang, Kimelin, 13/04/01
- Marriage of Bala and Rukeiatu, 15/10/01 (ca. 30 min.)
 - interviews with the Muslim stepmother of the bride Baaba Kande, and with the best friend of the bridegroom Kimbah Stanley by Talatu Yusufa
 - interviews with *mallam* Musa Sulei of the Islamic Youth Association and Bastos by Haruna Kadiri
- Child naming ceremony at the compound of Musa Bala, 30/09/01 (ca. 30 min.)
 - interviews with Ja'o Yaroko, Gaya Bala, and Suaibu Hamidu slaughtering the ram, and with the compound head Musa Bala by Buba Ahmadu
 - interviews with Larey Yusufa, Uwa, Halima, Husseina, and Asabe cooking for the occasion, with the grand-mother of the baby *hajja* Mohamadou, and the first wife Maimuna Wanzam by Bebi Halima and Talatu Yusufa.

Response from the audience:

- *Estimated attendance:*
 - Women's programme: 40-50 women, ca. 60 children
 - Men's programme: ca. 200 men and children
- *Feedback from Muslim women¹:*
 - 1) *Bebi Sheikh* (Fulfulde): The films I saw on Friday, I liked them a lot. When the children came and told me, they had seen occasions and dances in television, I said: this is a lie. On Friday, I decided to get up and I told myself: Let me go and see! There, I enjoyed it a lot. I saw myself at the naming ceremony and the marriage, I saw myself working. I saw everything. I like to thank you for your work. May Allah support you!

¹ Feedback obtained in conversations at the child naming ceremony of Yakubu Nasara (Misaje, 29/10/01).

- 2) *Asabe Musa* (Fulfulde): On Friday I did not have the chance to come, not because I did not like to come but on that very day, a child of my compound got married. If people came to the compound and did not see me, they would not have been happy. That would not be good. But there is another film you taped in my house, at the naming ceremony. I saw my mother, you, my friends and my children. I saw, you were sitting in the parlour, I saw you inside the film. I did not know that, I too, had entered the film.
- Before that, when they showed a film on television in the house, I was always wondering if Allah should make it that I enter. But now, I also talk inside people. Before, I was not able to talk when being with people. If there was a naming ceremony, even if in my own house, I preferred to hide until the people dispersed. Then I gave what I had to give. I could not sit with people and talk. You see, when we had the MBOSCUA meetings in our compound and people came, I used to go to another place to wait until they had dispersed before I could come back. Ammah! Now I know how to sit with people. When you started filming, every time you came, I ran away to hide. I did not want to see my body in the film. But when I saw my friends in the film, so I also came and sat.
- 3) *Sa'adatu Adamu* (Pidgin English): The film was so interesting. We saw a lot of things which took place in your compound. The naming which took place in the compound of Musa Bala, the marriage of Bala Bread, and the *addu'a* in the compound of *alhaji* Yero. We saw them all. It is difficult to name all the things because we saw many and they were all interesting. The one in the compound of Musa Bala was most interesting because I participated. I told people my name and it was filmed. Those in Misaje who never knew my name they now know it. I also saw you in other places where I was not present. All was interesting and we are begging that God should continue to strengthen you.
- Somebody like I never knew that I could be seen in the white man's country. Anybody from there who comes here will ask for 'Coco' and I will be shown to the person. Even if I die today, I will be existing in the white man's country. That one is very good to me.
- 4) *Larey Musa* (Hausa): Okay, the reason why our husbands allowed us to attend the film show is because Aishatu (Michaela) follows the law and she knows Islam. She does not admire men. The whole public was invited, not a selected few. I used to wonder how this film production is made. When I went to the film show I understood it and I saw myself. I was surprised to see myself on the screen speaking. It is because of her truth that everybody attended the film show. Because of this her righteousness may she succeed in her undertakings. May Allah help her with her work. She is now together with us and is behaving well. She is like a Muslim. Though she has not stayed for long we are so used to her and she is helping us. Our husbands talk well of her and they don't know how to thank her. Only God will reward her.
- 5) *Talatu Yusufu* (Fulfulde): The film show the women watched in Aishatu's (Michaela's) house was very successful. I saw women there whom I never believed their husbands would permit them to come. It is because of the respect Aishatu showed by going to the compounds of *alhaji* Mbiame and *alhaji* Yero that they allowed their women to come. When I saw their wives I was surprised. That is they permitted them to come because of the respect Aishatu showed to them and

also, because her compound is well fenced and for the fact that they never saw any man entering the compound. Really, Aishatu has followed the rules of Islam the way she took care of those women. When next she is organising another film show, even if it is in the market, I believe that those men will still permit their wives to come.

- 6) *Azumi* (Fulfulde): I liked it a lot. Because when you came here you taught us a lot of things we did not know. People like I never went to school. You came here and added a lot of things and knowledge for us until now. I learned a lot of things, like talking English and so on. I never thought I could act in a drama. It was only yesterday. Little did I know drama could come to Misaje. I like to thank you much for adding me a lot of knowledge.
- *Public feedback from Muslim men at the end of the presentation in Holy War*²:
 - 1) *Musa Abdullahi*: I like to thank Aishatu (Michaela) for the film. I was in Dumbu when I heard of the film-show and decided to come. I have come and realised that the film is so interesting. I think that the films for tomorrow and the day after will be equally interesting. I will be glad to watch them.
 Nfume Godfrey: Would you like to have this film on video and watch it again?
 Musa: Even if I do not have a video, some of my friends do. If I am able to do so, it is business. The main thing is to show the film to the public.
 Godfrey: This implies you can buy the tape and keep so that whenever you have a video you can watch the tape, isn't it?
 Musa: That is exactly what I like. The whole thing has interested me a lot. I also think that it has been good to others, especially those who have not been watching this kind of stuff. I believe there are some of my people who have seen this thing today for their first time.
 - 2) *Makossa (comedian)*: I thank Aishatu (Michaela) for the films she has shown to us, and which have made us to see the Hausa people, how they live and how they get married.
 - 3) *Musa Tukur*: One of our colleagues drowned in the river, not very long ago. I just happened to have seen him in the documentary. That is what interested me a lot. We thank Mrs Aishatu (Michaela) a lot for the production. I have realised that with the film she has given us courage to continue.
 - 4) *Nji Ignatius Muluhtekwi*: Thank you for giving me the opportunity. I want to first of all appreciate our learned colleague, Mrs Pelican from Europe for the great job which she has done in the Sub-Division. Most of us did not understand what television production is all about. If anybody should come today, he will be surprised that Misaje has produced its own film!
 Secondly, in the film I have realised the aspect of cross-culturalisation. I have seen Christians and Moslems working together. I have also noticed in the films that the Moslems are doing most of their things together. I will like us, the Christians, to copy that behaviour.

² Feedback originally in Pidgin English.

Saturday, 27/10/2001: Market day in Misaje and Misaje Drama Group presentations

Open-air film show in the market square (4:30- 7 pm, in front of the council office)



Film languages: English, Pidgin English, Hausa, Fulfulde, Ncane, Nsari

- Misaje Drama Group presents: Islamic Education (role-play), 13/02/01 (ca. 45 min.)
 - scene 1: in the class room
 - scene 2: reception of the guest teacher
 - scene 3: students' chatter
 - scene 4: visit to the *fon*
 - scene 5: parents-teachers meeting
 - scene 6: audience with the *fon*
 - scene 7: meeting with the administration
- Misaje market documentary, 07/04/01 (ca. 1:10h)
interviews with:
 - Bobang Victorine, Misaje counsel (market mistress)
 - Kande Faatu, selling milk
 - Napoleon Doh, family provision store
 - Nyapendo Jeinabu and Jeinabu Goma, visiting the market
 - Amina Wedelde, selling eggs
 - Mohamadu Haruna Dashi, bread store
 - Ali Bala, mixed items store
 - Magdalene Fuh, selling vegetabes
 - Sarkin Hausawa Dumbu, selling Hausa stuff
 - Algetti, butcher
 - *mallam* Idrisa, selling clothes and shoes
 - Martha Muluh, selling cloth
 - Julia Ma Ndakwe, *shah* house (maize beer bar)
 - Kimbah Stanley, park discipline master
 - Mbah Christopher, selling kola nuts
 - William and Bebe, tea house

- Bebi Halima and Talatu Yusufa, selling makara
- Ladi, restaurant
- Mbang Christopher, First Pharmacy
- Austin Tamfoh, Fari Tamfoh, HM CS Nkanchi, customers in a *shah* house (maize beer bar)
- paid herder, customer in a *shah* house (maize beer bar)
- Ignatius Nji Mlutekwi, Microphotobarb Misaje
- Role-play on land and inheritance presented by Ballotiral at CAMAUW workshop on land and inheritance in Bamenda, 06/03/01(ca. 15 min.)

Response from the audience:

- *Estimated attendance:*
 - initially ca. 400 people including men, women and children
 - at the end ca. 200 people, mostly children and men
- *Public feedback from the audience*³:
 - 1) *Dr. Ernest Ngu, medical officer at the Misaje Health Centre, commenting on the role-play on Islamic Education:* I am very happy that you have given me this opportunity to talk to you about the film which we have just watched. I will first of all thank Aishatu (Michaela) for her efforts, because not everybody can undertake a task like this; that is, to go into people's culture, learn it, sort out the good aspects, and finally to promote that culture, and also to eliminate what is not good about it, so that the culture will become stronger and will have a place in society. Not every aspect of a culture is good and also, not every aspect of a culture is bad. It is therefore good to promote the good aspects of a culture so that people should know about it.

We can see from the film that, for people to say a school should exist, is a problem. Some were of the opinion that the school should be while others were in opposition. In the final analysis, those who were in favour of the school outnumbered the others and that resulted in the creation of the Islamic school. We have seen how functional that school is and we should promote it so that many more children will be educated. It is also important that all the children who are always idling around in the market should make an effort to go to school whether they are Muslims or not.

Once more I will like to thank Aishatu for the good job she has done. I only regret the fact that I have come to Misaje at the time when Aishatu is about to leave. I would have loved to assist her by contributing to hold the place the way she is holding it.
 - 2) *Mr Nkenda Simon, Deputy Mayor of Misaje, commenting on the market documentary:* This film acts as a mirror which shows us the economic life of Misaje town. Unfortunately, we have seen that the economy of Misaje town is not booming. We have seen that most children just loiter around in the market. They should have been moving around selling oranges, groundnuts or pushing trucks in order to boom the economy. It would have been better for the young people to get up in the morning and engage in some farmwork before coming back later to drink *shah* (maize beer) or beer. This does not mean that we should not drink *shah*. We should try to work, before we start drinking later in the afternoon.

³ Feedback in English.

Appendix A

Mr Ignatius' business place is a good example to teach our children the result of whether they go to school or not. Mr Igna has a BSC in microbiology, but he has kept aside the degree and is doing business. He is a barber, photographer, and a retailer in cosmetics. He can train many of our children in these trades. I believe that if each and every one of us had done one thing to promote the economy of Misaje, we would have gone a step ahead. Each and every one should make sure that he does whatsoever he is engaged in very well. That is the best way to earn a living, and it will also contribute to strengthening the Sub-Division.

Once more I will like to thank Madame Aishatu (Michaela) for this documentary. I would have loved that all the people in the documentary were present to watch it. At times, they watch these things and feel that it can only be possible in the white men's country without knowing that they are real. We have always thought that they are all fictions. Now that most people have seen themselves in the films, they will believe that it is reality.

I would like that you develop these tapes and keep them on the market so that we can have access to them in future and also use them as souvenir to always remember you. I saw in the first film that you have come far away and it is you who is trying to educate us through your research. It will be good if it can be possible for you to take one of our children back for some training. You know that our country is a developing country. That child will come back with the knowledge and continue with the kind of work you are doing. This way we will always remember that Aishatu was here with us and has not completely left us, because we will see her work reflected in the deeds of the child.

I therefore thank you and also wish you more grease to your elbows, also success for your research in the Sub-Division. We will be of assistance each time that you need us.



Mr Nkenda Simon (second from left)

Sunday, 28/10/2001: National events celebrated in Misaje, Lake Nyos documentary and Lake Nyos role-play, installation of new Divisional Officer

Afternoon programme: for the general public (3-7pm, Holy War with a token of 100 FCFA/adult and 50 FCFA/child)

Film languages: English, Pidgin English, French, Fulfulde, Ncane

- Youth Day, 11/02/01 (ca. 20 min.)
- Women's Day, 08/03/01 (ca. 28 min.)
- National Day, 20/05/01 (ca. 33 min.)
- Lake Nyos documentary, 09/02/01 & 05/04/01 (45 min.)
 - boat trip on Lake Nyos (09/02/01)
 - explanations by M. Issa (5/4/01)
 - boat trip on Lake Nyos (5/4/01)
- Misaje Drama groups presents: The creation of Lake Nyos (role-play), 05/04/01 (45 min.)
 - scene 1: in class: geography lesson
 - scene 2: excursion to Lake Nyos
 - scene 3: audience with the *fon*
 - scene 4: on the Lake
 - scene 5: scientific explanations
 - self-introduction of actors
- Installation of new Divisional Officer, 24/10/01 (50 min.)

