

**Hamadou ADAMA**

# Patrimoine et sources de l'histoire du Nord-Cameroun







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Sous la direction de  
Hamadou ADAMA

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# Introduction

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Hamadou Adama<sup>1</sup>

De par sa géographie soudano-sahélienne, le Nord-Cameroun a engendré des spécificités artistiques et culturelles assez originales qui le distinguent des régions équatoriales. L'art, la culture, les traditions et les techniques issus de cet ensemble géographique, développés et reproduits dans cette région, véhiculent une empreinte toute particulière qu'il nous semble intéressant d'aborder.

L'idée de cet ouvrage vient du constat de cette réalité plurielle et d'une volonté de rendre compte des dynamiques en cours, de leur actualité, de leur impact et des initiatives fécondes qui participent de son ancrage dans la modernité.

Le patrimoine du Nord-Cameroun dont il est question ici recouvre l'ensemble des savoirs, des savoir-faire et des savoir-vivre, qu'ils soient matériels ou immatériels, individuels ou collectifs. Ce sont des *valeurs communes* qui impulsent le mouvement, orientent la dynamique et stimulent la réinvention permanente d'une société. Quant aux sources de l'histoire, ce sont des *traces et vestiges*, des éléments de toute nature, producteurs d'informations susceptibles de renseigner, d'éclairer, de guider, de progrès et de développement. La source, de son côté, ne doit pas être confondue avec la référence. Cette dernière prétend à l'identification objective et raisonnée d'éléments bibliographiques, dont le nom de l'auteur, relatifs au document. Quant à la source, selon notre entendement, elle permet de porter un jugement sur la validité d'une information, puisqu'elle tend à déceler et à rendre compte des intentions, des supports producteurs d'information. Autrement dit, se renseigner sur la source, c'est s'intéresser à la nature et au lieu originel de discours d'une information. Cela permet, entre autres, de mettre en évidence sa véracité, sa pertinence, et l'utilité de son utilisation. La question de la classification et de la validation des sources a, à l'origine,

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été posée en historiographie, lorsque les historiens discutèrent de l'écriture de l'histoire et de la manière dont la connaissance du passé est obtenue, à travers le problème de la méthode historique.

Dans la perspective des sociétés africaines, les sources orales sont au centre de l'approche utilisée. Au sein de cette même source, l'onomastique nécessite un questionnement tout particulier. Conservés par la tradition orale, les noms cachent des indications précises, précieuses pour comprendre l'histoire d'un groupe ou d'une communauté. C'est aussi une archéologie du nom que le chercheur se doit de faire car, la profondeur chronologique et les interactions linguistiques rendent les recherches difficiles. Le sens commun et les noyaux figuratifs sont fonctions de l'énonciateur et de l'effet recherché chez le destinataire. Le toponyme concentre en son sein des tendances contraires. Beaucoup de toponymes survivent, comme des buttes-témoins, à l'abandon de la langue dont ils dérivent.

Les propos de cette réflexion commune visent, non à inventorier l'exhaustivité des patrimoines et sources existantes au Nord-Cameroun, mais à comprendre qu'au-delà des autres sources, l'onomastique, l'iconographie, les récits migratoires, l'alimentation, le vestimentaire, les représentations mentales sont, entre autres, des pistes de réflexion dans l'écriture de l'histoire, dans l'énonciation des valeurs patrimoniales. Il nous semble aujourd'hui opportun de les questionner dans toute leur spécificité, leur singularité et leur pertinence.

Dans le cadre de cet ouvrage, la géographie du Nord-Cameroun est envisagée comme un ensemble territorial composé des trois régions septentrionales du Cameroun. Ce choix se justifie par la permanence de certains traits culturels et une expérience historique commune au sein des constructions étatiques ouest-africaines. La répartition thématique des différentes contributions restitue cette réalité diverse, construite autour d'une région, des peuples et des cultures.

La contribution du regretté Martin Zachary Njeuma sur le *Northern Cameroon Identity* a été produite - et initialement présentée - lors du Congrès international des sciences historiques qui s'est tenu à Oslo en 2000. Le texte, non publié jusque-là, reste d'actualité. L'auteur revient avec force détails sur les grandes étapes, sur les acteurs et sur les contextes ayant façonné et ponctué la « création » d'une identité régionale, distincte et spécifique, dans la partie septentrionale du Cameroun. Il privilégie cette hypothèse de « création », en tenant compte des pressions politiques de l'ordre gouvernant qui encourageait le projet hégémonique des musulmans et la formation d'un bloc septentrional homogène pour faire face au bloc méridional dans le sens des négociations politiques des décennies 1960 et 1970. Pour Njeuma, l'adhésion à une conscience identitaire régionale au Nord-Cameroun relève plutôt d'une « création » et elle ne serait pas le

produit d'une construction consensuelle. C'est un travail qui s'appuie sur une documentation importante et bien fouillée et qui intègre une grande variété des sources aussi bien écrites, orales qu'*ajami*, celles-là qui sont rédigées en fulfulde, en empruntant des caractères arabes et en inventant des phonèmes inexistant dans la langue arabe. Ces sources arabes et *ajami* sont abordées par Hamadou Adama qui revient ici sur un aspect jusque-là très peu abordé dans des travaux d'historiens camerounais, celui du renseignement prévisionnel et stratégique, en contexte colonial. A partir d'un échantillonnage composé des correspondances issues des chancelleries de Rey Bouba et de Bibémi, il relate la fonctionnalité de celles-ci au double plan codicologique et paléographique. Il ressort de cette contribution que la maîtrise de l'alphabet et de l'écriture arabes a joué un rôle décisif dans la concrétisation de la domination politique des musulmans sur d'autres entités ethniques ne disposant pas de ce savoir scripturaire, à l'instar des peuples des monts mandara. En revanche, ces derniers disposent d'instruments patrimoniaux sophistiqués qui renseignent, restituent et reproduisent leur histoire. Ce sont l'onomastique et les épistèmes étudiés par Maura David, les travaux communautaires et les fêtes communielles abordés par Diye Jeremie, les récits migratoires (Maura David) et les données archéologiques croisées à l'ethnographie des peuplements (Hassimi Sambo). Tout cet ensemble relevant de la tradition orale qui aborde les sources de l'histoire des peuples des Monts Mandara et ceux du versant sud du plateau de l'Adamaoua témoignent de l'existence de riches potentialités patrimoniales dont l'exploration favorise la visibilité et l'appropriation par tous les Camerounais.

L'autre spécificité des monts mandara, et plus particulièrement la localité de Mora, est qu'elle a servi de lieu du dénouement de la deuxième guerre mondiale au Cameroun, étant donné la capitulation de la 3<sup>ème</sup> Compagnie des troupes coloniales impériales retranchée sur ses massifs environnants. En dehors de quelques articles scientifiques publiés et mémoires soutenus dans les universités camerounaises, les combats entre les Alliés et les troupes allemandes à Mora ont très peu suscité l'intérêt des spécialistes de l'histoire militaire au Cameroun. A l'extérieur, par contre, des fonds d'archives sont de plus en plus accessibles et rappellent à la mémoire collective cette séquence importante de l'histoire de la Grande Guerre au Cameroun. Ainsi, le photographe Frédéric Gadmer qui a sillonné le Cameroun au lendemain de la victoire alliée et l'officier anglais Arthur Lees ont légué à la postérité de précieuses photographies qui permettent de visualiser une période pour laquelle les données orales sont de plus en plus fragmentaires. C'est à partir des données iconographiques de cet acteur de la Grande Guerre au Cameroun qu'est Arthur Lees et du photographe français Frédéric Gadmer que Woudammike Joseph et Gigla Garakchame portent à

notre connaissance cette séquence inédite de l'historiographie militaire camerounaise.

Dans les plaines, on rencontre d'autres formes, d'autres traces qui, sans s'opposer aux héritages des peuples des montagnes, complètent ceux-ci, en renforçant leur fiabilité, leur pertinence et leur fonctionnalité. Les techniques de la parure, de la coiffure, des blessures symboliques et de l'iconographie corporelle sont certes plus élaborées ici, à côté des danses patrimoniales et le raffinement vestimentaire.

A partir des éléments esthétiques relevés chez les Arabes choa, Kanuri et Kotoko, Atoukam Tchefenjem Liliane Dalis relève l'importance accordée aux vêtements, parures, produits cosmétiques et essences odoriférantes dont les origines remontent au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle. Mahamat Abba Ousman lui emboîte le pas, en revenant sur les modalités de valorisation des danses patrimoniales des Kotoko dont l'exécution est rendue indispensable lors des manifestations culturelles. En dégageant les problèmes conjoncturels que traverse cette pratique culturelle chez les Kotoko, il réfléchit également sur les modalités pratiques de vulgarisation et de valorisation de cet héritage commun à ce peuple.