Response from the audience:

- *Estimated attendance:* ca. 200 people
 - *Comments gained from conversations with individuals out of the audience while watching the films:*
 - 1-6 by Michaela (M) in Pidgin and Fulfulde
 - 7-8 by Buba Ahmadu (B) in Hausa and Fulfulde
- 1) Conversation with *Mrs Angelica Ngobe* (AN) watching the Women's Day documentary (Pidgin):
 - M: How do you see the Women's Day?
 - AN: Women's Day was tough. You know I was not here in Misaje, I was in Kumbo.
 - M: Which group do you enjoy most?
 - AN: For the Women's Day, I think the one of Kumbo was very good. The one here was equally good. In Kumbo I was only an observant. If I knew, I would have participated here, especially with the Merry Sisters. The group is quiet good.
 - M: Do you enjoy the film?
 - AN: Yes, I do, because it is very interesting.
 - M: It is a pity the DO's wife cannot be here.
 - AN: I am just from her house. She has gone to Nkambe for a rally, I am sure she would have been here if she had the chance.
 - 2) Comment from *alhaji Mbiame* (AM) watching the Women's Day documentary (Fulfulde):
 - AM: Aishatu (Michaela), how is it?

Appendix A

M: No, it is fine. How do you enjoy it?

AM: It is fine. When is the Lake Nyos film coming?

M: It will come soon after.

AM: Okay.

3) Conversation with *Gambo Abashe* (GA) watching the National Day documentary (Fulfulde):

M: Gambo, you have come, I am very happy.

GA: Yes, yesterday I told you I will come today, so I am here now.

M: Did *mallam* Raago permit you to come?

GA: Yes, I told him and he agreed that I should come. The programme is very nice, I really enjoy it.

M: For which film did you come in particular?

GA: I heard you saying that the Lake Nyos film will be shown today. That is the film I have really come for, although the other ones are nice too. So, I will still stay a bit for the Lake Nyos film. Then I have to go back, you know the compound is a bit far.



4) Conversation with a young Mbororo man (D) watching the National Day documentary (Fulfulde):

M: So you enjoy this school bands and their leader?

D: Yes, I enjoy this sport. They learned this at school

M: Do you know how to do it?

D: Me, no I can't do it, although I went to school.

M: Where did you go to school?

D: In Nigeria. I went to school in Nigeria. I only came back recently.

M: What does it help you to watch this kind of films, that is documentaries of national events like Youth Day?

D: Yes, it helps me. It helps me to remember things that have passed.

Appendix A

M: Did you also come to watch the films of yesterday?

D: Yes, I did.

M: Which ones were better?

D: Ammah! The ones of today, I enjoy them more.

M: So, can you also identify all the traditional dances?

D: Yes, I know them all, because if you stay together with your neighbours you must know about them.

M: Do you also know to dance it?

D: No, I don't know. I know only our own. You see we are of many ethnic groups (lenyi), everyone with his own tradition.

- 5) Interview with *mallam Ibrahim Mogonde* (MI) watching the Lake Nyos documentary (Fulfulde):

M: Did you also go to Lake Nyos that day?

MI: Yes, I was there, and also my junior brother Musa. See him there.

M: There were many more Fulbe than 'country people' or Hausa, why?

MI: Yes, there were more Fulbe. Maybe they are more courageous. The 'country people' get easily afraid, the same for the Hausa. But for me, I don't fear. You can see Musa, *mallam* Raago and his brothers. No, we Fulbe, we are hardly afraid. See late Mr Ngobe

Minute of silence for late Mr Ngobe.

M: Many people like to drink that water, why?

MI: Me too, I was drinking that water. Just like that. But some people make medicine with it. You see, the Fulbe don't fear to enter the water to take photographs. See me descending from the tons where they snapped me! They don't fear the water because they are courageous.

- 6) Interview with *Dauda Ma'aji* (DM) watching the Lake Nyos documentary (Fulfulde):

M: Did you join them when they went to Lake Nyos that day?

DM: No, that day I could not join them. I did not hear about it in time.

M: Have you ever gone there?

DM: Yes, I went there before the disaster. And it was me who helped to wash and bury the dead bodies. But since then I have never gone again.

M: Do you like to go back?

DM: Yes, if I know about it early enough when there will be an excursion again, I will like to join.

M: Are you not afraid to enter the water?

DM: No. Why should I be afraid?

- 7) Conversation with *Danladi Sheif* watching the Lake Nyos drama (Hausa):

B: Is the film you are watching interesting?

GP: Yes, It is; because it brings civilisation. All what is being done, the news will spread all over.

B: A small town like Misaje has become big.

D: Yes.

- 8) Conversation with *mallam Unusa* (Fulfulde):

B: Welcome to you, *mallam* Unusa. I have seen you coming out of the hall. How did you enjoy the films?

MU: *Kai!* The films are very nice.

Appendix A

B: What did you see inside there?

MU: Ammah! I have learned a lot. I have seen Lake Noys, I have seen 20th May etc. I went to the Lake, and I entered the Lake.

B: Did it give you any satisfaction?

MU: Yes, it is very satisfying, because you see yourself inside this thing, you see your head inside, that is very satisfactory.

B: How did you feel about late Mr Ngobe you again saw in the film?

MU: I felt sorry, I remembered him.

B: Thank you very much.

- *Public feedback from the audience*⁴:

1) *Mrs Angelica Ngobe*: Good evening to everybody. I will like to first of all appreciate Madame Aishatu (Michaela) for her efforts which have enabled us to see things that are happening. I want to say, all of us have learned. I am one of the persons who accompanied her to one of her trips to Lake Nyos. Even though I consider it very sad, because I do not have eyes to watch. Everybody knows about it [the death of my husband]. But the drama in particular has transmitted the information. I will like to call on everyone to support her so that we should have many more role-plays and our children will learn from that. Even though my condition is not favourable, I will like that she should organise another trip so that I should be part of it and so that we should make another role-play which is more advanced than this. I appreciate her a lot. Thanks.



Mrs Angelica Ngobe



Mr Suh

2) *Mr Suh (gendarmerie officer Misaje)*: I am very happy. What I can say about our sister who has shown us these films is that she has thought us a very good lesson. It would be good if she could develop the films and leave them with us so that when she has gone, after many years, people can still see what happened during her stay in Misaje. Even the documentation has made me to see a friend of mine who passed away. This implies that people cannot just go away like that forever. We can still see them even if they have gone. It will be very nice if she leaves us some of the tapes.

3) *Ntoban Emmanuel (student of GSS Misaje)*: Good evening to everyone. I would like to thank our Madame Aishatu (Michaela) for this organisation. We have been able to watch the things which occurred some time in the past. I also thank her for making all these films, so that the young people of Misaje were able to come up

⁴ Feedback originally in Pidgin-English.

Appendix A

with a certain thing that other people can watch. I like the way she came. I used to hear of her and I have come to meet her. And I like the way she brought the programme that some of the creative people of Misaje have been able to develop their talents. That's all I have to say. Thanks a lot.

- 4) *Mr Mabah Paul (technician)*: I want to thank you for the opportunity given to me by the organisers to express my happiness for what has happened. At first, we used to watch only the American movies without even understanding what they are all about. Now, that our sister has come and has brought everything to the local level, that is why we see that the whole thing is so enjoyable I want to thank those who have tried to show their talents and also to really show the culture. Because of our sister, our culture, especially that of the Mbororo has been put into use again although they started to abandon it. We also see some of our own culture inside this society that we have neglected until it threatens to disappear. But even if she is leaving today, there are aspects of our culture which she has helped to bring to light which we will continue to practice and maintain. If anybody has learned something here, the person should to improve on it. We really thank her and also those people who support her to make this programme pass smoothly.
- 5) *Gentry Pierre (business man)*: I will like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to comment on the films which we have just observed. I will first of all thank Aishatu for her efforts in producing these documentaries. This is some sort of entertainment to the entire community of Misaje Sub-Division. I want her to continue.

Evening programme: Gala Night for the general public and invited guests (10pm-2am, Holy War with a token of 200 FCFA/person)

- presentation of a live drama: 'I hear say' (gossip)
- music and dance
- *estimated attendance*: ca. 50 people



Wirsiy John Ngalim, DO Misaje Sub-Division



Dr. Ernest Ngu, Misaje Health Centre

- *opening of the occasion by the Divisional Officer, Mr Wirsiy John Ngalim*: Good evening everybody. I want to thank the organisers for this programme which has been going on for over a week. It is what I can call a cultural week. It is good that when things are done in your own place, and you watch it by yourself, you really appreciate it. I want to thank Mrs Aishatu (Michaela) Pelican who brought up this idea and the colleague from Nkambe who have made the occasion to be a success. Once more I

thank you very much and I hope that you will really enjoy it. I feel that today, being the last day, you will draw the maximum satisfaction from the evening which we will have. Thank you.

- *feedback to the life drama by Dr. Ernest Ngu, medical officer at the Misaje Health Centre:* Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the drama we have just seen now. Really, it is good to avoid anything which is ‘I hear say’ (rumours). Just make sure you have witnessed the thing yourself before you start telling the story. Do not just hear from others and start spreading the news. So do not ‘hear say’ and ‘talk say’! Thank you very much.

Drama presented at the Gala Night, 28/10/2001: ‘I hear say’⁵

***Scene 1: in the palace
conversation in Ncane (N) and Pidgin English (PE)***

A nchinda (palace steward), a nji (sub-chief) and the fon (Grassfields chief) enter the palace and take their seats. We hear a knock at the door. The nchinda goes to see who is there and returns to the fon.

ncinda (N): Greetings to the fon. These people have come from the white man’s country, your Highness.

The fon sends the nchinda to call them. The nchinda accompanies the white lady and her assistant into the palace and shows them where to sit. They greet the fon in the traditional way, clapping for him.

fon (N): Tell them to sit down. Tell them that they are welcome. Tell the white lady who has come from far away that she is welcome.

ncinda (PE): Madame, the fon welcomes you. He welcomes you to his palace.

fon (N): Why have they come here? How is their country?

The nchinda translates to the guests.

white lady (PE): I have come to do research in Misaje. I have come to see how the Mbororo, Hausa and the ‘country people’ live together.

fon (N): Tell her that she is welcome. That what has brought her here is good. Ask her what she has brought to give to the ruler of the people. I am the big fon and I rule over all of this land and the people in it which you can see.

The nchinda translates to the guests.

The white lady asks her assistant to hand the gifts: a bottle of whisky and a kola nut.

fon (N): Thank her. Tell her that as she has come to my palace, whatsoever it is, that she wants she will get it.

The nchinda translates to the guests. The white lady crosses her legs (disregardful gesture). She is corrected by the nchinda that nobody is allowed to do so in the presence of the fon.

⁵ Original text translated into English.

The assistant asks the *fon* on demand of the white lady (PE): Your excellency, is it possible to carry out an interview now?

fon (N), translated by the *nchinda*: Tell them, that this is not a good time, that they should come any day next week.

The assistant asks on demand of the white lady (PE): Is it possible to take some photographs?

fon (N), translated by the *nchinda*: Today is not a good day. I will tell her when to come. I want to dress in the special *lala* (traditional gown) used by *fons*. She will come and take photographs of me.

nji (N): Your Highness, you should ask her to bring us some things for the palace.

fon (N), translated by the *nchinda*: She has seen how the palace is. Ask her whether she has brought any motorcycle or anything which we can keep in the palace. Ask her that.

The white lady is embarrassed. She signals her assistant that they should leave.

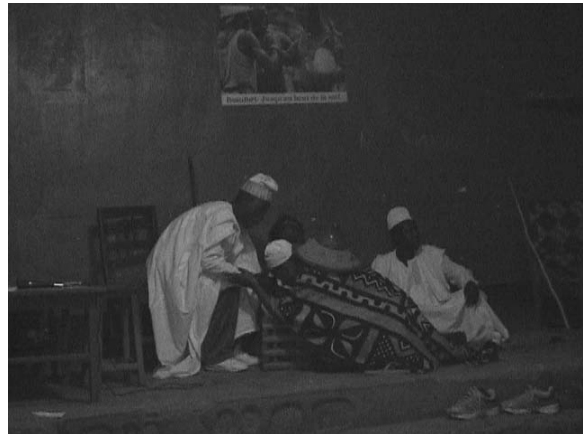
assistant (PE): Your Highness, we will have to leave now.

fon (N), translated by the *nchinda*: Okay, go well and sleep fine.

The guests leave. The fon, nji, and nchinda continue to discuss before they also leave.