Chez les Peuls aussi, le genre musical dénommé *mbala*, étudié par Hamid, attire les foules, attise les passions et sa prestation publique ignore les hiérarchies sociales. Le crépitement sonore et saccadé des tambours, la rime prosodique et la rythmique versifiée des paroles distillées, et le déhanchement des choristes déclenchent une telle frénésie au sein du public qu'il devient difficilement contrôlable et dépense sans compter. Zakiyata Laoupanga et Ousmanou Kereste sont, incontestablement, les principaux porte-paroles de cette tendance musicale aux origines lointaines.

Pour sa part, Ousmanou Adama s'interroge, à travers quelques illustrations, sur la nature religieuse ou patrimoniale des figures géométriques qui ornent les gandouras et les vêtements d'apparat en vogue dans le Sahel camerounais et au-delà. Les symboles concrets constituent, d'après cet auteur, les matériaux de l'imagination reproductive qui se transforment dans le génie créateur du modéliste par une sorte d'alchimie mentale, mystérieusement subtile, en des images symboliques où s'expriment non plus des sensations affaiblies, mais des formes nouvelles et originales représentatives d'une idée et dont la signification de portée universelle nécessite déchiffrement et interprétation.

Outre le patrimoine artistique, l'environnement et ses richesses multiples s'imposent de plus en plus comme des objets d'étude et de production historique. L'environnement est non seulement un patrimoine à préserver des risques naturels et anthropiques, mais aussi, il regorge de potentialités que l'homme n'a pas fini d'explorer et de découvrir (Ahidjo Paul). Les plantes médicinales en milieu culturel peul, largement étudiées par Mengue

Me Ndong Jean Paulin, font aussi partie intégrante de ces richesses et ressources nécessaires à la stabilisation des grands équilibres naturels et à la survie de l'espèce humaine. Au-delà de la qualité thérapeutique intrinsèque des plantes, se cache une valeur symbolique qui met à jour bien des aspects positifs de la médecine naturelle dans le septentrion camerounais.

Sur un tout autre plan, les sources de l'histoire économique et quantitative sont abordées dans les contributions de Fofiri Nzossé Eric Joël et Ndamè Joseph-Pierre, s'agissant des principales menaces qui pèsent sur le patrimoine céréalière dans les agrosystèmes du Nord-Cameroun d'une part et, d'autre part, de Ndihi Jonas sur les prix, poids et mesures usités dans cette région. Fofiri Nzossé Eric Joël et Ndamè Joseph-Pierre s'interrogent sur la problématique de la préservation d'un patrimoine alimentaire constitué autour du mil/sorgho, reconnu comme base traditionnelle de l'alimentation des populations au profit du maïs et du riz qui sont de véritables marqueurs identitaires face aux mutations alimentaires en cours. Dans le domaine de la métrologie, abordée magistralement par Ndihi Jonas, plusieurs systèmes de mesures ont disparu, du fait de leur englobement consécutif à la colonisation européenne et au développement des échanges interétatiques fondés sur des systèmes métriques aux normes partagées. Toutefois, poursuit-il, d'autres systèmes ont tenu tête et continuent d'exister. Au Nord-Cameroun, la mémoire collective conserve de nombreuses traces des systèmes de mesures dont certains ont encore cours sur les principales places des marchés hebdomadaires. Les préoccupations des traçabilités en histoire économique abordées dans sa contribution sont structurées autour des quatre grandeurs que sont les prix, les masses, les volumes et les capacités, les longueurs.

La conduite d'un tel projet éditorial ne pouvait pas se passer d'une réflexion profonde sur l'univers carcéral, les constructions mentales et psychologiques générées par des pratiques pénitentiaires allant de la simple mise en résidence surveillée à la lointaine déportation. A partir des productions littéraires de quelques écrivains originaires du Sud-Cameroun et dont le séjour forcé dans les geôles a été une source d'inspiration, leurs arrêts ayant été les pré-textes à d'ultérieures publications, Bana Barka, analyse un certain nombre d'écrits de prison ayant contribué à faire de la région septentrionale un espace carcéral et concentrationnaire dans le champ littéraire camerounais. Ce faisant, cette littérature a permis de distinguer dans l'intelligentsia camerounaise une caste d'« écrouvains » (Bana Barka, 2002) qu'il définit comme étant l'ensemble des personnes dont la littérature fait constamment référence non seulement aux pratiques privatives de liberté, mais aussi aux espaces de confinement dans lesquels ils ont eu à faire les frais de leur liberté d'expression. En s'appuyant sur de célèbres écrouvains comme Emmanuel Bityeki et Mongo Béti, Bana Barka dégage de leurs écrits d'écrou l'image du Nord-Cameroun comme une région de

réclusion et d'exclusion, tout en tentant une analyse de cette clautrographie à géométrie variable.

Pour conclure, une réflexion théorique s'impose sur la production historique qui inspecte la crise des sources orales, les matériaux de prédilection de reconstitution de l'histoire africaine ainsi que les défis de l'écriture de cette discipline. La contribution de Wassouni François revient sur les difficultés qui entachent aussi bien l'accès aux sources orales, leur collecte que leur traitement. Il insiste sur les embûches qui jalonnent le chemin qui mène aux sources orales ; le désintérêt et la disparition poussée des paramètres de la tradition (les contes, les légendes, les mythes, les proverbes, les épopées, les chants, etc.) ; la suspicion, la peur et la réticence des informateurs à livrer des témoignages sur d'importantes séquences de l'histoire ; la protection, le respect et la méfiance qui entourent les questions de mémoire. Au registre des suggestions, l'auteur préconise l'élaboration des mesures appropriées pour collecter, conserver et valoriser le patrimoine oral, le renforcement de la formation au maniement des sources orales, le développement des astuces susceptibles de pousser les acteurs à rompre le silence et à combattre les velléités d'instrumentalisation de cette discipline à des fins pernicieuses. La réussite d'un tel pari, suggère-t-il, passe par la mobilisation de plusieurs acteurs, à savoir l'Etat, les universités, les organisations internationales et non gouvernementales, les collectivités décentralisées, les comités locaux de développement.

Cet ouvrage se compose de dix sept contributions produites autant par des chercheurs confirmés que par de jeunes doctorants engagés depuis plusieurs années dans l'étude des problématiques abordées. Le croisement des thématiques sur des questions patrimoniales et celles embrassant les sources de l'histoire nous semble fécond à plus d'un titre. D'abord parce que le patrimoine, en tant que lieu de mémoire situé, est régulièrement convoqué pour servir de source à l'histoire ; ensuite, la réactualisation de la problématique de l'immatérialité du patrimoine face au temps en fuite appelle un nouveau regard, une redéfinition du patrimoine ; enfin, la convocation de l'oralité, en tant que source fondamentale de l'histoire africaine, ouvre de nouvelles perspectives de recherches dans des domaines jusque-là peu explorés.

En somme, cette livraison est conçue comme une introduction, une invite à l'approfondissement des recherches sur les « lieux partagés » et les « valeurs communes » susceptibles d'agrandissement et d'élévation et ce, en tirant profit de toutes les opportunités qu'offrent les nouvelles technologies dans la valorisation des héritages et la traque des sources de l'histoire.

## Regionalisation and creation of a “Northern Cameroon” Identity

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Njeuma Martin Zachary †

### A neglected theme

Studies on regionalisation have not been popular among African historians. This is largely because historians treat the subject as Area Studies, demarcated in geographical terms as North Africa, East, West, and Southern Africa. Each of these areas consists of a number of modern nation states. The British historian, David Birmingham and his colleagues put together papers outside this framework, specific to regional studies under the title, “A History of Central Africa” in two volumes.<sup>2</sup> The interest in the book is not so much in the title as in the definition given to the area and the common features that make up the region. Neither the assumed frontiers nor the elements of unity are convincingly different from what we can attribute to other areas of Africa. In another sense, one finds similar poverty in concepts. This can be explained principally because rival theories about nationalism and nation-state have superseded concepts of regions in their historical contexts.<sup>3</sup> In other words, put side by side, attention to regional

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†This paper was initially presented by late Professor Martin Zachary Njeuma (April 9, 1940–April 28, 2010) at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences, University of Oslo, Norway, 6-13 August 2000. He gave the editor two draft papers with permission to publish them after both attended a Humboldt conference in Yaoundé on 25 November 2009. This contribution is published as a tribute to his blessed memory.

<sup>2</sup> D. Birmingham and P. Martin (eds.), *A History of Central Africa*, vol. I & II; pp. VII-XII, 1-4; « It is twice as large as West Africa on one flank, or East Africa and the Horn on the other....All of Central Africa's three million square miles lie within the tropic ». This notion of a region does not take into account the colonial frontiers.