Michaela, Haruna , Shehu, Bah Jerome, Ibrahim



Dawuda, Buba Ahmadu, Kimbah Stanley, Shehu

***Scene 2: in front of the compound of the sarkin hausawa (Hausa chief)
conversation in Fulfulde (F) and Hausa (H)***

The sarkin hausawa (Hausa chief) sits in front of his compound. The lame mallam Garga comes in and takes a seat next to him. They exchange greetings and begin to discuss about the white lady and her assistant Haruna who pass regularly to greet the sarki.

An alhaji comes along. He removes his shoes and takes a seat next to mallam Garga. They exchange greetings.

Haruna and the white woman pass by. They come to greet the sarki and the elders. Haruna has a gift for the sarki from the white lady, some sugar, and tea. The sarki is very happy. He greets both of them and shakes hands with the white lady.

Appendix A

sarki (F): Welcome Madame, welcome. How are you? How is your work going on? I am very happy about your stay. I hope everything is okay. Thank you very much for your support.

white lady (F): Thank you very much. Everything is okay. The work is going on well.

Finally, they pass on. The elders are happy about the present of the white lady, but they wonder, why at all she should give any gift to the sarki.

A pullo (Mbororo man) comes along. He removes his shoes and greets the sarki extremely devotedly. He takes a seat next to the alhaji. After exchanging greetings they begin to discuss.

pullo (H): Why should the *sarki* just look at this like that? Why is Haruna always travelling with that white lady? She makes him to stop being a good Muslim and to become a Christian.

alhaji (H): You are right, my friend. And after all, why should our *sarki* shake hands with this white lady when even the *fon* is refusing to do so?

pullo (H): You *sarki*, are you just looking at this boy without taking any action because the white lady is bringing you sugar and tea everyday? In the face of Allah, this is too bad!

Mallam Garga and the sarki try to argue against the pullo, but he does not even allow them to make any argument.

pullo (H): Pa *sarki*, if you will not take any action on this I will leave the village because this woman is just disturbing that boy, and worst of all, you are just looking at it like that!

alhaji supports the *pullo* in the argument (H): It seems you don't want to take any action on it.

pullo (H): In that case, I better go me.

The sarki makes attempts to explain, but the pullo and the alhaji do not even listen. The pullo gets up in rage, he puts on his shoes again and leaves the place. The alhaji follows his example and parts. Finally, mallam Garga decides to leave as well. The sarki is left behind all alone. He gets up and enters the house.

Scene 3: Buy'am sell'am in the market conversation in Pidgin English

seller 1: Excuse me, you have started selling *mimbo* (alcohol) in this our section!

seller 2: Mind your business. What, is it your problem?!

seller 3: What is all this disturbance. Can one not do one's business in peace?!

seller 2: The market is bad these days. One is not selling again as usual.

A customer comes and inspects some of the goods.

buyer: What do these women sell there?

The sellers all call for the customer.

buyer: What is this?

seller 2: Palm wine.

buyer: What do you mean?

seller 2: *Matango* (sweet palm wine).

buyer: Oh, *matango*.

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seller 2: Would you like to taste it?

buyer: No, don't worry. I don't drink *matango*.

seller 1: Come and buy my own item.

buyer: I don't buy anything which is close to *matango*.

While the customer is arguing and picks up some bananas to buy, the white lady comes with her assistant. They are filming in the market and she is teaching her assistant how to do the correct filming.

white lady: Let me show you how to film something correctly. This is an interesting scene in the market. We will film it and show our people. Do you see that man, he wants to buy. You see this button, it is the zoom of the camera, like this you zoom in and out, have you understood?

seller 3: What is this lady doing! What is she trying to do?

seller 2: No, I don't want it!

seller 1: This is TV. She is filming us in TV.

While seller 1 is very happy about it and smiles into the camera, seller 3 and seller 2 hide their faces.

seller 3: Why does she want to do that?

seller 2: I don't want it. She will surely want to take us to *mami wata* (water spirit).

seller 3: She surely wants to sell us to *nyongo* (zombie witchcraft). We are not going to allow that!

white lady talking to her assistant: What is the problem, what are they arguing?

assistant: They are saying that we will take them to a secret society, *nyongo*. Let's better go.

white lady: What is this all about?! I am sorry, we better go.

The white lady and her assistant apologise to them.

The sellers continue to argue.

seller 1: You see, now she has gone. People will surely see us in America. If you don't want that, you should better go.

seller 2: In that case I better leave. You did not even want me to sell alongside with you people!

Seller 2 packs her things and goes away.

Seller 1 and 3 call her back, but she has already gone.

seller 1: Wicked woman, go away! They want to show your image in America and you don't even like it!

Seller 1 also packs her things and leaves. Seller 2 follows with seller 4 who has not said anything in the whole matter.



Shehu, Azumi, Bebi Halima, TalatuYusufa, Liliale



Djingui, Kimbah Stanley, Shehu, Yaya

***Scene 4: in the bar
conversation in Pidgin English***

The Mayor sits at the table, waiting for the Brigade Commandant (BC) and the Divisional Officer (DO) to come for their break. He calls the bar man to bring the drinks. The Brigade Commandant comes in.

Mayor: Commandant!

BC: Monsieur le Mayor! How are you and how is everything ?

The Divisional Officer enters and greets everybody before taking a seat.

BC: Monsieur le sous-préfet !

Mayor: Where is that sales man? Bring us drinks you fool!

BC: Something is worrying me. Since the white lady came, she has never come to see me.

DO: Don't worry me about that white man woman. Give me drinks!

BC: She is in my jurisdiction! Me, as a commandant! Since that lady came, she is going about taking photographs and doing other things. She hasn't got any permit!

DO: Do you think you can challenge me? I am the one who is supposed to sign the permit.

BC: We are the ones to check the permit.

DO: If I don't give the permit, you will look for what to check?

BC: Mayor, it appears that the DO has taken something from that white man woman!

Mayor: I have heard of that already. I don't hide anything. I will tell you direct, I am in office.

They all engage in an argument. In the meantime, Haruna comes in with a paper from the white lady to see the DO.

Haruna: The white lady has sent me to give you this paper to be signed.

DO: Don't worry me with this now. This is not my office, we are on break now.

BC: I will lock her up. She must stay in the cell, whether she is white or not.

Mayor: I don't want anybody who is disturbing the peace in my town, the peace of my councillors.

DO: Please, Lord Mayor, excuse me. Just give me a second.

Haruna goes out.

Appendix A

Mayor: A Yaoundé man who can be considered an outsider comes to my town and does his work well (*referring to the Brigade Commandant*), whereas you, as a son of the soil, don't do the right thing (*referring to the DO coming from a neighbouring village*). Do you think I can support you, because you are the DO? What is the DO!?

Mayor, *now talking to the Brigade Commandant*: He has taken money, but to sign the papers, he doesn't want to sign them.

BC: My problem is that I will catch that lady today.

DO: You are too mouthy! What can you really do? There is nothing you people can do.

The DO goes out.

BC: Because he is the DO, he thinks that he can do anything. Who is he?! Mayor, the whole story is that the DO has something fishy doing without our knowledge. It seems that the white lady has brought a huge sum of money and he does not want to tell us. Since I am a gendarme officer, I will arrest that woman and lock her in my house. After locking her in my house for three days, I will then lock her in your own house.

Mayor: I don't support that idea! Lock her in the cell and not in your house! Is your house a cell?

BC: The thing is that my cell has got no section for women. Besides, now, that she has called for the DO and they are presently discussing about something I should go there and find out.

Mayor: I can see that you are struggling to cause a problem between the DO and that lady, so that you should interfere. Is that your plan? I don't want to be involved in anything troubling the DO.

BC: Let me go and see what they are up to.

The Brigade Commandant leaves. The Mayor struggles to call the sales man to pay the bill.

Mayor: Manager! Where is he? What is my bill?

Sales man: 11.000.

Mayor: What?! 11.000 francs! I will soon take my salary and ...

Mayor leaves.

The end.

Actors:

Scene 1:

fon

nji

nchinda

white lady

assistant

Bah Jerome

Shehu Usmanu Ali

Ibrahim Agha

Michaela Pelican

Haruna Kadiri

Appendix A

Scene 2:

sarkin Hausawa
mallam Garga
alhaji
pullo
white lady
assistant

Dauda Ma'aji
Kimbah Stanley
Shehu Usmanu Ali
Abubakar Ahmadu
Michaela Pelican
Haruna Kadiri

Scene 3:

seller 1
seller 2
seller 3
seller 4
white lady
assistant

Bebi Halima
Liliane Marouajo
Talatu Yusufu
Azumi
Michaela Pelican
Haruna Kadiri

Scene 4:

Mayor
Brigade Commandant
Divisional Officer
salesman
assistant

Shehu Usmanu Ali
Jingi Mohamadu
Kimbah Stanley
Yaya Salifu
Haruna Kadiri



team member in action (Abubakar Ahmadu)

3. GENERAL RESPONSE BY THE AUDIENCE NOTED DURING THE FILM SHOW

- *public response and social integration:*
 - Neighbours whispered at each other to point out interesting scenes.
 - Non-Muslims were equally interested in the Muslim programme on Friday.
 - Individual men were interested in the Muslim women's programme on Friday morning, passing by and inquiring what was going on.
 - Children and Mbororo girls were afraid to enter the Holy War on Friday afternoon. They took the chance to watch the film through the window.
 - The Fon of Misaje was also interested in what was going on the market square on Saturday. He observed the happenings from the window of his palace, but he could not attend because of his position.



Fon Richard Chefon

- *response to individuals featuring:*
 - People generally tried to identify the persons they saw in the films. They were not always able to identify them easily, especially if they resembled someone else
 - Spectators immediately reacted to seeing individuals who had died in the meantime. They were reminded of them and felt sorry, but valued the film the more, because it gave them the opportunity to remember the person of late.
 - Viewers enjoyed scenes with persons who know to make fun or to act.
- *response to projection's setting:*
 - People generally tried to identify the places, backgrounds and the occasions depicted.
- *response to language:*
 - People appreciated mostly films/sequences in their own language or at least in a language they could understand.
 - People reacted to actors or individuals who refused to answer in the language they are expected to use.
- *response to content of the film:*
 - Some Hausa women directly reacted to blessings given in the film (e.g. when calling the name of a baby).
 - Women enjoyed the songs of the women's groups they belong to.
 - The audience enjoyed dancing sequences, especially by good dancers or popular people.

Appendix A

- Hausa people easily identified ‘country dances’, which were generally appreciated and admired.
 - Mbororo girls and boys point out that they like the Grassfielders’ dances and that they might be able to identify them, but that they are not able to dance them, only their own dance: everybody with his own culture.
 - Men and youths were interested in watching the marriage at both Adamu’s and Bala Musa’s compound, since they normally do not have the chance to observe it, as it is a women-only event.
 - Youth and children were very interested in the Mbororo youth dance at Suaibu’s compound. No one, not even any Mbororo elder complained about showing the dance; maybe because I asked for their pardon in advance and those who did not want to see it, left before
 - People reacted with mixed feelings, especially non-Muslims, to Jao’s claim that failing to make a child naming ceremony identifies you with a bad or poor person.
- *requests by the audience:*
 - Viewers advised each other not to disturb but to pay attention instead
 - Individuals asked the organisers to keep the children under control so that they can better concentrate
 - There were repeated requests to show the lake Nyos documentary.



Appendix A

4. TEAM INTERNAL EVALUATION ON DAILY BASIS

Evaluation of day I: Friday, 26/10/2001

DAY I	successes/strengths	failures/weaknesses	proposals
Team level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good team cooperation and commitment • intuitive / flexible arrangements • everything went out well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no team briefing this morning • frequent changes of programme • underestimation of work load • no proper assignment of team members concerning their duties (job description) • some of the team members were missing in action because of hunger • Jerome completely missing in action • undermining team opinion by individuals • no arrangements for food for team members • no break time to relax or eat • failures in timing • failure of sitting arrangement for women • undermining prayer time by starting late (concerning women's programme in the morning) • duration of each presentation was not announced to the audience • money palaver (entrance fee and tapes to be sold) coming in at the wrong time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regular team briefing in the morning and evaluation in the evening • once the programme is discussed and agreed upon, we have to stick to it, changes only if circumstances warrant • all team members should be present and fulfil their duties (job description) • Jerome to be enrolled anew and informed about his responsibilities • decisions should be taken in agreement with all team members • food arrangements have to be made in advance • timing has to be set and respected • prayer times should be respected • audience should be informed about the length of the films and not only the content • money palaver has to be discussed and agreed upon: entrance fee Sunday 100FCFA (adults)/50 FCFA (children), Gala Night 200 FCFA • public announcement of programme from Nji Ignatius' place on Saturday early afternoon • animation before start to show the films, e.g. park boys (the armies), choreographic dance organised by Buba
technical level (quality of films & equipment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tapes were well edited • audio-visual set was in good condition • microphones were very useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transport of equipment not well organised • problems with the use of microphones • part of one film was not clear and the operator was missing to fix the sequence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transport has to be arranged in advance • setting the colours before starting the film show • get extension cable and florescent lamp from Nkambe • buy an exercise book to cut tickets on Sunday
audience level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good attendance (especially by men) • heterogeneous audience (Muslim and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disturbance from children • analysis of films shown did not work out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children should stay only in the extension part of Holy War on Sunday

Appendix A

	Non-Muslim) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elderly and young women sitting together (including in-laws) • respect of age/generations • animation before start by the women (dancing to gumba) • audience was interested and excited / moved, no early going out • guiding through the films in several languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complaints of people who did not get a personal invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysis of films should be preceded through animation by one of the team members, individuals should be picked out of the audience and ask to comment / evaluate the film show
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Revised programme for Saturday, 27/10/2001:

- 8 – 10 am preparations for drama to be presented at the Gala Night (story line and rehearsals)
- 1 pm start of announcements from Ignatius' place
- 3 pm setting of equipment in front of council office (market square), Sheikh has to be contacted!
- 3 pm animation with music and musical film (dombolo) from Djingui (responsibility: Godfrey)
- 3:45 pm introduction and rundown of film show (content and timing)
- 4 pm start of film show:
 - o Islamic School (drama): brightness has to be considered (45 min.)
 - o Misaje market documentary (1 :10 min.)
 - o African marriage (drama) : sound has to be considered (45 min.)
- analysis of films
- 7 pm handing over to Islamic Youth for their marriage celebration of Mallam Musa Sulei (Ardo) and Mallama Rashida Musa

Evaluation of day II: Saturday, 27/10/2001

DAY II	successes/strengths	failures/weaknesses	proposals
team level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • story line of drama for Gala Night has been created • announcements were successfully made during the day from Ignatius' place • moderation by Ignatius, supported by Godfrey, went on well • location of the side (in front of council office) was good • food has been provided for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rehearsals of drama for Gala Night was not achieved • late start, but not too bad (4:30 instead of sharp 4:00pm) • time wasted in organising the sitting arrangement • for the self-introduction Bebi failed to present herself • due to other commitments not the whole team could be present for the evaluation of day II 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • story line for drama has been drawn, actors have been informed, rehearsals are scheduled for Sunday early morning • Sunday sitting arrangements have to be planned well after the experience of the past two days; hall might even be too small to contain all people interested, since many people have mentioned their interest especially in the lake Nyos documentary

Appendix A

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all team members were conscious of their duty/assignments of the day • control of the crowd managed 		
technical level (quality of films and equipment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • market documentary was much more interesting to the people, because the images were bright and it concerned people they recognised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • content of the first film not bad, but because of the poor image quality people were distracted. Many people did not come with the intention of listening to any message but to see bright images. Therefore many people left about 15 min. after the start of the first film • the market documentary was too long and some of the interviews were not meaningful. The first part of the film was of poor sound quality. For a professional filming there should have been an overview of the market maybe filmed from Tailor Ndi's house. Also, the interviews should have been separated from the filming so as to avoid long, boring sequences only focusing on the interview partners (e.g. in Nji Ignatius' store, in the shah house) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for another time, better start with the market documentary than the poor quality drama so as to attract the people's attention • In order to present the Islamic School drama successfully to an audience, the drama would have to be replayed and filmed under accurate light conditions • for a more professional filming, interviews should be separated from images • tape has to be prepared as a present for the outgoing DO, Wirsiy John Ngalim
audience level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heterogeneous audience • much interest in the market documentary, especially when people well known are featuring or when a familiar language is used • much interest in the drama about land ownership presented by SIDO FORUM • good commentaries made at the end of each film by Dr. Ngu and Mr Nkenda Simon, Deputy Mayor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children disturbing (unavoidable) 	

Revised programme for Sunday, 28/10/2001:

- drama group meets from 7 am to rehearse the scenes
- entire team meets at 12 am to get set and integrate unforeseen issues
- benches have to be arranged for from the Presbyterian church and individuals, Ignatius and Jerome have been assigned
- Godfrey is responsible for designing the seating arrangement for the film presentation and the Gala Night
- Ignatius has been assigned to take care of the tickets
- Bebi has been asked to prepare food for the team
- start of programme at 2 pm, start of film presentation latest at 3 pm:
 - o national events (1:30 min.)

Appendix A

- lake Nyos documentary (45 min.)
- lake Nyos drama (45 min.)
- installation of new DO Etah Mbokaya Ashu (50 min.)
- end of programme latest at 7 pm
- start of Gala Night between 8 and 8:30 pm
- music will be arranged/provided for by Godfrey and Buba.
- Michaela has to provide enough money for entertainment of distinguished guests

Evaluation of day III: Sunday, 28/10/2001

DAY III	successes/strengths	failures/weaknesses	proposals
team level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team spirit worked out well although there were differing opinions at time, mediation was successful • gate fee helped to control the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliberate undermining of team opinion by individuals (concerning the drama) • delayed start of afternoon programme, but not too bad • Jerome was at times impolite and too strict when taking the gate token • Ignatius was double occupied and had to attend another meeting in the afternoon • delay of start of Gala Night because of general delay and drama practice • drama was prompted and arrangements were not made well in advance • Holy War was the wrong place for rehearsals in the evening (people watching through the window) • poor drama rehearsals • actors did not manage their roles and costumes • Godfrey had to carry out three functions: selling drinks, master of ceremonies, disk jockey • Buba was involved as actor and camera-man at the same time for the Gala Night • no budget to run the whole organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time consciousness • for another time, reminder of the Sunday programme by reading of programme in church services again and also broadcasting programme by a car moving round the town • for another time, augmentation of gate fee • live drama should either have been prepared well in advance or been left out completely to avoid any disturbance of the programme (solely Gala Night) • contact the invited guests again to ensure their attendance
technical level (quality of films and equipment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • projections were of good quality and very interesting to the audience • TV was in an elevated position which enabled the audience to watch the films less disturbed by people passing • DO appreciated quality of equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • video tapes not in place • audio tapes for Gala Night not in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • video and audio tapes should be arranged in advance • supplementary appliances (e.g. amplifier)

Appendix A

audience level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many people attended the video show in the afternoon with great interest • heterogeneous audience, everybody's attention was attracted by the screen • minute of silence for late Mr Ngobe • Mrs Ngobe's presence and comments were very encouraging • good feedback from the audience • no disturbances during the Gala Night • drama was successfully presented and appreciated by the audience, especially the DO and the doctor, although preparations started late, actors had to be replaced and rehearsals were poor • Misaje has the potential for good actors (e.g. Djingui, Shehu, King Jobe) • DO Mr Wirsy John Ngalim and Doctor Ernest Ngu responded to the invitation although they were addressed late 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy War is too small to host the population • married Hausa-women could not attend the film show because of the environment and the presence of their husbands although they would have been interested • long break between end of film show and start of Gala Night had the result that many people who were interested initially, finally left and went to bed • low attendance • not all drinks could be sold • most invited guests did not come • DO and Doctor Ngu were already sleeping when Michaela and Bebi went to call for them • people were not interested in seeing a drama live on stage but more in the video projections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • since Holy War is a commercial place and quite small, the town council should make an attempt to build a town or community hall, contacting NGOs working in this domain requesting for support
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General observations:

a) positive aspects:

- team members concentrated their personal efforts into organising the occasion
- everybody was committed and efforts were made to come to agreements by all team members
- team members participated out of philanthropic aim to disseminate information and educate the population
- team members got a lot of learning and experience in the audio-visual domain by organising the film festival
- equipment was of good quality and in very good condition

b) negative aspects:

- the workload and expenditures linked to the organisation of the Misaje film festival has been underestimated by the team which resulted in the fact that there was no co-ordinator assigned and no budget designed
- people, including team members, passed carelessly in front of the screen disturbing the audience
- insufficient time consciousness

5. FINANCIAL REPORT***1) Expenditures***

person	items	amount
Buba Ahmadu	fuel for generator	10.000
	fuel for bike	9.000
	repairs of generator	16.000
Haruna Kadiri	fuel for generator	3.000
	food for team members	5.000
Mfume Godfrey	drugs	2.000
	rent of hall	8.000
Bah Jerome	clearing the compound	2.000
Nji Ignatius	ink for stamp pad	1.000
Bebi Halima	food for team members	7.000
Michaela Pelican	5 video tapes	12.500
	photocopies	2.500
	food for team members	5.000
	transport of equipment Misaje	1.000
	transport of equipment Nkambe-Misaje-Nkambe	13.000
	advertisement fee, market office	1.000
	drinks for team members and actors	11.000
	rim of paper	3.500
	report (photocopies, binding etc.)	20.000
	miscellaneous	2.500
Total		135.000

2) Income

day	Number and price	amount
Film show 28/10/01	51 tickets for 50 FCFA/each for gate token	2.550 FCFA
	134 tickets for 100 FCFA/each for gate token	13.400 FCFA
Gala night 28/10/01	33 tickets for 200 FCFA/each for gate token	6.500 FCFA
Total		22.450 FCFA

3) Compensation for involvement and assistance

person	post	amount	signatures
Michaela Aisha	organising team member	Turned down	
Buba Ahmadou	organising team member	Turned down	
Nfume Godfrey	organising team member (including compensation for helpers)	12.450 FCFA	
Nji Ignatius	organising team member	10.000 FCFA	
Haruna Kadiri	organising team member	10.000 FCFA	
Bebi Halima Sarki	organising team member	10.000 FCFA	
Bah Jerome	assistant	5.000 FCFA	
Total		47.450 FCFA	

4) Total expenditures: 135.000 + 47.450 – 22.450 = 160.000 FCFA

6. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REALISATION OF MISAJE FILM FESTIVAL

Brain storming session attended by Abubakar Ahmadu, Michaela Pelican, and Ngeh Jonathan (01/11/2001)

Team management:

- you must know well the people you are working with
- when preparing a film festival you must be careful with assertive people
- in the course of generating a programme for the film festival you must be categorical, frequent changes causing a lot of disturbances and misunderstandings should be avoided
- all team members need to make known their objectives
- clear deliberations of functions, need for co-ordinator without imposing any hierarchy
- in taking up responsibility for your assignments, don't give chance to anyone to take over your function which will only cause confusion and problems
- patience is absolutely necessary in team management and interaction with the public
- mediation is necessary to avoid conflict

Organisational aspects:

- workload should not be underestimated
- you have to prepare materially and financially in advance (programme, budget, video tapes etc.), i.e. sustainability of carrying out a film festival depends on your planning
- public relations (acquaintances) is a tool to mobilise resource persons and general assistance
- first priority in choice of films/documentaries: the audience's taste has to be taken into consideration
- time consciousness
- A certain amount of flexibility is appropriate and helpful



Mfume Godfrey

Audience's feedback:

- The audience was heterogeneous in terms of ethnic background, age and gender.
- There was a tendency of children and youths to be overrepresented.
- There was generally positive feedback to films presented
- The audience was more interested in clear pictures than messages.
- Spectators enjoyed to watch themselves or people they are close to.
- The language diversity in the productions reflects the reality in Misaje of communication being limited.
- The audience enjoyed the fact that the films are produced in Misaje, which is a new experience and gives them the impression of development: Misaje is no longer a village, but a town.
- The audience appreciated especially the documentary of Lake Nyos. Due to the fact that many never had the opportunity to visit the lake personally, they at least felt that they had seen the lake now through the film.
- Muslim women explained, they never actually knew that they were filmed and only realised it when seeing themselves. They felt happy and proud that, although they do not have the means, their images will go abroad and therefore they will be there.
- Muslim women expressed a feeling of empowerment. They no longer feared to be filmed and to talk openly.
- People also asked about the reactions of the audience when these films were shown in Germany.
- Some of the films left the audience with open questions (e.g. the drama on the creation of lake Nyos) of which the outcome is unpredictable.
- Participants in the drama productions compared themselves to renowned international actors. They also expressed their pride that their images will be shown all over.
- Individuals who were able to express themselves in public were mostly members of the educated elite.
- More feedback should be expected from personal conversation
- The Gala Night caused confusion because of admission fee, late start and late ending (mothers had to chase their children)
- Many people showed interest in the rehearsals of the live role-play in the Holy War and watched us through the windows.
- There were frequent requests to show some of the films again, especially the Lake Nyos documentary, or to leave a copy of the video cassettes in Misaje.



7. FINAL REMARKS BY TEAM MEMBERS

Nji Ignatius Muluhtekwi:

Thank you very much. I just want to appreciate all the efforts that have been put into this venture. Everything has come to pass successfully. I want to congratulate everyone of us for active participation, and also to encourage us by saying that the small token which we have received from Aishatu (Michaela) should not be looked upon as compensation but just as a word of encouragement. We can not expect to have everything we need in this kind of venture. But we thank God that the message has gone to the community and that will be our benefit.

I want to thank especially Mr Mfume Godfrey for his active participation, coherent approach to a lot of things, ideas which have led so much to our success. Also Mr Buba from Nkambe. We expect that if we should have a show like this again, it will really marvel not only the people of Misaje but of the whole Sub-Division. Once more I will like to thank Miss Michaela Pelican for this initiative. Thank you.