<sup>3</sup> Studies on nationalism in Africa are plethoric. They are mostly country-based. For Cameroon, see Ndivé Kofele-Kale, (ed.), *An African Experiment in Nation Building: The Bilingual Cameroon Republic since Reunification*, Colorado, Westview Press, Boulder, 1980; W.R. Johnson, *The Cameroon Federation: Political Integration in a Fragmentary Society*, N.J., Princeton Univ Press, 1970; J.F. Bayart, *L'Etat au Cameroun*, (2nd ed.), PFNS, Paris, 1985; Martin Z. Njeuma, (ed.) *Introduction to the History of Cameroon in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Macmillan, London, 1989 (French trans., L'Harmattan, Paris).

studies has taken second place to those on nationalism, apparently due to inconsistency in definition and uncertain international focus on regions.

Up to a point, the manner in which African historiography has developed has also contributed to a neglect of the theme. On the one hand, as an offspring of imperial studies, African history was first taught as part of expansion of Europe in Africa. Consequently, Africa was viewed more from Eurocentric perspectives and less from within, consistent with Africa's internal logic thereby defying attention for natural regional classifications. On the other hand, when Africans themselves started researching and writing their own history the focus so far has not been on regions either. Instead, the choice of subject and motivation has been national, with roots in micro and local histories. The perspectives have been parochial and as long as the contradictions and problems of identifying generally acceptable regions persist, it is unlikely that African Africanists would burst out of the national orbit to seriously engage in studies about regions.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that scholars have felt more at ease working where they can relate with the events and peoples and minimise overhead difficulties of language and cultural competence. In Cameroon historiography, the term region has been a geographical concept mostly encountered in the writings of French trained scholars. I am referring to Dongmo, Boutrais, Beauvillain, et cetera.<sup>5</sup> They see region, and its diminutive, sub-region, in almost every economic and political development. References to region have been to territory with imprecise delimitation, but sharing common geographical features. Sometimes, a combination of modern states sharing common linguistic and colonial unity is called a region, as for example the Central African Region, or within Cameroon, the grassfields and anglophone sub-regions. Thus when geographers speak of savannah region, or dessert region or, still, peripheral or intermediate regions, the qualifying words or word offer the clue to the general identity, what is in reference, as well as what constitutes the hypothetical frontiers of the region. In historical works, notion of region also conveys limitless space, but it is the qualities of the people such as type and level of economic and political organisation or their value systems (law, religion, culture), which constitute the specificity and content of the

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<sup>4</sup> In a sense this has to do with decolonisation and the liberties it brought to African scholarship. For an authoritative study, see J.C. Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and History", *The American Historical Review*, vol.104, no.1, Feb. 1999. For several points of views, B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury (eds.), *African Historiography: what History for which Africa?* Beverly Hills, Calif., 1986; A.J. Temu and B. Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique*, London, 1981 for incisive criticisms of African scholars' writings, which are blamed for lacking ideological content.

<sup>5</sup> Some are J-L Dongmo, *Le dynamisme Bamiléké (Cameroun)*, 2 vols., CEPER, Yaounde, 1981; J.M. Ela, *L'Afrique des Villages*, Karthala, Paris 1982; Jean Boutrais et al, *Le Nord du Cameroun: des Hommes, une Région*, ORSTOM, Paris, 1984; A. Beauvillain, *Nord-Cameroun, Crise et Peuplement*, Notre Dame de Gravanchou, 2T, Paris 1994.

identification. Here, regionalisation takes the hue of the way people interact and think vis-à-vis regional concerns and characteristics. The confusion and lack of harmony of views are remarked in the way scholars variously refer to northern Cameroon as “la partie septentrionale du Cameroun”, “Nord Cameroun”, “Cameroun du Nord”, “Nord-Cameroun”, and “Region Nord” to mean one and the same area without distinction either in area or concept.<sup>6</sup> In the circumstances, the context and audience matter for an understanding of usage. Many are seen to use the term region more in an administrative than a historical sense, and historians of the region have the task to draw the distinction.

The purpose of this study is therefore to examine and analyse the historical foundations of regionalisation in northern Cameroon. As a pioneer study, regionalisation is studied here in terms of emergence and imposition of political authority that have marked out northern Cameroon as a region in the Republic of Cameroon with particular focus on nineteenth and twentieth century experiences. It examines the agencies, and their articulation, and transforming roles, content of regionalisation, in pre-colonial, and early colonial periods; and the roles which early colonialism played to strengthen or weaken the regional process. This and other pertinent issues of segmentation, conflict, competition, shifting and interlocking political cultures, with more than parochial interests, constitute the side- and high-light of the study. We are highlighting both events and structures that transcend single or few “ethnic” communities (ethnic or ethnicity is used here and elsewhere only as a term of convenience derived from the sources). The northern Cameroon identity is important in present day Cameroon across the board because it involves nearly half the area and population of Cameroon as well as the domestication of the entire savannah region. Geographically, northern Cameroon is the watershed for several rivers as well as a great meeting area for ethnic groups, which cross international frontiers. These peoples have played a distinctive role in regional capacity building by their regional specificity in parliament and other state institutions. Based on regional capacity, the northern region provided Ahmadou Ahidjo, an able first President of the Republic, who played the historic role of safeguarding the country from a devastating civil war at independence from colonial rule. There are therefore much unexplored grounds in the concept, content and promoters of regionalisation in Africa viewed from multidisciplinary considerations.

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<sup>6</sup> See “Mega Tchad” Bulletin of information (1986-). It has been publishing up to date bibliographies and short reviews including newly defended theses on northern Cameroon.



## Pre-colonial origin: state building

Historically speaking, northern Cameroon identity construction or regionalisation can be traced back to a remote past though modern scholarship mistakenly puts the genesis in Fulbe uprisings, sometimes referred to as jihad (holy wars) of Usmanu dan Fodio at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In origin, river Benue and its tributaries together with Lake Chad and the numerous rivers that drain into the lake provided the natural regional foundation. This huge hydraulic complex that touches on every part of northern Cameroon provided sustainable resources and communication links to warrant extensive cross-cultural interactions and considerable changes in environment. Consequently, waves of peoples from far and near have been attracted to settle, wander or pass through the area sometimes leaving historical foot prints on their trails. The influence of their civilisation, such as those of the So or Sao, Kotoko and Musgum can now be traced mostly from ethnological studies and archaeological diggings, scanty traditions picked up here and there and from extrapolations from the past. Groups which have survived and can be classed linguistically and culturally have been named and studied as ethnic groups<sup>7</sup> though the traditions that link them together might be of relatively recent creation.

However, before the nineteenth century, some communities (for reasons that are not easy to explain in macro history) became powerful, buttressed by elements that made for group solidarity and cohesion around major resource centres in the Chad and Benue basins. By the sixteenth century, relations between Muslim states of North Africa and West Africa across the Sahara desert encouraged emergence of strong states in order to regulate trade. The history of Borno and that of Kanem to the west and north of Lake Chad respectively, which linked up with North Africa is a case in point (Adeleye, 1971; Lange, 1987). They produced able leaders such as Idris

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<sup>7</sup> C. Tardits, (ed.) *Contribution de la Recherche Ethnologique à l'Histoire des Civilisations du Cameroun*, CNRS, Paris, 1981; Common was the practice of divine kingship. Annie Lebeuf, *Les Principautés Kotoko: essai sur le caractère sacré de l'autorité*, Paris, Université de Paris, 1969; also Jean Hurault, "Les anciennes populations de cultivateurs de l'Adamaoua occidental", in Jean Boutrais (ed.), *Peuples et Cultures de L'Adamaoua (Cameroun)*, CRNS, Paris 1994; Ibid. Thierno Bah, "Le facteur peul et les relations interethnique dans l'Adamaoua au XIX siècle", pp. 61-86; E. Muhamadou, *Les royaumes Foulbé du plateau de l'Adamaoua*, Tokyo, 1978. Bah makes a significant distinction between the Fulbe culture before and during the jihad. Group identity before the jihad was based on language and "religion". This was a matter of birth, though alliances brought about the acceptance of others for protection and prosperity of the group. A mistaken notion is that which politically divides Cameroon into ethnic groups. The jargon is recent, probably a colonial and postcolonial expression, where word "tribe" had become derogatory. For a discussion on the , see Chrétien and G. Prunier (eds.), *Les Ethnies ont une Histoire*, Karthala, Paris 1989, pp. 135-148; T. Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa", in E. Hobsbawn and T Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, CUP, 1983.

Alaoma who, backed by an Islamic nobility and strong diplomatic network abroad, made war and peace and ruled over far-flung peoples. Their objectives would seem to be to acquire labourers, make alliances as well as pursue prestige. Their advantage was possession of horses and weapons of mass destruction (firearms not excluded) from across the Sahara, and acquaintance with techniques of managing violence situations that were mostly imported from North Africa. Though such pursuits divided communities into hostile camps, nevertheless the lessons learnt from long distance travel and study of exotic cultures were very much a part of the emerging civilisation in the northern Cameroon region.