Nji Ignatius



Mfume Godfrey

Mfume Godfrey:

Apart from the team assessment of what has taken place so far, for the organisation of this film festival, I am very happy. We have sampled out the weaknesses and the achievements. I want to be specially grateful to Miss Aishatu (Michaela) Pelican. For whether by design or coincidence, in fact, being really an anthropologist. I see her really work as an anthropologist in the sense that she is doing everything possible to bring people together.

I want to be specially thankful to the fact that I knew Buba, but we were never so close. This occasion has reinforced and brought us together. From now hence, we will continue to be together in the same spirit as we were during this Film Festival.

I therefore thank all the team members heartedly for the oneness and cooperation that has led to the success of the festival. We therefore wish that you should take home this message of appreciation back to your institute. If we had the powers to qualify you, we would have done so right away. Thank you very much.

Haruna Kadiri:

I thank everybody who participated in this our Film Festival, especially Mr Godfrey, Buba and Ignatius. Much of the thanks goes to Michaela Pelican who has tried in managing us and in doing most of the things. That is all I can say. Thanks to everybody.



Haruna Kadiri



Abubakar Ahmadou

Abubakar Ahmadou:

In fact, my thanks goes to the almighty God, that is to Allah, for really giving us the strength to carry on with this festival. It has been a big learning process for me. As part of my role in the project which I am working with, which is Ballotiral, this is the same thing I have to be doing, and this is like a test for me. You know, life is a challenge, and sometimes when you are with human beings, patience is one thing. Even from the start of the festival we had some problems and difficulties on the way. But, we have really done it. Nobody believed that it would have happened like this. Although we minimised it at the beginning, by the end of the day, we all realised that it was something big. I believe that we are all learners.

I will extend my thanks to all the team especially those who were with us from the start: Mr Godfrey, Mr Ingatius, Haruna who has been keeping us very well by cooking us tea all the time, and Mr Jerome though always missing in action; and also Jonathan who has come a long way from Buea just to see that everything is fine, and he has done it. Also to Patrick who has just left us like that. I don't want to say missing in action but he has left us and has done a great part I mean even by being here; also to the out-going DO of Misaje who has had all the time to come and sit with us till the end. Thanks for the support.

Also to Michaela Pelican for her efforts and patience that she has with these 'black African trouble people'. To work with people from different backgrounds, she has really done it. I wonder if it is easy to find a European who will have this patience. Anybody can say anything to her and she just takes it like that. Maybe it is part of anthropological research. I will say thank you very much and I hope, in future, it will be more than this. Thank you.

Michaela Pelican:

I will like to thank everybody who has been part of this team and who has been part of the drama group, anybody who has supported this film show in any way either as an actor, someone who has been filmed or an audient and the whole population of Misaje, those who have come from far and near to witness the occasion. Those who have come from Bamenda, Nkambe and other areas of Misaje Sub-Division. Special thanks go to the DO who has supported this occasion together with the Doctor. Also all the people who have not only supported the occasion but my research which is the basis for this very occasion.

I hope that we have succeeded with this our film show because we have put a lot of efforts in it to try to disseminate the information that has been gathered to the people and I hope that the message has reached them and that everybody is full of joy and will remember this occasion. Thank you.



Michaela Pelican



Ngeh Jonathan

Ngeh Jonathan (ironic comment):

To me, you see the whole occasion was ... I am not very satisfied with it. I am a disgruntling man. Ever since I came here, I was hoping to get something big. Unfortunately, since I came here no bottle of beer from anybody. Nobody cares a damn about me. I left all the way from Buea to come here. Nobody really cares. I will reserve my comments for now until when you guys must have given me a bottle of something. Except for my man Buba who actually tried to mention something good about me – but Buba, you know, I will not really thank you fully because you are always coming to me and going back, but it is ok.

Bebi Halima Sarki:

It was very interesting! For all of us, not only me. Whoever saw the film, said the film was nice. They used to say, we are only joking. But when they came to see it before yesterday in your house, whoever came talked about it. They thought it is a lie but now they know it is true. Until some even said, next time, they will also act, they will make their own drama. I propose the Hausa women act their own drama, there is no one yet in Hausa.



Bebi Halima Sarki



Bah Jerome

Bah Jerome:

Concerning the Film Festival I feel fine. A lot of things in the films have made me to at least understand the nature of your work. When you first came, each time you asked us to do something, we did not know exactly what you are out for. We saw the trip to Lake Nyos which gave some of the people in Misaje an opportunity to see the lake on TV. Most of the people who don't know about your work, it has made them to understand that you are here for your research and they see everything, they understand it. The dramas were equally good. When I used to see dramas on screen I was not able to follow up or understand how they were

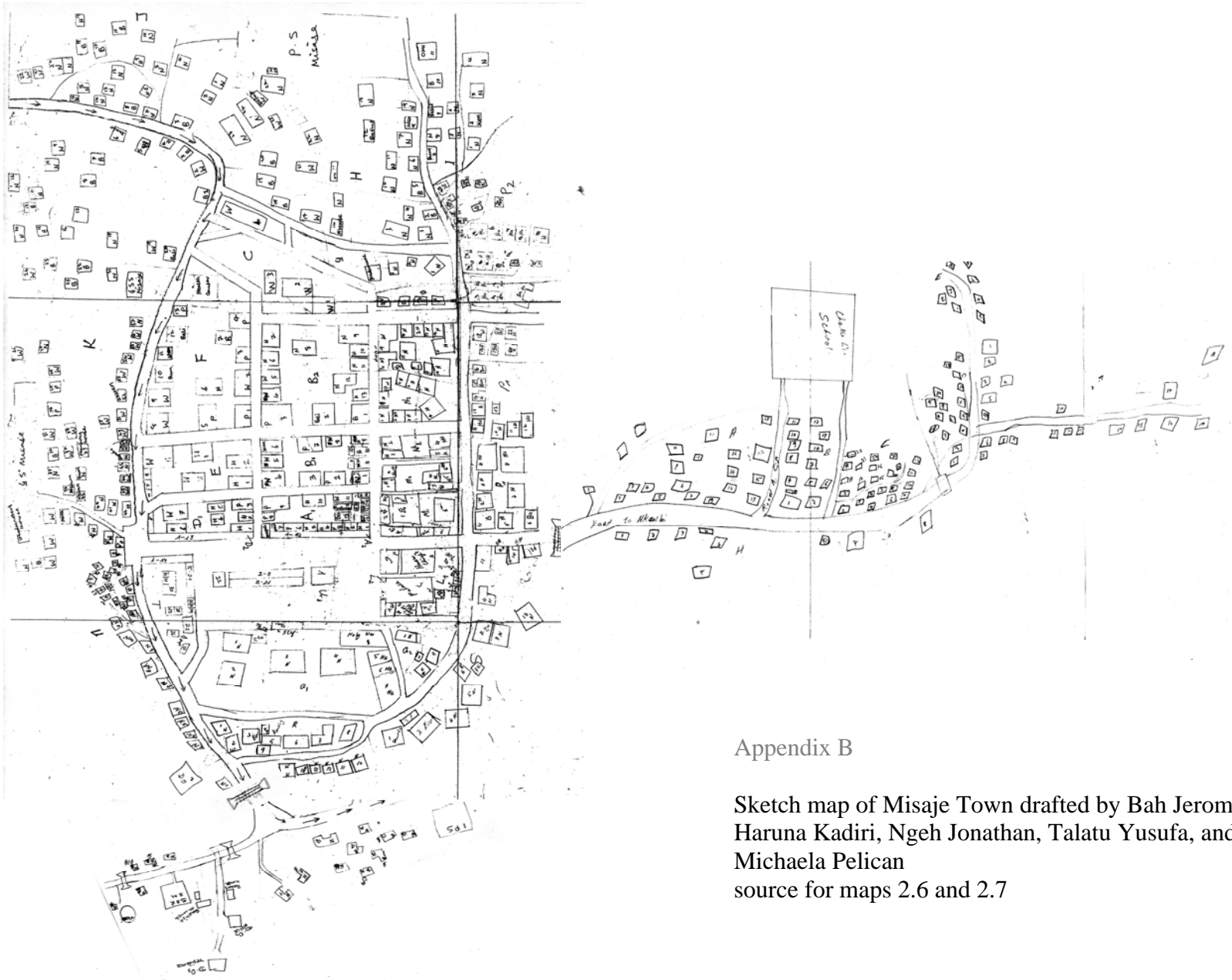
Appendix A

produced. But now, that I have been one of the actors and through your efforts of teaching us, we are really happy because we understand how to make drama now. We used to watch films, especially the Nigerian films without understanding. But now we know how the planning is done, filming and acting, and so we better understand the films.

I thank you very much for your efforts and also the introductions you have given to the general public so that they can follow up. Many of the elders, the learned people, and many other people understand what you are doing here. We really hope that you remain one of the persons who will be remembered in Misaje for life through your films and pictures which we have. Also through the good research which you have done here. Nobody has ever carried out a research in this area the very way you have done. Thank you very much and I hope that you will succeed in your studies. So that also for us who will stay behind the name of Misaje will grow.

Copies of the video cassettes have been handed to Mohamadu Ali Jingi, the owner of the Misaje Video Club, so as to enable the population of Misaje to continue enjoying the projections shown during the Misaje Film Festival, 26-28/10/2001 and to remember the occasion.





Appendix B

Sketch map of Misaje Town drafted by Bah Jerome, Haruna Kadiri, Ngeh Jonathan, Talatu Yusufa, and Michaela Pelican source for maps 2.6 and 2.7

Islamic Primary School (IPS) Misaje, Misaje Sub-Division

1. A brief history

The Islamic Primary School Misaje is a co-educational establishment geared at educating Cameroonian children in English language, Arabic language, and Islam which in short is the Muslim religion. The school is also open to Christian children who wish to follow the English language curricula activities aimed at obtaining the first school leaving certificate in English language, while Muslims obtain both the English language certificate and the one in the Arabic language.

This institution went operational in Misaje Town at the late *mallam* Musa's residence, under the leadership of a young dynamic Muslim, by the name of Issa Balla, now in Yaoundé. During that time in 1994 the teaching and learning was informal, mostly in Arabic and translated into Hausa. Issa Balla, the headmaster, taught Arabic language, *mallam* Isa taught the *hadith* (history), *sheikh* Ali taught the *tarhidi* (worship and faith), *mallam* Unusa taught *fithu* (religion), *mallam* Tanko taught *huruful ijaya* (Arabic alphabet) and Mr. Mustapha taught the Koran.¹ By October 1995, with the creation of an Islamic educational managerial area for Donga-Mantung and Menchum with the head-office at Nkambe, an elite member of this area, by name *mallam* Adamu Kibaya, was appointed pioneer manager. He immediately organised the Islamic primary schools within this region, and Misaje was not left out. The school at this time was a formal educational institution, aimed at the First School Leaving Certificate and GCE exams after seven years of primary education. It started with classes one and two and Arabic at *arDo* Affang's compound with an enrolment of 30 pupils. From then on, the school has progressed through the administration of the following head teachers:

Nr.	Names of head teachers	Classes	period	duration	Enrolment boys	Enrolment girls	Enrolment total
1	<i>sheikh</i> Ali Garga		1994				
1	Angah Donatius	I, II	10/95 – 06/96	8 months	16	14	30
2	<i>mallam</i> Yahyah Karingong	I, II, III	09/96 – 06/97	12 months	25	20	45
3	Mr. Nji Enock Tanjong	I – IV	09/97 – 04/98	18 months	58	31	89
4	Mr. Kinyang Simon	I – V	04/98 – 10/99	5 months	72	38	110
5	Mr. Nji Alex	I – VI	10/99 – 06/00	12 months	71	41	112
6	Mr. Nji Enock Tanjong	I – VII	09/00 – 06/01	12 months	99	55	154

Mr. Angah Dontius left the school, as he was called for other duties. Mr. Kijang Simon and Mr. Nji Enock went in for the teachers' grade one programme and completed in June 2000.

Assistance:

The success of the school from 1995 to the present date has been due to the efforts of individuals, groups, voluntary associations, and the government.

¹ During the first year the teaching was for free (*sadaka*). During the second year (1995) the parents were asked to pay registration fees (200 FCFA) and a monthly contribution of 200 FCFA per child. Due to the failure of the parents to support the teachers as required, the latter finally decided to declare the teaching for the second year again as a gift (*sadaka*).

Appendix C

Support by the local community:

- *ArDo* Affang of Misaje Town assisted the school by providing two rooms in his compound for teaching from 1995 to 1996.
- *Fai Nji* Kinogh of Nkanchi assisted the school with his five-room-house in Misaje Town from 1996 to 1999, before the school finally was transferred to its permanent site.

Assistance for the construction of the buildings:

- *ArDo* Affang of Misaje Town assisted the school with a one-year cow which was sold at 51.000 FCFA to get building materials like nails and iron rods.
- The Muslim community of Misaje laid sun-dried bricks which were used in putting up two class rooms with the dimension of 7m x 6 m.

Assistance in doors and window frames:

- Adamu Affang assisted with the sum of 15.000 FCFA.
- *Wakiili* Ya'u assisted with the sum of 7.000 FCFA. The money was used to buy timbers to make doors and window frames.
- *Alhaji* Mohamadu Mbiame contributed doors and window shutters.

Roofing of the first two class rooms:

- The Fulani community of the Misaje area contributed 100 timbers and a bundle of corrugated iron sheets.
- Another bundle of corrugated iron sheets was contributed by the Muslim community of Misaje Town.
- *Alhaji* Manu of Akweto supported the roofing with the sum of 30.000 FCFA. This money was used to pay part of the carpenters' labour.
- The Islamic Youth Association Misaje helped in transporting the above 100 timbers from Karbura's compound in Chako to the school.
- *Mallam* Mohamadu Njigidon assisted the school by offering a eucalyptus tree. Part of the wood was used for roofing, part for making benches. The remainders were sold to pay for additional expenditures.

Land certificate:

- The Islamic Youth Association Misaje assisted the PTA (Parents Teachers Association) executive with the sum of 10.000 FCFA for the acquisition of a land certificate for the school.

Land acquisition:

The Islamic Primary School Misaje has a land area of about 30,000 m² offered under the authority of *fon* Richard Chefon of Nkanchi. The main landlord is *fai* Nji Babeh of Katanga quarter. The school is now situated along the Misaje-Wum highway (Ring Road), below 'the stone that carries another'.

Assistance from external sources (national associations):

- The national Islamic Association based in Yaoundé (Cameroon) assisted the school with five Arabic text books and an Arabic scheme of work, with the aim of encouraging the teaching and learning of Arabic in our primary school.
- The Cameroonian Government, through the inspector of Primary and Nursery Education of the Misaje Sub-Division, provided the school with the following teaching aids: a chart of nature studies, a chart of the human body, a plastic black board ruler, a plastic protractor, a pair of compasses. All this assistance goes along

with encouraging the teaching and learning of rural science, nature talk, and arithmetic in our primary school.

- On the 19/01/2001, the Mafor University Women Organisation based in Bamenda, together with the Islamic educational secretary *mallam* Adamu Kibanya visited IPS Misaje to encourage the education of Muslim girls in our primary schools. They gave prizes to the first and second girls who had promotions from class six to seven. The schools involved were IPS Misaje, Chako, Bridge Five, Kimbi, Dumbo, and Nkambe. IPS Misaje was lucky to receive prizes worth 45,000 FCFA, which went to Aminu Balkisu (25,000 FCFA) and Ali Mairamu (20,000 FCFA). The remaining prizes went to pupils from IPS Kimbi, IPS Nkambe, and IPS Dumbo. The occasion was attended by the Divisional Officer of the Misaje Sub-Division, the headmasters of all schools of Misaje Town, the representative of the *fon* of Nkanchi, *arD*os and *wakiilis*, *imams*, the Islamic Youth Association Misaje, and the Muslim women's group Misaje. The event was thought to challenge Muslim women to consider the education of their daughters, instead of sending them to sell snacks on their behalf.
- The school recently received text books from Helvetas Cameroon. This is an international organisation which does not only assist schools but also villages and towns in water supply projects. This organisation supported IPS Misaje with text books in the subjects of history, geography, English language, civics, rural science, general knowledge, and still intends to do more.

Extension of the school:

After completing the first two class rooms, the Muslim and Fulani communities of Misaje town saw a need for the construction of an additional class room and an office. The success of this great project resulted from the efforts of the following individuals and associations:

- The Islamic Youths Association laid about 500 sun-dried bricks.
- The Islamic education secretariat supported this project with a sum of 40,000 FCFA. Part of this money was used in paying the mason, putting up the walls of one class room and an office for the head master. Part was also used for buying building materials.
- The PTA executive borrowed 13 timbers from *alhaji* Mohamadu Mbiame for making doors and window frames. Until this moment these timbers have not been refunded.
- *Mallam* Aduka Bi Bala of Nfume Abeng also supported the project with a eucalyptus tree which was sawn into 60 timbers. They were used in making a roof for the extended area.
- As for sheets of corrugated iron, the Islamic education secretariat assisted the school with a bundle which was used for roofing.
- *Alhaji* Mohamadu Mbiame supported the extension with 50,000 FCFA because of shortage of corrugated iron sheets, nails, and other materials.
- The Muslim community of Misaje assisted with 18 sheets of corrugated iron to complete the roof.
- The Islamic Youth Association went to the hills and transported the sawn timbers from *mallam* Aduka Bala's compound to the school.
- To give the school a colourful look and good teaching aids in the field of flowers, *Mallam* Issa Balla, an elite member and the first person who started this school, has continuously supported the school with flower seeds.

2. Background information on the Islamic Primary School Misaje

PTA executives 2000/2001:

Chairman	<i>mallam</i> Umaru Jato
Vice	<i>mallam</i> Mohamadou Ngeneh
Secretary	<i>mallam</i> Yusufa Pallalu
Treasurer	<i>mallam</i> Seidu
Adviser/head master	Nji Enock

Staff:

name	qualification	Classes taught	Teaching experience	Periods per week	Monthly salary (FCFA)	position
Nji Enock Tanjong	teacher grade one	I, II	10 years	30 x 2	10,000	Head master, labour master, farm master
Tumfosi Doris	refresher course in Takum	III, IV	4 years	30 x 2	8,000	Hand work mistress, project mistress, domestic science
Bame Solomon	teacher grade one	V, VI, VII	4 years	30 x 3	10,000	Sports master, music, staff secretary
Unusa Umaru	Arabic certificate	I to VII	6 years	12 x 7	7,000	Islamic advisor, project master, staff translator
Ali Tukur	<i>mallam</i>	formerly I, II	6 years	12 x 7	7,000	coordinator

Presently, *mallam* Ali Tukur has been appointed Islamic Schools Manager for Misaje, Bum and Nkambe Central Sub-Divisions with his head office in Misaje Town. He is in charge of the following schools: IPS Misaje, IPS Kimbi, IPS Chako, IPS Kituya, IPS Bridge Five, IPS Dumbo and IPS Nkambe.

NB: Classes I and II are taught in the same room, as well as III, IV and V, and VI and VII. Hence there is an urgent need to extend the school building by another four class rooms to ease the teaching and learning processes. Furthermore, the office needs to be completed, as the head master should have place where private discussions with pupils, parents, teachers and visitors are possible.

Timetables:

classes	timing	periods	breaks
I & II	8.00 – 9.30	6 periods to 15 min.	5 min.
	9.35 – 10.25	4 periods to 15 min.	40 min.
	11.15 – 12.05	3 periods to 15 min.	10 min.
	12.15 - 13.00	4 periods to 15 min.	
III & IV	8.00 – 9.30	5 periods to 20 min.	5 min.
	9.35 – 10.25	3 periods to 20 min.	40 min.
	11.15 – 12.20	4 periods to 20 min.	5 min.
	12.25 – 13.30	3 periods to 20 min.	
V, VI, VII	8.00 – 9.50	4 periods to 30 min.	5 min.
	9.55 – 10.25	1 period to 30 min.	40 min.
	11.15 - 12.45	2 periods to 30 min.	5 min.
	12.50 – 14.00	3 periods to 30 min.	

Farming activities:

The school has enough land for a farm. But at the moment the students are only cultivating a small farm near the classroom I/II. Plans are on the way for an orchard to be made where mangoes, guavas, pears, and palm trees should be planted.

Sporting activities:

At the moment the school has a handball court well marked and a site for a football field yet to be dug.

3. Finances:

a) Registration fee

The Islamic Primary School Misaje, like other primary schools in Cameroon, collects a registration fee of 750 FCFA per child from classes one to seven. From this amount 250 FCFA per child are sent to the managers' office for the smooth running of his office. Out of the remaining 500 FCFA, 100 FCFA are used for the pupil's insurance. 25 FCFA per child is paid for FENASCO (Federation Nationale du Sport Scolaire) duties in the IPNE (Inspectorate of Primary and Nursery Education), while the remaining 325 FCFA are spent on note books for teachers, pens, coloured and white chalk, registers, schemes and record of work, and a few text books for the school. In fact, the sum of 325 FCFA per child cannot in any way make up for the required expenses, and often the school lacks basic equipments.

b) School fees

Pupils in classes one to four pay a school fee of 2.500 FCFA while those in the senior classes pay 3.000 FCFA per child. All this money is used in paying teachers' wages per month. It is alarming that a school like IPS Misaje with three grade one teachers, one refresher-course personnel, and two *mallams* cannot pay the teachers' full wages from September to June each academic year. Many teachers are sacrificing their time at their own expense. This explains the fact that most teachers in Islamic schools are not permanent.

4. Suggestions

In order to ensure the effective education of our children, I wish to suggest that:

- The Islamic education secretary should struggle to employ qualified staff members who should be made permanent.
- Trained teachers should be paid a salary and not only a meagre wage.
- If subventions were given, they should not be misused.
- The secretariat should think about the life of our schools and not only collect its dues without feedback.

Mr. Nji Enock Tanjong, Misaje, May 2001

Photo gallery



The campus of the Islamic Primary School (IPS) campus, Misaje.

Photo: Michaela Pelican, 02/10/2001



Pupils of Islamic Primary School Misaje playing during breaktime.

Photo: Michaela Pelican, 02/10/2001



Parents and teachers of the Islamic Primary School Misaje in a PTA (parent-teacher association) meeting, sitting in one of the three classrooms of the school

Photo: Michaela Pelican, 02/10/2001



Pupils of the Islamic Primary School (IPS) Misaje with their head master Mr. Nji Enock Tanjong helping Adamu Affang with his farming activities in appreciation of his assistance to the school.

Photo: Michaela Pelican, 09/05/2001



Mallam Adamu Kibanya, national secretary of Islamic education, with the chairmen of the Islamic Schools in Donga-Mantung (Misaje, Chako, Dumbo, Kimbi) and the girls who received prizes from the Mafor University Women Organisation from Bamenda.

Photo: Michaela Pelican, 19/01/2001

Portrait Islamic Youth Association Misaje

The association was formed in the late 1980s with not more than 20 members. Its main objectives are as follows:

- To bring out all the Islamic rules and regulations and to put them into practise.
- To bring the non-Muslim youths into the Islamic religion.
- To share ideas with members of other religions.
- To wipe out superstitious believes, e.g. the idea of our grandparents that after a person died, his ghost will return at night and even take another person along or that the colour of a newly born calve brings either luck or misfortune.

The association was legalised in 1995 in Yaoundé. It has more than 50 members now who are mostly traders. Weekly meetings are held during which they contribute money, thus forming a saving group (*njangi*). Other activities of the association are to make sure that the mosque, its surrounding, and the graveyard are kept clean. The association has also assisted in running of the Islamic Primary School (IPS) Misaje by contributing sun-dried bricks, grass, benches, and financial support. Finally, the association tries to educate its members to be good Muslims by abolishing the drinking of alcohol, stealing, gambling, and idolatry which are all forbidden by the Islamic religion. (Adamu Joro Yaroko)

Executive members

1. President: Sule Tukur
Vice president: Palalu Saidu
2. Secretary : Alhaji Buba
Vice secretary : Adamu Ja'o
3. Adviser: *mallam* Musa Sule
Vice adviser: Ali Bala
4. Treasurer: Musa Hamidu
Vice treasurer: Salihu Bello
5. Master of ceremonies: Ali Jingi
Vice master of ceremonies: Garba Hamidu
6. Discipline master : Usman Njuwa
Vice discipline master : Gambo Asa
7. Arabic teachers: Ali Tukur, *mallam* Unusa Umaru
8. Organising secretary: Musa Tukur
Adviser: Salihu Kadiri
9. Other active members contributing good ideas: Isa Ndula, Suaibu Hassan, Hassan.

The beginning of the association

The Islamic Youth Association Misaje was formed in the late 1980s by the Muslim youths of Misaje town. The founding members were Issa Balla (now in Yaoundé) who registered and thereby legalised the association in 1995, Danlami (driver for Guarantee in Yaoundé), Ibrahim Nginyu (tailor in Yaoundé), Ali Tukur (teacher at the Islamic Primary School Misaje), Tanko Ibrahim, Uba Kawu, Musa Sule, Ali Jingi, *mallam* Issa (now at Takija), Bala Kadiri, Sule Tukur, Yusufu Balla (now in Yaoundé), Palalu Saidu, Adamu Chinese, Alhaji Buba, and Awudu Tambaya (now mechanic at Douala).

At first, the association was only made up of Muslims

staying in Misaje town. By now it has expanded, and has attracted also Fulani youths who are staying with their animals in the bush.