The map of the region, for this pre-colonial period, indicated that those who did business outside their immediate territory were the surrounding Muslim states of Kanem, Borno, Baghirmi, Mandara, and Wadai to the Far East. Why Muslim states had this lead over the others in multi-ethnic state building requires more global and comparative research. It is suspected that this has to do with the Caliphate concept of organising a state. For these states, raiding for men and property as well as destruction of settlements were in quest of both political and economic objectives to win recognition and find the resources to survive as strong, aggrandised states. Rulers of these states were very much in need of labour to support expanding economies, supply porters for long distance travel, domestic workers, and military personnel. All these produced the prestige, which buttressed much-desired diplomatic activities with the Arab world. The frequency of these raiding expeditions, coupled with distances over which they were carried, raised raiding to a regional phenomenon from these early times. Those who could evade capture, found that they regrouped on less accessible areas (highlands and marshy territories) as refugees of mixed origins and formed sub-regions. Another reality made people who had lost their native cultures to be assimilated into more dynamic and expanding cultures of the neighbouring centralised states. Thus a raiding culture and forced emigration broke the synergy of local knowledge development and sense of kinship at the peripheries of “kingly cities”, only to concentrate these qualities of power and sense of community achievements at the centre of the states. As it was for Lake Chad area, so was it also for the Benue basin.

Further south on the banks of Lower River Benue, also developed Kwararafa or Jukun communities whose Empire we know little besides that it flourished in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with nucleus around present-day Numman. According to the Kano Chronicles and Jukun traditions, Bachama and Chamba formed the leading communities in the

Jukun Empire.<sup>8</sup> In retrospect, the fact that rulers of Borno and Mandara sent raiding expeditions to such distant peoples, about 400 kilometres apart, was evidence of the great value which was attached to these peoples and the products of their civilisations. It was therefore not surprising that Borno armies clashed with non-Muslim kwararafa in contexts that could be interpreted as regional competition for hegemony.

Today, the Chamba have been reduced to small communities that share common affinities, and they are found scattered as far south as the Bamenda grasslands. Another reason for reading regionalisation in their exploits was the influence that the Chamba have exercised over this vast sub-region since the sixteenth century. Their authority and civilization spread because of attraction of their cult practices, including divine kingship customs, intensive agriculture and techniques of fishing and hunting big game. Thus, in all, regionalism functioned as governments became centralised and spread their powers and authorities far beyond the central point.

### **The Fulbe concept and contribution**

The next notion of northern Cameroon as a region, an entity, which linked with pre-Fulbe state building culture, was the conception of what Fulbe sources referred to as Fombina. The attempt was also state building under indigenous leadership, but the difference was the extent of territory covered and emphasis on religion. Fombina should not be confused with what the German/British explorer, Heinrich Barth, imagined as an ancient Batta kingdom of Kukomi, which seemed to have been located in the same area of the middle Benue below Garoua. In Fulbe language (Fulfulde), Fombina means Southland, south here in relation to Borno territory.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Fombina was not a political terminology in the sense of Borno or

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<sup>8</sup> C.K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical study of the Jukun Speaking People of Nigeria*, (reprinted, Negro University Press, New York, 1969; Sa'ad Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina: A Political History of Adamawa 1809-1902*, Ahmadu Bello University Press and Oxford University Press, London, 1977. See Chapter One "The Region and its Inhabitants". He outlines connections between the major "ethnic groups" from historical sources collected in the early British colonial days. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Adamawa, Past and Present*, London, 1958; N.B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon: A Political History*, Edition Cape, Paris, 1988; Richard Fardon, *Raiders and Refugees: Trends in Chamba Political Development, 1750-1950*, Edingburg, 1990 highlights environmental conditions as reason for mobility.

<sup>9</sup> Sa'ad Abubakar, *op.cit.*, He uses the term Fombina for the title of his book, instead of "Adamawa Emirate" may be to emphasise the multi-lateral historical growth as against a focus on the specific role of Modibbo Adama, which won him an unsurpassable respectable place. M.Z. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa) 1809-1902*, CEPER, Yaounde, pp. 68ff. See also Jean Boutrais' interesting comments in *Peuples et Cultures de L'Adamaoua (Cameroun)* *op.cit.*, pp. 7-8. He claims, unconvincingly, that originally the word had a political and historic content, but it became a geographical and administrative entity in Cameroon.

Hausa communities, which had well-structured central administrations. Fombina had neither capital nor ruler. It should rather be seen as an ecological and economic conception referring to areas of dry season transhumance for cattle herders. Naturally this included Mandara territorially, but hostility between Mandara and Fulbe were such that Fulbe seldom made stops in Mandara as they moved south. Thus, geographically speaking, Fombina lay beyond Mandara territory, and by custom was located in river Benue sub-region, in the same area where Fulbe Emirate of Adamawa emerged in the beginning of nineteenth century. However, it was not the idea of Fombina, which was ultimately responsible for Fulbe regionalism in the sense of making a homeland.

The Fulbe regional ideas were shaped by the kinds of relationship, which Fulbe had developed with non-Fulbe just before their communities rose to prominence. The need for each other's resources encouraged symbiotic relations among non-Fulbe and Fulbe settlements. Today, the details of these relationships, for example, who initiated them and how they were enforced is mostly a matter of conjecture and extrapolation from recent happenings under similar conditions. From non-Fulbe accounts, Fulbe presence did not seem to have stirred widespread hostility or competition with their neighbours because Fulbe peopled the region at different times in small bands from many directions. Though they had common objectives, Fulbe never congregated together in one area, but were dispersed into several communities, principally due to leadership imperatives. Some among them had either reduced or abandoned nomadism on conversion to Islam. They mixed the religion of Islam with Fulbe values and cultures, collectively referred to as Pulaaku.<sup>10</sup>

Among themselves, they practised bilingualism in Fulfulde and rudimentary classical Arabic, which they used mostly for religious and magical purposes. It was principally with this Muslim group that non-Fulbe peoples interacted in significant ways to transform the parochial society. Because they possessed few cattle, their elite had ample time to study the Quran and Islamic sciences and to acquire broad-based knowledge and serve as instructors to others and earned a living. The principal role that Fulbe communities and villages played in advancement of regional ideas was to profoundly change the character of the region from little settlements and villages to societies with cosmopolitan towns.

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<sup>10</sup> Pulaaku in the foundation of Fulbe unity. "Tabital Pulaaku" is an international association of Fulbe, which was founded in Bamako, Mali, in 1998 to keep alive the ideals of Pulaaku. For an anthropological study, see Catherine VerEecke, "Pulaaku: Adamawa Fulbe Identity and its Transformations". PhD. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 47ff. So far this is the most detailed study on the subject for the region; also D. Stenning, "Cattle Values and Islam Values in a Pastoral Population", in I.M. Lewis, (ed.), *Islam in Tropical Africa*, Bloomington, 1966, 194- 205. Fulbe have preserved Pulaaku as very compatible with the Laws of Islam.

Firstly, the Fulbe period defined the content of regionalisation by institutional building, then developing the particularities of the regional economy and, finally, Islamisation efforts. These common concerns constituted the foundations and the identity of northern Cameroon.

### **Fulbeisation: institutional building**

The Fulbe attachment to Usmanu's jihad brought them into political limelight construction, superseding all other communities in the process. This started in 1809. Historically speaking, the most important development was creation of common leadership, an innovation among independent and scattered populations of Fulbe. Usmanu dan Fodio appointed Modibbo Adama of Yola supreme leader and instructed the Muslims of the principal states of northern Cameroon, (Garoua, Maroua, Rai and later Ngaoundere) to form one Community (Emirate) with him. As subsequent events showed, it took some time, and resort to war (as in the case of Rai Bouba vs Yola) for the old leadership to submit. Thus it was that Usmanu's nomination of Modibbo Adama, and his simplistic and accommodative character, solved crucial problems of unity among Fulbe, wherever they were found in northern Cameroon. Also, rising to prominence were a plethora of title-holders and advisers, Islamic religious officials, poets, musicians, praise singers, jokers, and palace historians of mixed origin. Each, in its own way, contributed to the smooth functioning of Fulbe institutions by putting essentials of local knowledge and popular acclamation at the service of the new regional political empowerment. The new experiences did not contradict basic Fulbe *mœurs*. On the contrary, they brought to the forefront their universalistic application.