We have actually realised that most of our people are not educated, they are lacking business skills, and are ignorant of the rules and regulations of our religion. We thought it wise to form this association so as to make our children, wives, brothers, sisters, and friends understand the value of being educated and to engage themselves in business activities. We do not end at this level, but make sure that our association participates in all village development. (Ali Jingi)

The idea of creating a school

In 1994 the Islamic Youth Association decided to open a school called *Hayatul Islam* (make Islam grow). It was a school for elders and children, especially girls, and also those who had newly converted to Islam. We were teaching Islamic studies and other subjects like English, French, Hausa, Fulfulde, mathematics, and social sciences. We also helped non-Muslims who could not send their children to government school by educating them in our school.

Hayatul Islam operated successfully for three years before it was transformed into the present Islamic Primary School (IPS) Misaje through the efforts of Adamu Kibanya (now of late). Two of our Islamic teachers were taken over by IPS Misaje, that is Ali Tukur and *mallam* Unusa. For the additional subjects new teachers were recruited which resulted in the final collapse of *Hayatul Islam*. Teaching within the association is still going on, but restricted to males. *mallam* Unusa Umaru and *mallam* Adamu usually teach Islamic legislation on Friday afternoons, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings.

IPS Misaje, the off-spring of *Hayatul Islam*, is now a well organised school, recognised by the government, and is the pride of the Muslim community of Misaje town and the whole area. (Ali Jingi)



Islamic Primary School Misaje

Response from our elders

Initially, when the association was created, our elders were not happy because they thought that we wanted to seize power from them. They feared that we wanted to appoint a new chief and a new *imam*. During one *salla*, some of our members were even taken to the Divisional Officer. *continuation page 2*

By forming the *Hayatul Islam* and through our physical and financial support to the Islamic Primary School Misaje, our elders came to understand that we are actually working for the development of our Muslim community and the village as a whole.

They gained trust in us and, handed over the collection of alms in the mosque to the Islamic Youth Association to control the finances and be responsible for repairs in the mosque. We are also supporting our women and elders in the sense, that we have taken over the responsibility to do all the hard labour in town (e.g. community work), so as to enable them to keep their dignity and to follow the rules and regulations of the Koran. We now enjoy the full support and trust of our elders. (Ali Jingi)



imam Abdullahi and mallam Muhdi, sarkin hausawa Misaje

Activities of the Islamic Youth Association and its importance to the Muslim community

The Islamic Youth Association is the only Muslim association in the Misaje Sub-Division. It is a non-political association whose main objective is to promote Islam in the Sub-Division, and in Misaje Town in particular. This has been successfully achieved through some of its activities which include tidying the mosque and keeping the Muslim graveyard clean and in order. Most important is the support given to the Islamic Primary School (IPS) of Misaje which is physical and even financial. The Muslim youths also take part in community work, like carrying stones and sand, making fences, and clearing fire tracks etc.

The Islamic Youth Association is made up of members of all the ethnic groups, including Nchaney, Bessa and Bum, as long as they practise the Muslim faith. The association has brought order to its members by eliminating bad habits such as drinking and smoking. They have been encouraged to perform their five daily prayers in the mosque, which is highly appreciated by their parents, especially the *sarkin hausawa* who is always calling on Allah to assist them.

While the association has been registered and thereby legalised, the major difficulty we face is the lack of finances. Presently, we still do not have a permanent hall to hold our meetings. Plans to contact other associations like the Islamic Association in Nso are already made, and we would be happy if we could be linked up with other associations that could support us. (Musa Sule)

Rules and regulations

1. Membership is restricted to Muslims.
2. Non-members are not allowed to participate in the association's activities.
3. Late coming to the meeting is punished with 25 FCFA.
4. Frequent failing to participate in the association's activities is punished by the discipline master.
5. When going out for a mission (e.g. condolence visits), members should not allow outsiders to disturb their programme.

The importance of the Islamic Youth Association for me

About two years ago, I left my compound in the bush and came to Misaje to learn driving. One day, friends invited me to a meeting of the Islamic Youth Association. They told me about their activities, and I saw that it was fine for me. I started attending their meetings on the 13th of October 1999, and up till now I go there regularly.

Before I joined the association, I was rough in certain ways which a good Muslim is not supposed to be. I was used to drinking alcohol and to spending a lot of money in a way that was not good. Through the advices that I got from the members of the association when I started going there, I stopped these things. They also told me how to go about a business. I am now in the business of selling articles and I am very happy, because I would have continued with the old habit and ended up with losses.

There was a time, I was sick in our compound and nobody came to greet me. Since I joined the association I got ill once and many of them came to greet me. They knew that their member was sick and they brought some things for me. For us, when we get married, nobody supports you. But in the association when you get married they support you with money and articles. Also when you have a child and you are a member of the association, they will do everything for you. They will buy you kola nuts, sweets and will be the ones to inform people that you have a child and that they should come for the naming ceremony. You will just sit aside and not do anything. If you have a die the association will contribute money and send people to sympathise with the family. All these things that the Islamic Youth Association is doing are very important for the Muslim community and also for other people. (Shaibu Hassan)

Benefits to women and children

The Islamic Youth Association is good, because we women received knowledge through them. By the time they started, *mallam* Isa, *mallam* Balla, and *mallam* Garga Tukur taught us three times a week. We read the Koran and learned more about our religion, such as how to stay in our married homes and how to bring up our children.

Concerning our children, they helped us a lot because they showed us the importance of education.

continuation page 3

Before, when I tried to teach my children the rules of Islam and to show respect to others, they did not understand quickly or were stubborn. But with the influence of the Islamic Youth Association and as a result of going to the Islamic Primary School, they are now learning fast. Some of our children can even come home from school and teach us, the mothers, things that we do not know. That is what I see as most positive of the Islamic Youth Association especially for us, the women. They have opened our minds and helped us to improve on our religion. (Uwa Palalu)

Why I am not active in the association

I am not active because the Islamic Youth Association does not have a permanent office, which causes a number of problems.

I am not talking like somebody who is opposing the community because there is one idea in the association which I contributed: I proposed that members should be contributing 50 FCFA each every Friday as a trouble fund, so that in times of problems money should be taken from the fund to solve them, for example if somebody died, is sick, or if you have visitors. This trouble fund is operating very well today and has about 45.000 FCFA. Also, another problem I have is that when we propose new ideas, I feel, the executive members always oppose them, because we do not have any position in the association. I am saying all this because, personally, I do not like to serve two groups. I am always with those Muslim youths who do not belong to the association. At the same time, I am a member of the association.

So I proposed to the president to call for a general meeting of all the Muslim youths where they should try to find out why others are not active in the association. All the Muslims of Misaje contribute to Islamic activities, like taking care of the mosque, or assisting when there is a death celebration and when somebody is in need. But the few people who are in the association behave as if they are the only ones doing these things. I think that the association does not consider me as a member, because I do not take part in their *njangi* where they contribute 1.000 FCFA each.

I am the masters of ceremonies for all the marriages in Misaje. I was elected to that post by the members of the Islamic Youth Association about seven years ago and I still hold that position till today. I do not know why they do not consider me as a member. I am not saying this because I am opposing them, but as an input that can help the association to go ahead. (Garba Amidu Batuure)

Sports activities

Since the creation of the association sporting activities are on the rise. The association is full of sportsmen, mainly footballers. Our team is called Rajas FC. The first Islamic team was B.B.C., but after most of the players left, our generation of players decided to change the name to Rajas FC. We chose the name from a first-division team of Casablanca in Morocco.

We practice daily from 4 pm to 6 pm, except of Saturdays and during fasting, and we usually mix up with players from other teams.

We participate in inter-quarter competitions in Misaje Town and also on sub-divisional level. In all the competitions we have participated so far we have reached the finals. We even took the cup of the last tournament organised by the Divisional Officer Wirsiy John Ngalim. The amount we won was 50.000 FCFA, the second prize went to the Brothers' Club from Nkanchi, headed by Father Anthony of the Catholic Mission. Our team was awarded heavy prizes not only for our success but also for the good performance of our team members like Suleiman Bala who was the best goalkeeper and Musa Sule Ardo who was the highest goal scorer with nine goals. Laban Emmanuel from the Brothers' Club Nkanchi was the 'man of the match.' Another tournament that took place last year was the "below 20", organised by the park boys of Misaje. We were defeated in the semi-finals by the park boys. The SDF parliamentarian of the Misaje constituency organised a tournament that was won by the Park National team. We came second and won a prize of 15.000 FCFA. We played in many friendly encounters with teams from Dumbo, Ako, Nkambe, and Lassin.



President for this term: Pallalu Saidu

Coach: Tanko Ibrahim

Captain: Balla Mohamed

Goalkeeper: Bala Suleiman

Players: Adamu Chinese, Enusa, Bala Mohamed, Musa Sule, Ali Jingi, Sule Tukur, Musa Tukur, Alhaji Buba, Musa Hamidu, Adamu Ja'o, Shehu Usman Ali, Yusufu Isa, Konyu Felix, Fon Michael, Awah Hannibal, Justin Afon.

The association has actually produced many good sportsmen in several domains:

- Football: Danlami Umaru (now a driver for Guarantee Yaoundé-Douala) was a second-divisional goalkeeper for Binka Red Devils for two years; Issa Bala (now in Yaoundé) was the goalkeeper for B.B.C. FC Misaje.
- Athletics: Umaru Ali (now professional tailor in Douala) won the 3rd position in a cross-country race from Dumbo to Misaje, organised by the Divisional Officer Wirsiy John in 1997.

continuation page 4

- Musa Sule and Salihu Kadiri came 5th in the 3rd year race Dumbo-Misaje; Adamu Ja'o was 1st in the 2nd year race Mungong-Misaje; Ali Jingi won the 4th position in the 4th year race Kamine-Misaje and Pateh Sahara was 2nd in all the competitions.
- Handball: Musa Sule and Adamu Gaba received prizes for fair play during the 'best players competition', which was organised by the Divisional Officer Wirsy John in the year 2001 to select players that can represent the Misaje Sub-Division on the divisional level.
- The association has also produced a good goalkeeper for handball girls by name Adama Ajuji who is representing Misaje in women handball competitions.

The sporting activities help to unite our members. Actually, the Rajas FC could have extended even to the third-divisional level, but due to lack of finances and equipment we have not been able to go further, so far.

Marriage committee

According to the organising committee of marriages, we celebrate the occasion in sections. We have the organising committee which is from the Islamic Association and comprises all Muslims and even non-Muslims. The organising committee is on the top of all the committees. It first of all organises a general meeting in preparation for a marriage. From there the decoration committee is assigned to do all the necessary arrangements concerning the sitting order and decoration of the site. The other committees are: the animation committee, the feeding committee, the finance committee, and the masters of ceremonies. These are the committees which fall under the Islamic Youth Association. Most of the people in these committees are not members of the association, but they are active in doing their work because of Islam. I am saying this because for the Islamic activities, the men, women, and elders work together. I am not saying this as a gossip. I even went to the association on the day of *salla* and gave this report. I would like to give special thanks to Aishatu (Michaela) and her people because they have enlightened us a lot.

(Garba Amidu Batuure)



Masters of ceremonies
Garba Amidu Batuure
and Ali Jingi,
marriage of Musa Sule
and Rashida Musa
(2001)

A woman's perspective

The importance I see in the Islamic Youth Association is that it unites its members. This is good because they learn and achieve many things, they would not have been able to if they had not come together.

I am very happy about the way they practice the Muslim faith. They support us in moments of need. When a member of the Muslim community has died, they take over the responsibility for his burial, irrespective if they know you or not, if you have money or not. Before the Islamic Youth Association was created, it was not like this. When somebody died and he did not have the money or people to care for the burial, all the responsibility fell back on the *sarki*. He had to go round and beg people to help in the burial. But now, it is them who do everything.

The youths are united in their association and that is very important to me. They take care for each other, being wealthy or not, that does not make any difference. They contribute money to salute sick members and elders, or to go and condole in case of a death. Through their union they developed concern not only for their members but for the Muslim community in general, and thus improved on Islamic practices. (Amina Muhdi)

Why I am interested in the association

First of all I am interested in the association because it is made up of young people, mostly my age-mates. To work with them is more or less an exchange of ideas and I feel free to ask them anything. The fact that it is an Islamic association is an opportunity to learn more about Islam which broadens my knowledge since I am of a Christian background. I take it also as an opportunity to learn Fulfulde and Hausa, because I have always been interested in those languages. From the short experience of working with them as an association, I feel welcomed.

My interest in the Islamic Youth Association is linked to my University programme as a student of Sociology and Social Anthropology. The association is a good example of how rural communities organise themselves to face development and modernity, using religion as a binding factor.

Now that I have come to an end of my work with the members of the Islamic Youth Association, it is my greatest wish to see them progressing and having a positive impact on the society of Misaje in general. Nagode Allah. (Ngeh Jonathan)

Julde Idi 2001

The Muslim youths celebrated the *salla* day with a cocktail party in Misaje. The party was attended by approximately 35 youths of whom 25 were members of the Islamic Youth Association Misaje. They joined to celebrate the end of Ramadan after 30 days of fasting. They are used to do so every *salla*.