The question has been asked to what extent the institutions the Fulbe created represented commitment to spread and reform Islam and not a craving for naked authority? If a line could not be drawn between religious and political authority, then the search for authority was simply the path to religious security. Islam provided its adherents a way of life in which culture and authority were inseparable. Both faculties needed each other's support. Similarly, there was the question of foreign imposition and cultural anomaly in Fulbe actions. For them to be described as foreign and estranged to peoples in northern Cameroon context, four conditions would have been observable. First, Fulbe came from outside the geographical region where they had a base for headquarters. Second, they worked for foreign interest vis-à-vis local interests. Third, they had negligible stakes in the fate of the local populations. Fourth, they were supported and financed from without so that the actions of agents were like those of mercenaries. It was not a foreign invasion seeing that Fulbe had migrated into the region since the

seventeenth century and had broken with their past ancestry. Furthermore, in Africa, principles of first occupant are significant in legitimising ownership claims to land. Their longevity in the region gave them the status of indigenous peoples particularly because the institutions of empowerment were highly incorporative, as they were open to participation of all, including “conquered” peoples.

However, inability of Fulbe led forces to subdue all peoples in the geographical region equally and at the same time created an incongruous situation characterised by protracted warfare. This had to do with issues of effective occupation by Fulbe and means to hold down heavily segmented populations, which were prone to plenty of unrestricted movements, and would do everything but submit to Fulbe demands. The invasion of Mandara, Mbum, and Bamoun reflected this inability of Fulbe to backup initial conquests with effective occupation. Thus a distinction could be drawn between two societies of Fulbe regionalism: the peoples inside and those outside Fulbe direct influence and control. Those inside the central lands were situated south of the Logon River at Mayo Kebbi and Lere, the Diamare, centred on Maroua. Also included here were the areas of Benue River and its tributaries to as far south as Adamawa plateau, stretching from Banyo in the west to Ngaoui on the frontier with Central African Republic in the east. The principal communities outside Fulbe jurisdiction, alliance, and protection were the Mandara, the Tupuri, Massa, Kotoko, Mundang, Shuwa Arabs and the kingdom of Bamoun.

These lived on the peripheries, independently as before the Fulbe period, holding firm to their ancestral heritage, though often they borrowed aspect of Fulbe leadership patterns and symbols, e.g., in the organization of court etiquette. Borno and Mandara (two Muslim kingdoms in the extreme north of Cameroon) were also situated outside Fulbe sphere, and the sources and content of their Islam differed from Fulbe experiences.

As Muslim kingdoms, they all operated under Islamic law. Distinction between these two categories of populations outside Fulbe sphere was more theoretical than practical. Viewed over a long period the superiority attitudes, organisation, and military preparedness were such that the Muslims were feared and/or dreaded everywhere. An additional advantage was the possession of wealth and pluralistic knowledge, especially in the role of providing theocratic models of government.

Another worth-noting issue was that Fulbe had expanded too fast and so widely that available human resources to effect rapid changes were inadequate. This limitation rightly explains the jihad’s political option of broad-based participation at all echelons of administration. Certainly, and of necessity, political expediencies conditioned Fulbe policies, principal among which was the question of how to integrate indigenous forms of knowledge into construction of a new society without at the same time losing sight of

Islamic ideals. According to Islamic traditions, government was theocratic with Allah at the apex and his representatives organised in subordinate units of authority down the ladder. From a sociological analysis of government in Zaria, M. G. Smith calls the structure Emirate-type government. Naturally, several practical problems surfaced as transition to Emirate-type government was taking shape and as the Fulbe aristocracy adapted itself psychologically and otherwise to its new roles as rulers of a vast extent of territory. Over 95% of the population (that is, assuming that the estimated 8% Fulbe in the region was mostly Muslim) had never experienced Muslim government and, no doubt, some Fulbe who assumed leadership roles, thanks to the jihad, were also strangers in the Emirate system.<sup>11</sup> Put in context, what preoccupied the ruling aristocracy at the time was not being versed in Islamic principles of government, but how as neophytes in the system, it was going to synchronise the old and new environments? What form was integration to take in view the fact that several widely dispersed communities were involved at different stages of development? Under these circumstances how was a Muslim environment going to be concretised without compromising ideals?

The answers to these questions could only be relative to contemporary socio-political realities of the sub-region. Much depended on competent leadership that combined the old and the new hands on deck. Usmanu dan Fodio and his descendants instructed the Lamibbe to rely on diplomacy and war to stimulate new loyalties, alliances and obedience. They operated through a system of mutual assistance that was facilitated by the chain of community linkages referred to above. Uniformity of government structures was desirable since legitimacy sprang from one source, Islamic precepts. Local leadership skills and the importance of the non-Fulbe population in some areas made variations inevitable. This was the case in Ngaoundere, for instance, where Mbum ruling houses (*Belaka*) allied with Fulbe and maintained a position of strength in the government of the lamdo. Also, Batta of Demsa and the Dama of Rai were important elements in their respective sub-regions.

Therefore to ensure stability, they were made to feature prominently in the councils of the new government. They however participated in government to the extent that they progressively acquired principles of

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<sup>11</sup> Administration in Northern Cameroon has been studied from many angles. See Njeuma, 1978, op. cit., and Sa'ad Abubakar, 1977. On building solidarity and the function of identity maintenance, see Philip Burnham, *The Politics of Cultural Differences in Northern Cameroon*, Edinburg University Press, 1996; Paul K. Eguchi and Victor Azarya, (eds.), *Unity and Diversity of a People. The Search for Fulbe Identity*, Kyoto, Japan, 1993; Louis Brenner, "Introduction: Muslim Representation of Unity and Difference in the African Discourse" in L. Brenner (ed.) *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: Hurst, 1993. Kees Schilder, *Quest for Self Esteem: State, Islam and Mandang Ethnicity in Northern Cameroon*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1994.

Pulaaku and became either “Fulberised” or posed no threat to Fulbe architecture for regionalism. They also learnt Fulfulde, Fulbe language, which quickly became the lingua franca and assumed regional dimensions for inter-community communication. However, in Maroua, where Fulbe Modibbe were numerous, the Lamdo, himself a Modibbo, was always a prisoner to a council (*faada*) composed of scholars, and thus compromises with non-Fulbe populations were less pronounced. These and other few exceptions of the general rule did not cause a drawback to the essentials of regionalism.

In these ways, the vague notion of “Fombina” gradually gave way to a wider creation, the Emirate. In conception at least, the Emirate had frontiers and a legal status in Islamic law. And this fact motivated the community to defend its institutions. Besides, the Emirate was made up of over 40 sub-Emirates in number and looked up to Yola, home of its founder, Modibbo Adama, as both spiritual and constitutional headquarters. In this sense, the jihad was unmistakably fired by ethnic-type solidarity because all newly installed “dynasties” were of Fulbe stock. An additional aspect that facilitated institutional building all over was that structures of the Emirate were a replica in miniature of the Caliphate government from Sokoto, Nigeria. The Emirate traditions gave a sense of legitimising the position of the new authorities. The Lamido or Emir was both chief and “Commander of the Faithful” so were also the Lambbe in sub-Emirates. They were all assisted by a host of appointed officials. The structures were organised, depending on the particularity of the area at two levels: councillors or very close collaborators of the Lambbe and non-Fulbe titleholders. The main difference between the first and second levels of interactions was that policies were discussed and elaborated in the former, while the functions of the latter were to execute policies, which reached them in forms of orders from the hierarchy. These structures ensured that the essential function of state were taken care of permanently and that non-Fulbe populations were just as active and involved and felt responsible as were the Fulbe. Institutionally, the system was held in place by personal ties of loyalty and subordination down the scale, and especially reinforced by value congruency among the aristocracy irrespective of origin.

Once established, Muslim immigrants constantly swelled the rank of Fulbe aristocracy and transformed the aristocracy to a bulwark of regionalism. For instance, between c1840 and 1872 a substantial number of scholar immigrants came to various parts of the Emirate to stay permanently and operated private business, or associated with government in a variety of capacities as advisers, judges, or creditors to the Lambbe. They came voluntarily by invitation, or on their own, principally from Borno and Hausaland, people whose ancestry practiced Islam. As a result they were



absorbed into Fulbe aristocracy (Burnham, 1994).<sup>12</sup> By their knowledge and skills and inter-territorial reputation, Fulbe aristocracy quickly gained respectability and legality with much assistance from the spiritual centres of Sokoto and Yola as the case might be. In order to understand the tradition that required immigrants to submit to, rather than to compete for authority with Fulbe rulers, one must reckon with the fact that a Fulbe ruler was both leader of a political community and a designated “Commander of the Faithful”. The latter quality made him an acknowledged and anointed leader for Believers. In this context, the “Commander of the Faithful” enjoyed considerable immunity, for instance, from public rebuke, aggression, and disobedience, but not freedom from public prosecution in civil matters.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, the immigrants became an indispensable part in strengthening Fulbe leadership, and promoting cosmopolitan, regional and global perspectives within the multi-ethnic aristocracy.