This year, on the 16th of December 2001, the cocktail party took place at the house of Sali Aminu.

continuation page 5

After opening the meeting with prayers, Musa Sule presented a brief history of the Islamic Youth Association Misaje. The association has been working continuously for the development of Misaje for the past six years. Then members were given the chance to express their feelings.

A complaint was brought up that in order to have a voice in the activities of the Islamic Youths Association, you need to be member of the executive. Since the party was meant to celebrate rather than to discuss internal problems, the topic was closed and forwarded to the next Friday meeting. Food and drinks were shared and everybody was happy.

While the cocktail party was going on in Misaje, part of the youths had gone to Dumbo for a football match against the team of the Islamic Youths Dumbo. The Dumbo team won by 2:1. Idi of Dumbo scored two goals before Ibro of Misaje scored one. The Misaje team had a penalty, but Ibro missed the goal. The match ended like that and many of the Misaje youths decided to come back after the match, while a few remained to enjoy the Gala Night in Dumbo. (Haruna Kadiri)

Achievements and advantages

1. The association has created an atmosphere of obedience, respect, endurance, unity, and peace amongst the Muslim youths.
2. Thanks to the efforts of the Islamic Youths Association, our juniors now have the opportunity to enjoy a bi-cultural education at IPS Misaje. If the association had been formed by our parents already, we, the youths could have been better off and, maybe by now, we would already have spread our message all over the nation.
3. Education for Muslim women. Most of our mothers, wives, sisters and daughters now also know how to read and write the Arabic as well as the Western alphabet.
4. Employment for some youths as teachers in the Islamic Primary School Misaje, including Muslims and Christians.
5. Saving activities (*njangi*) carried out during the weekly meetings enable the youths to get access to funds.
6. Improvement of the relationship between the Muslim youths and Grassfields people working together for the development of the village, e.g. by participating in the construction of the water tank, in the building work for Government School in Misaje, and membership in the vigilant group.

(Ali Jingi)

Major difficulties

We lack materials and finances to expand our development objectives to the Misaje Sub-Division and Cameroon in general. The financial resources of the association come from the weekly donations that are based on our individual business activities. These meagre resources do not enable us to complete our objectives and various programmes.

Therefore without assistance from foreign donors or wealthy people we will not be able to realise some of the following aims:

1. Educating our youths who depend only on cattle rearing and do not care to get Western education.
2. Educating our mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters who are only made to stay at home without learning anything.
3. Establishing small scale business and handwork activities for our youths to enable them to finance the running of the association by themselves when need arises. (Ali Jingi)

سيرة الاجتماع للشباب المسلمين في المساج

بدأنا اجتماعنا في الدار طيلة ايام ام ، و كنا نعيش هذا الاجتماع منذ سنة
ثم انتقلنا الى الدار عميا ، و نعيش في هذا الاجتماع في كل جمعة ، و بعد ذلك بسقط
هذا الاجتماع و وجدنا الفتنه فاستلمنا و بعد ذلك ابدأنا اجتماعنا ايضا مرة ثالثة في
الدار سليمان ابن تاجر بسنة اعيرنا في هذا الاجتماع ، لما تروى انتقلنا الى البيت موسى
سيمان ايضا ، و نستمر في هذا الاجتماع حتى تزويج هو ايضا ، لما تزويج فتركنا
البيت الى البيت موسى ابن تاجر لقصرة البيوت ، و اما الذين لنا القوه نستطير البيت
نا ضالم اجتماعنا .
المتقوه في هذه الاجتماع الصاعده التي كوننا المسلمين كمالنا بديننا و اسافرنا
و حريف و حريف ، و ايضا كتحسين المسجد و بنيت المدرسه و تحسن الدار
طال برأ سنا بسيف بل و بما و تدشنا ، صاعدا و ننا جد جدا حتى تركوه ، هذا البلد و ننا
بصاعدا و ننا بسيف ، من كما ايضا بسيف ، هو لجان رئيس المدرس من الإبتدائية في قسم
الشمال امغربى الكومون و قد مات في شهر نوفمبر سنة ١٠٠٠ م من العمل فتركه في اليوم
صحة و اعطى كنه .

(mallam Unusa Umaru)



Friday meeting of the Islamic Youth Association

Editorial

Contributors: Ali Jingi, Musa Sule, Garba Amidu Bature, Haruna Kadiri, Ngeh Jonathan, Amina Muhdi, Uwa Palalu, Shaibu Hassan, Adamu Joro Yaroko, mallam Unusa Umaru.

Co-production of: Islamic Youth Association Misaje, Michaela Pelican (Aishatu) (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany), Ngeh Jonathan (University of Buea).



Islamic Youth Association Misaje (January 2002)

Analysis of the role-play ‘*sippoygo* (selling milk)’ performed by the Mbororo women’s group of Chako, April 2001

In March 2001, I visited the Chako women’s group together with a Hausa friend. I had just come back from Burkina Faso where I had bought decorated calabashes as presents for my Mbororo friends. Eight women had assembled, among them five elderly women who were well acquainted with each other, two younger Mbororo women, and a Hausa woman who was also a member of the group. One of the elderly women initiated a role-play by picking up a decorated calabash. Soon the guiding theme emerged: *sippoygo* which means ‘to sell milk’ in Fulfulde. Without further discussion of the story-line, the women embarked on the role-play, drawing on their experiences and imagination.

Sippoygo (selling milk), role-play of the Mbororo women’s group of Chako, 08/04/2001 (original length approximately 20min., edited clip 4:27min.; accessible via <http://corpora.eth.mpg.de/>)



Madujo (Fulfulde for ‘old woman’, ‘grandmother’) takes off to sell milk. She is called by a customer who wants to taste her milk and complains that it has been diluted with water. *Madujo* gets annoyed, but finally agrees to sell it. A second customer distracts *Madujo*’s attention and her calabash is stolen. She holds the interrupter responsible and threatens to take the case to court. She finally restores her possessions, but the milk has gone.



Madujo introduces herself as a Fulbe woman from Senegal. A local woman wants to give her seeds of maize and vegetables to plant, but *Madujo* declines. She points out that she lives only on milk and does not eat maize. Also, her family has no chicken, but cattle. She shows her decorated calabash spoon and boasts that she sold a cow to buy it. She then scrapes the milk remains off her calabash and licks her spoon, a behaviour the



Appendix E



others find disgraceful. Moreover, she begins to dance publicly and to utter superstitious blessings.

Madujo again takes off to sell milk. She meets customers but cannot understand their language (Pidgin English). She is robbed. While the thieves make fun of her, a friend comes to her help. The friend wants to attack the thieves, but is held back. In the meantime, Madujo has grabbed a stick and threatens the thieves. They return Madujo's possessions. Yet her friend is so upset that she breaks into tears, and is eventually consoled by her neighbour.

Photos and video footage: Michaela Pelican, Nkambe, 08/04/01

Mbororo women's engagement with role-playing should be seen against the background of established genres of cultural performance, such as song, dance, and story-telling. Within Mbororo society, the singing and dancing of adult women is limited to specific occasions, such as marriage and child naming ceremonies, and is addressed to a women-only audience. Story-telling is a leisure activity of the evening period, and is performed in the family nexus, from which adult men are normally excluded. Mbororo women call their role-playing *fjirde* in Fulfulde, meaning play, amusement, fun. Similar to singing, dancing and story-telling, they see it as a form of entertainment. Most plays are addressed to themselves, and occasionally to a visitor or the Ballotiral staff. They are thus not elaborate masterpieces but improvised sketches of possible real-life situations, with which performers and audience are generally familiar.

I will now elaborate on the above role-play and provide the necessary background information to understand its implications. The two main subjects addressed in the play refer to Mbororo women's predicaments over selling milk products, and the perception of Mbororo as a backward people.

Scene one

The scene starts off with a common situation. Many Mbororo women in the Misaje area are used to sell milk products. However, in northwest Cameroon the demand for fresh and sour milk is relatively limited, as the local Grassfields population is not

accustomed to its consumption. They see milk as snack food, and many individuals prefer imported, powdered milk which they consider more hygienic and healthier than the milk of Mbororo cattle. The argument, that Mbororo milk is diluted with water and not very fresh, is a common conviction of many Grassfielders and is often used as a bargaining strategy. Moreover, many potential customers demand the right to taste the milk before buying it, which Mbororo women consider a nuisance, as most customers buy only small quantities. In consequence, selling milk is a relatively tedious and time-consuming job, particularly when taking into account that Mbororo women have to undertake a considerable journey, since their compounds are situated at a distance from Grassfielders' villages.

The scene then evolves into a more unusual situation, in which Madujo's calabash is stolen and she threatens to take the customer to court. It may occasionally occur that children try to dupe Mbororo women to get milk for free, but their calabashes are rarely stolen. Also Madujo's threatening with a court case is relatively hypothetical, as Mbororo women generally avoid contact with law enforcement officers. Within Mbororo society, court action and any interaction of a political character is generally a male prerogative. Furthermore, Mbororo women are apprehensive of state agents' corrupted practices. They consider themselves vulnerable because of their insufficient mastery of Pidgin English and their lack of education. We thus have to interpret the second part of the scene against the background of Ballotiral's paralegal programme which is aimed at bolstering the self-confidence of Mbororo men and women, and at instructing them on their civil rights and the exploration of legal strategies of conflict resolution.

Scene two

Madujo introduces herself as a visitor from Senegal. The Fulbe of West Africa here are seen as more original than the Mbororo in northwest Cameroon who have settled and diversified their economic activities. They are portrayed as being pure pastoralists who exclusively live on animal products. Madujo's dancing and her blessings represent assumed pre-Islamic practices, which the Mbororo in northwest Cameroon have abandoned. Her licking the calabash spoon is a sign of her lack of *pulaaku* (sense of shame) and her uncultured life.

The image of Madujo thus represents the opposite of how Mbororo women see themselves. At the same time, it reflects the Mbororo past and their cultural heritage. Furthermore, the character Madujo is a parody of the popular stereotype of the Mbororo as backward, uneducated and nomadic cattle pastoralists, which is widely shared by local population groups and the administration in northwest Cameroon.

Scene three

The participants return to the issue of milk-sales and Mbororo women's assumed exploitation. They address the communication problem, which in the play is exaggerated, as most Mbororo women speak Pidgin English well enough to communicate with their customers. Moreover, a number of local Grassfielders have learned basic phrases in Fulfulde as a result of their frequent interaction with their Mbororo neighbours.

Madujo's property is stolen again. But this time the play suggests a different solution than in scene one. Madujo and her friend become violent and attack the thieves with a stick. It is quite inconceivable that Mbororo women would adopt an aggressive strategy in public, as such a behaviour goes against the rules of *pulaaku*. At the same time, the suggestion is not totally implausible, since we know that Mbororo herdsmen may react violently to Grassfielders women chasing off their cattle (see Ballotiral role-play). Moreover, it is said that both Mbororo men and women are well accustomed to using a herding staff, be it as a walking stick, a herding tool, or a weapon of defence. We may thus consider the strategy suggested in scene three as unlikely but faintly realistic.

In the end, Madujo's friend is overwhelmed by her emotions and breaks into tears. This is unthinkable behaviour for an elderly woman in Mbororo society, where emotions and pain are generally concealed, even in the face of birth and death. Accordingly, the performers and audience were highly amused and the scene ended in laughter.

Conclusion

Compared to the Ballotiral role-play on farmer-grazier conflict (chapter 6), the play performed by the Chako women's group was of a more imaginative character. The women experimented with common elements drawn from their experience, sometimes exaggerating, sometimes inverting them.

The role-play reflected on processes of social change, namely the Mbororo's contemporary reality as a settled, Islamised, agro-pastoral people as opposed to their nomadic past, and their increasing political self-confidence as promoted by Ballotiral. According to Turner (1988: 24)¹ cultural performances "may themselves be active agencies of change". This is also the agency that Ballotiral emphasises in its work with Mbororo women's groups. The above role-play may thus serve as an example of the ways in which Mbororo women challenge established social structures and experiment with alternative views and strategies. However, its eventual impact on real-life situations remains to be seen.

¹ Turner, Victor. 1988. *The anthropology of performance*. New York: Performing Arts Journal.

Erklärung über selbständige Verfassung der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit

Hier mit erkläre ich, Michaela Pelican, geboren am 05.04.1972 in Chur, Schweiz
dass ich die eingereichte Dissertation mit dem Titel

Getting along in the Grassfields:

Interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon

selbständig verfasst habe, keine anderen als die mir angegebenen Quellen und
Hilfsmittel benutzt und die den verwendeten Werken wörtlich und inhaltlich
entnommenen Stellen kenntlich gemacht habe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michaela Pelican". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

(Michaela Pelican)

Halle, 15.Mai 2006