### **The economic *raison d'être***

Political power and status also resulted in inventing institutions that were economically oriented to an integrative system. The wars, as a rule, had led to much disturbances of the old order, especially since it was conducted on several fronts at the same time. Families and villages were in many places put asunder and ravaged. The problem, which arose, was how to manage raiding expeditions before and after the event and, ultimately, how to dispose the booty. It was always a potential source of conflict. Resort to Islamic constitutionality prevailed and there are recorded cases, which were brought before justices of the peace for redress.<sup>14</sup> Practically, redistribution of wealth was carried out within the framework of Islamic obligations to meet expenses for traditional hospitality locally and to send tribute or pay taxes to hierarchical superiors in the vast administrative structure, which had Yola and Sokoto at the summit. Consequently, Fulbe rulers put premium on raiding as a means of augmenting production and accumulation of wealth. There was full employment for every able body was implicated. Every one belonged to an extended family, which had responsibility of socialisation and maintaining continuity in economic activities. There was, however, a problem between exporting labour in form of what European sources refer to as slaves and keeping labour locally in state and private farms. This was an old problem for the region. Export of peoples deprived the region of

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<sup>12</sup> For details about the content of the aristocracy see Bah, 1996; Mohammadou, 1981; and, for and analysis of more recent developments, Dongmo, 1996; Burnham, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Njeuma, 1978:138; Sa'ad Abubakar, 1977:79. Most of the civil cases concerned lending, borrowing and unfulfilled promises; also harbouring absconded wives and labourers.

<sup>14</sup> For more details see Njeuma, 1978:138-141; Bah, 1985; *Rumde* also formed a part of the defense system.

some of its best labour forces and consequently slowed down progressive local accumulation of wealth.

But where stability was guaranteed, Fulbe elite quickly integrated cattle and agricultural economies under single leadership by establishing plantations called, in Fulfulde, *rumde*.<sup>15</sup> It was a way of protecting and, at the same time, controlling displaced populations gathered from here and there and giving rein to their previous competencies. Thus Fulbe used and transmitted their skills in cattle husbandry, the Hausa and Kanuri organised trade and exchanges of high valued industrial and military products, while cultivators and craftsmen of all sorts found new stimulus to produce for an ever-expanding market. The *rumde* were par excellence new production centres, fully animated by their own administrative hierarchy that were adapted and geared to mass production. As new settlements that in some ways can be compared to Kibbutzim in Israel, they created surpluses that supported nascent Fulbe political and social institutions. Thus the Emirate long enjoyed a distinctive regional reputation within the constitutionality of the Sokoto Caliphate.

The cultural identities as well as socio-economic structures of Fulbe were built upon possession of cattle. In the economic field, Fulbe put cattle industry on a regional plane following political raise in status. With inputs from Shua Arabs, who were also big scale pastoralists in Lake Chad sub-region, out of reach of the Fulbe world, cattle knowledge and culture inevitably spread to the best areas for grazing on the Diamare and Adamawa plateaux respectively, taking advantage of the favourable political supremacy condition. Large herds of cattle considerably increased economic activities in the region and united Fulbe as a group within the plural society and with a degree of solidarity which transcended both kinship and clanship. Their pastoral needs, especially transhumance, required extensive land (open fields and water) and therefore a different conception of regional construction. They and their herds could be accommodated even when transhumance territory became inhabited because population was sparse and there was virtually unlimited land carrying capacity. Numerous cattle Fulbe, especially those who go by the names Mbororo and Jafun, were encouraged to migrate and spread all over northern Cameroon where cattle had good chances of multiplying fast. The rearing of big animals like cattle, horses and asses played a special role in the lives of aristocrats. The demand for these animals was very high because they were the three most important

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<sup>15</sup> H. J. Fisher, "The Horse in the Central Sudan", *Journal of African History*, XIV, 3, 1973, pp. 355-379, argues that breeding of horses took professional dimension when horses became an effective weapon of war with the introduction of good harness and equipment.

regional beasts of burden.<sup>16</sup> Because of the important investments involved, only wealthy families engaged in production and management in the industry. Therefore, this work carried much prestige and was a principal source of income for supporting regionalisation politics.

Another dimension was cattle transhumance. It gave a fillip to new demographic occupation of the region. The movements of cattle were often from north to south and from high to low lands and vice versa. This practice was indispensable as it was in response to the dry and wet seasons, which were sharply marked, and caused much variation in availability of water and green pastures. The pressures to succeed were always there in a highly social oriented and competitive profession where failure in one man's herd of cattle could result in the demise of everybody's. A sense of collective responsibility was implied to develop necessary veterinary skills to guard against health hazards. Since no single group had the monopoly of medicine production, the economic imperatives induced active inter-community cooperation. The objective merit of all these activities was their trans-ethnicity, which became specially reinforced and widened as common economic involvement expanded from the centres to peripheral and marginal societies.

## **Islamisation**

What was new in northern Cameroon regionalisation process in the religious domain was that following the appeal of Usmanu dan Fodio, Fulbe Muslims started insisting that Islam offered a superior God to whom all must submit, and that obedience to Allah's Messenger was obligatory. This was the novelty, the revolutionary idea, precept and political agenda, which set the stage for a new regionalisation.

Progressively, this set up new religious leaders, legal system, and social stratification in which a core of local Muslims placed themselves at the top of the pyramid. What were the strategies that raised Islam from small showings to a regional status? By their lay out, sub-Emirates formed a potential chain of authorities for conversion of those who were not born Muslims. They built up resources, which they put at the service of Islam to transform themselves from simple nomadic herdsman to Muslim teachers, to build impressive mosques, and to give a good and universal image to Islam, especially to visitors and on ceremonial occasions.

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<sup>16</sup> D. J. Murffet, *Concerning Brave Captains*, London, 1964, p. 36. This statement constituted popular British attitudes, which explains why the administrators established a hierarchy of cultures and believes in which Islam was higher than "paganism".

A British officer once remarked that regionalisation arose out of a “civilising” mission aimed at transforming paganism to Islam (Lacroix, 1966; Mohammadou, 1981). Fulbe of northern Cameroon were summoned to reform and expand Islam when the idea had already gathered momentum as a popular and successful cause. Thus their domination in northern Cameroon was made possible because it was carried out within this context of messianic Islamic revival in the region. It brought into play long experiences that date back to traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (to whom be glory and peace).

Existing communication infrastructure opened for pilgrimage, trade and transhumance to reach distant peoples facilitated this ambition. As already noted, Fulbe Islamism further distinguished them and put them in a separate world of their own. This is what Pierre-François Lacroix erroneously refers to as Fulbe monopolisation of Islam (Nagar, 1972). In fact Fulbe Islam went further as it provided extensive and essential knowledge links whose roots lay far beyond the region. As was demonstrated earlier, Fulbe aristocracy opened up to Muslim immigrants who played various key roles in increasing awareness and knowledge of trans-territorial Islam.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there was definitely an evolution in the role of Islam. This explains why the “divine” figured so much in Fulbe jihad traditions, and why they reinforced a theological viewpoint of their activities so that victory in the wars were attributed to God’s will and not to individual actors. It is understandable in the sense that Islam is a religion, which prescribed total submission and uniform code of conduct for all its adherents, no matter race or status. Relying as Muslims were on foreign assistance to build competence, Islam considerably widened the information matrix and kept a lively interest in trans-regional Pan-Islamism. The scholarly community often generated much interest and pride in wide contacts and developments towards Islamic sciences. In the colonial days such openness and sense of selffulfilment and independence was misunderstood by nervous colonial authorities who, consequently, imposed a vicious regime of surveillance against what they called, “Mahdist activities”.

Recent studies on the state of Islamic scholarship in northern Cameroon reveal articulation of Islamic knowledge through men who attained scholarly rank. In Islamic traditions, scholars commanded much reverence and authority (especially spiritual) in their various communities because Quranic knowledge brought its possessors closer to the divine. They had great latitude to engage in intellectual work and have real influence on the communities. The general belief was that learned persons possess special blessings (*baraka*) which they could invoke to assist people to improve their stations in life, hence the phenomenon of itinerant scholars (*mallams*). This semi-magical aspect made them sell well in the market of fame and fortune

seekers. They were consulted by both Fulbe and non-Fulbe, as persons with special knowledge of Allah's will, capable of solving health problems and inducing success. Essential to scholarship was literacy in Arabic, which permitted scholars and their pupils to have direct access to Quranic knowledge and all that this implied in terms of inspiration, development of personality, and acquisition of spiritual maturity. The Quranic message was one of hope and courage, and assurance of ultimate triumph of Islam over ignorance and wars on earth. Under such psychological conditions, it is easy to understand why Fulbe fostered values that were protective of their Muslim heritage, indeed why they were so totally and collectively engaged in a socio-political organisation that strove after universal Islamic ideals.

Thus, as the tenets of Islam became widely known and enjoyed an expanded audience beyond elite core of the population, knowledge from the Quran, the constitutional precepts of any Muslim society, assumed cardinal importance in fuelling and shaping the dynamics of the new and enlarged society. In this respect, Quranic schools and pilgrimage tradition from West Africa played a significant role in creating and strengthening channels of communication for Islamic knowledge. The tradition was that most Muslims, who had learnt more than rudiments in the educational system, opened their own schools or became either part-time or full-time instructors in one of the available schools. Making pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in ones life time, when one has means, is one of the five prescribed Obligations of a Muslim. The Sudanese scholar, Omar Nagar documented these traditions and their significance among Muslims of West Africa and stated that the tradition went as far back as the fourteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The region south of Lake Chad fell within one of the routes taken by pilgrims from *Bilad es Sudan* to the Hijaz and so benefited from pilgrims. Thus, in Borno, Sultans are on record as having made Hajj more than once in their lifetime. But, in view of the fact that only a few persons could afford to make the long journey and stay abroad for the length of time it took to accomplish the Hajj from West Africa, laureates and their families earned much prestige and higher social and saintly status. As these were often great events in their respective localities, both departure to and arrival from pilgrimage served as occasions for the masses to perform various services to the caravans and become converted to the cause of Islam. All were beneficiaries, even only as simple witnesses to the events. Fulbe aristocracy used the tradition for modernising their societies and updating the periphery with concepts from the centre. They reinforced and reiterated common attitudes, habits, symbolism and language with a sense of universal application. The snow

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<sup>17</sup> M. Z. Njeuma, "The Usmanuyya System, Radicalism and the Establishment of German Colonial Rule in Northern Cameroon, 1890-1907", *Paideuma*, no. 40, 1994. Their anticolonialism was no secret and so the colonial forces at the time made many derogatory remarks, which have clouded the correct view.

ball effect increased to the extent to which Islam took on a “popular” and above all, regional hue.

### **The Mahdist perspectives**

After half a century of existence, two politico-religious tendencies developed in Islam in Sokoto Caliphate. Their importance is that they significantly influenced initial concept of the Emirate as a closely neat predetermined area in Muslim jurisprudence. Those who glorified in the past, the conservatives, who worked to strengthen the status quo provoked the first tendency. They felt that much, indeed too much, had been achieved and current leadership was to be maintained. On the opposite side, there were those who felt time had come to proceed to another phase, a higher phase of Islam, the Mahdist era, which Usmanu, the founder of the Caliphate had predicted and, indeed, made a part of his doctrine to his followers. During the last quarter of nineteenth century, contradictions inherent in both positions came to a head in northern Cameroon, especially in the Maroua-Mindif-Bogo sub-region. They threatened to overthrow three quarter century Emirate system as a legal basis for regionalisation.

Behind this ambition was the figure of Hayatu ibn Said, great grand son of Usmanu dan Fodio. The image of an opportunistic, impetuous and troublemaker, which some authors have painted of Hayatu is without foundation.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary he was an ardent and gifted Muslim with fixed ideas about how to improve the calibre of Islam in Sokoto Caliphate in pursuit of its global mission. In many senses, he was a centrist, seeking to strengthen central authority of the Caliphate in Sokoto over those of the Emirate so as to emphasise the global mission, then in neglect. Since Atiku, his cousin in power in Sokoto, refused to listen to him, he came to Adamawa Emirate in 1878 with a definite agenda. For this purpose, a large retinue of teachers and students to reinforce Islamic teaching and morality accompanied him. His ambition was manifestly to be Sokoto Caliphate’s representative to meet the Mahdi whom his great grand father had predicted would appear in the East to complete his revolutionary activities. Consequently, he built a substantial and respectable following in the entire Adamawa Emirate in particular, and in the Sokoto Caliphate in general. His

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<sup>18</sup> Accounts of this mission and the competition to reshape the regional boundaries are found in two French publications by Harry Alis, the Secretary General of the French colonial group, Comité de l’Afrique Française: (1) *A la Conquête du Tchad*, Paris 1891; (2) *Nos Africains*, Paris 1894, cited in Njeuma 1978, p. 161. On their part the British secret service was concerned about Rabeh’s anticolonial movements in the Anglo Egyptian Sudan and Borno territories. See CO 537/II *Africa* no. 2 in the British Records Office, “A short history of Rabi Zubeir” (Secret) by William Everret 19.12.1899. The record was compiled from official correspondence including those from the British Consul in Tripoli).

efforts to achieve a much wider regional perspective that transcended existing ethno-religious boundary were crowned with success in 1886 when he obtained an appointment from the Sudanese Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmed, then at the apogee of fame and power, to represent Sokoto Caliphate in his movement. Both leaders saw in each other instruments to achieve their respective goals in Islam and regional building.

What was at stake was not only the destiny of Emirate government, but also direction or redirection of Islam in the entire Sokoto Caliphate, Borno and Central Africa (Wadai and Baghirmi included) under authority of the Sudanese Mahdi, with capital at Omdurman. Whether by coincidence or design, Hayatu's Mahdist exploits in northern Cameroon in the Maroua-Mindif-Bogo area, and the proclamation of Muhammad Ahmed as Mahdi in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (1881), surely made Mahdism to an instrument in inter-regional reconstruction. In this regard, there was no concordance between religious, national or coterminous territorial frontiers. Consequently, the Mahdist Muslim leaders were insensitive to and ignored colonial spheres of influence and limitations on peoples' movements from one national territory to another. Firstly, this is seen in Hayatu's submission to the Sudanese Mahdi and, secondly, entering into an alliance with Rabah, a contemporary Sudanese Empire builder in the region. Rabah had already showed his prowess when late in 1890 he defeated and captured consignments of arms from a French resistance column led by Lt Crampell at Massenya in Baghirmi, as he was heading to conquer Borno.<sup>19</sup> In this connection, Hayatu's family background, personality, competence and spiritual authority inspired special attention, credibility and respect. These three fervent Muslim leaders (Muhammad Ahmed, Hayatu, and Rabah), with Mahdist motivations, surrounded by dedicated followers and resources at their command, made an extensive regional Islamic transformation plausible. All these activities worked in favour of seeking a broader base for regionalisation with northern Cameroon serving as an important centre and anchor.

However the union failed to materialize over time because of advancing hostile colonial forces of Britain, France and Germany. Firstly, in 1889 British inflicted a devastating defeat on Mahdist forces and cut off support for expanding their brand of Islam in northern as well as Central Africa, Borno and Sokoto Caliphate. Secondly, after Rabah conquered Borno in 1893, he had so over stretched his resources and made so many enemies that his personal survival was under constant threat. In this circumstance, Rabah could not easily assist Hayatu who relied on his agreement with Rabah that soon after Borno was captured, the great and populous Sokoto Caliphate

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<sup>19</sup> Njeuma, 1989 : 37-9; Usman, 1979 : 105-124; Bah, 1970. During fieldwork (1967) this was a common and well-articulated view among the Fulbe ruling classes. My feeling is that this point is made only in retrospect to ascribe blame for the hostilities.

Emirate of Kano would be next. For this reason, Hayatu had abandoned his plan to seize power in Adamawa, viewed politically and culturally as one of the richest subregion of the Sokoto Caliphate in a West African context. Similarly, he refused British overtures to become Lamido of Adamawa in Yola (1893) in order to follow Rabah's timetable of wars. As further proof of his commitment, he cemented his alliance with Rabah by marrying Rabah's daughter, Hawa. By a tragic ending, Fadle Allah, eldest son of Rabah, became tired of Hayatu's "impatience" and assassinated him in 1898 and this brought the alliance to an abrupt end and broke the backbone of Hayatu. His chief scribe and successor, the Sudanese, Modibbo Arabu, who spent long years with him in Balda and Maroua, and Sa'ad, son of Hayatu, struggled in vain to put together followers of Hayatu. Indeed, colonial might and co-operation among colonial forces, did not give them another chance. Instead, French armies from their colonial possessions in west, north and central Africa converged on Lake Chad and brought Rabah's Empire to an end in a very bloody battle at Fort Lamy (N'djamena). Thus the wider transnational conception of regionalization under indigenous leadership was thwarted by colonial forces, but more so, by internal feuding of the architects of the scheme.

### **Local history and the European dilemma**

As we entered colonial period, regionalisation took a more precise type of conception. It concerned, in the main, giving an international character and recognition. Regionalisation in pre-colonial period was essentially by internal state formation, creating centres and peripheries such as was the cases of Borno, Mandara, and Kwararafa Jukun by local leaders. In case of Fulbe, it was achieved by clothing the area with an Emirate system and with reinforced Islamic "international connections" and legality. These were reflected in expansion of Islamic religious culture. However, with colonial rule, the region was first and foremost a political conception under a government that was based on secular principles. The geographical limits were known as per-treaty documents, but all else remained a figment of the imagination and would only start becoming real to the natives as the age of colonialism advanced and its structures gradually caught up with the populations' micro-organisation of society. Territorially, German conception of northern Cameroon extended beyond Emirate of Adamawa to include Lake Chad basin, and bits of Mandara, Borno and Kotoko territories. Thus as a zone of cross-cultural interactions, northern Cameroon was achieved by political surgery of previous empires. The differences between pre-colonial and colonial typologies were that the former worked on basis of vague and shifting frontiers, while the latter operated in fixed and legally substantiated boundaries. Secondly, though centralisation of



authority went hand in gloves with regionalisation, pre-colonial Cameroonian Empire builders aimed at people rather than territory. Therefore the territorial space of a ruler was not necessarily bounded by contiguous landmass, but by territories that were as far afield as there were people who maintained relations of war and peace with the central administration.

Colonialism in the region started with dispatching exploring scientific missions, which at first had nothing to do with politics or territorial claims. They were meant to increase Europe's knowledge of Africa and Africans and establish such contacts, which would help abolish the Atlantic and Arab traffic of Africans from source. As the country that was foremost in suppressing "slave trade" and promoting legitimate trade in the nineteenth century, Britain had an advantage over its rivals, Germany and France, in negotiations for territorial acquisition in the region because of presence of its nationals. For example, the British Royal Niger Company's traders were on the spot since 1881. In a general way, the Berlin West African Conference (1884-1885) gave a special fillip to the European scramble and partition of Africa. It set down international laws for proceeding to acquire African territories and have the act recognised internationally. Once this legal hurdle had been jumped in the Cameroon context, European diplomacy did the rest by permitting each European nation to manage its "internal affairs" in the colonial territory as it saw fit without interference from other European countries.

The importance is that regionalisation in northern Cameroon became compartmentalised into colonial moulds. Cases such as re-establishing the destroyed Borno and Adamawa unity quickly lost focus because of armed resistance by the colonial forces acting in common concert.

Although Germans set up an administration for the entire colony of Cameroon in 1884, and the frontier between Britain and Germany had been completed up to Lake Chad by 1894, Germans had been reluctant to extend their authority into the "Muslim" North. It took nearly fifteen years to make up their minds and take appropriate concrete steps. It was feared that the operations would involve Germany in too many expensive bloody wars against "Islamic Kingdoms". For one had to reckon not only with Fulbe regimes, but also with the Sultans of Borno and Mandara whose societies were also Islamic with long-standing traditions of warfare. Therefore the prevailing feeling among German authorities was that what could not be done peacefully was better postponed. Also, it took time for entrepreneurs to search for business opportunities, which stood in rivalry to creation of plantations for growing export crops in the south of Cameroon. Indeed, the handicaps to install commercially beneficial enterprises in the north were many. Northern Cameroon was not well positioned for a European type economic take off due to lack of mineral deposits in exploitable quantities.

The north appeared too backward. It was too distant from the south for its dynamic work force to be turned to migrant or seasonal labourers. Finally, there were no easy communication routes either by land or river between the north and south. The Niger- Benue waterway was rather linked to the Nigerian coast leaving northern Cameroon as landlocked territory in Cameroon hinterland. The fact that colonial entrepreneurs decided to put all their investments in the south, which had openings to the Atlantic Ocean, already created a horizontal divide line between south and north. The seemingly two cultures, different eco-systems, and double standards of perception of colonial entrepreneurship took roots in German business circles. The wider the gap between north and south perceptions, the more pronounced was the regional dichotomy effect. The travel reports that German explorers like Barth, Flegel, Zintgraf, etc., wrote were studied in order to persuade German companies to be serious to develop an integrated south-north colonial economy. But many aspects of this policy could not be implemented because the duration of German colonialism was relatively too short (1900-1916).

As these were new situations for everyone, when Germans finally decided to “rush” and impose their authority over the “Hinterlands”, it was against them, not to be etched out by French and British aggression.

Indeed, it was thanks to the British that the Germans were brought into the show against the French because the French team led by Mizon was about to displace them and render the “Hinterland” theory un-operational. This way, Germans quickly shed their fears and became active for the subjugation of the north because of two unrelated but significant developments in the region. Firstly, the overthrow of Rabah, ruler of Borno since 1893, by the French in 1900. Secondly, the British had started conquest of Sokoto Caliphate since 1896, and in the process, Yola, the political and spiritual headquarters of the Lambe in northern Cameroon was a target.

Several authors have narrated the events of German conquests, but the principal concern here is the part played by German officers in obliging local rulers to fear and obey them and so create one overall regional authority within the German colonial sphere. There was on the one hand the question of sovereignty established by frontier treaties and, on the other hand, necessity of occupying territory effectively. From perspectives of local populations, German approach to take over power was full of ambiguities, as they did not reflect local customs in peaceful settlement of conflicts. The point was made that there was neither dialogue nor negotiations on the issues at stake.<sup>20</sup> The contacts took the form of orders

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<sup>20</sup> H. R. Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons, 1884-1914. A case study in Imperialism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1938; H. Stocker, *Kamerun unter Deutscher*

from the invaders to do or die. German approach was dictated by a psychological state of uncertainty that they might not have enough means to conquer and hold local leaders down and would be trapped in native web. There was the question of language and other cultural difficulties such that they had to operate through interpreters, and any protracted action was not in favour of German aggressors. Thus the Germans acted swiftly and brutally and when they had the upper hand, they imposed extravagant ransom on the populations to humiliate and deprive them of the means of resistance (Strümpell, 1912). Evidently, at this initial stage, those whom Fulbe had subjugated did not reject the system of the deposed Fulbe leaders nor think they had been liberated and so could move to the camp of Germans. To the local populations, it was clear that Germans were imposing a new political regime that would orient the resources of the region to German hands. But how this would function or be sustained without a binding force of religion, ethnicity and tradition was hard to comprehend. The local debate was about meeting of cultures and who among them had their hands on taxes, and for what usage? In the sight and imagination of Muslims, Europeans, who by origin were Christians, could not afford to promote Islam. In this case, so the logic went, Muslims would lose all what their ancestors had fought to construct. Some Muslims, who could afford it, migrated to new areas where they could practice their religion without fear or interference. Others saw possibilities of sharing power with Germans and so to use this power and resources to induce respect for and to protect Muslim traditions and institutions.

This compromise to safeguard Islam, while at the same time to work for German regional objectives, was what European sources called Indirect Rule. Farsighted and practical as this policy was in clearing grounds for reconciliation, it nevertheless was both a strength and weakness in German regionalisation perspectives. The Muslim ruling elite was thus allowed to function in its cultural context after taken the oath of office to the German Reich. It still performed as the principal actors and nothing important could be achieved without associating them. Fulbe authority was strengthened in the sense that their historical role as major conquerors in the region, the pre-eminent role of their religion (Islam) in inducing obedience and solidarity, and the colonial premature of moral and material support for Muslim rulers, were all given official recognition and protection.

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*Kolonialherrschaft*, 2 vols. Berlin, 1960-68 from Marxist perspectives of a class, and racist war of unequal. For example after the Germans conquered Tibati, they were asked to pay "a war indemnity of 100 large pieces of ivory and 250 cows. The payment in ivory must be made within one year while the cows should be sent without delay; send further payment as a symbol of submission to be paid by August of each year, a tribute of 3 milch cows plus a bull to the station at Yoko".

The weakness was that most peripheral peoples were marginalized because the new imperialism was characterised by government from a distance and by selfish and narrow objectives, for instance acting only when they could afford to come or pass by on tour. Thus political and socialising forces for promoting secular government, European language and monetary system proceeded slower than in the south of the country, thus further widening the gap in regional perspectives. The protection of Islam served as barrier for Germans to exert full authority in the region. Taking into account the vastness of northern Cameroon territory from Lake Chad to Adamawa (700-800 Km), and the fact that Muslim rulers were everywhere in power, Germans were afraid to make gross innovations in existing systems of government. So they decided to govern northern Cameroon under special conditions and reinforced regionalism by differential treatment they meted out to traditional rulers in north and south of the country. Since Europeans or their representatives could not be present all over the region, the act of sharing authority was only theoretical. As a matter of fact Muslim rulers saw that they assumed more responsibilities than before German conquests since they could, with the armed support of colonialism, accumulate more wealth, and justifying their exploitative tendencies on cupidity of colonial masters. Whatever way we see the position of Germans in northern Cameroon, the end result was that forces of Western civilisation were empowered indefinitely in the territory. Submission to dictates of colonial administrators was the rule. "Indigenat", and other forms of forced labour were imposed to satisfy a major preoccupation, that is, progressively orienting change towards Westernisation of society. This was evident in the new instruments of authority that Germans put in place (1900-1916), beginning with the fact that Germans constituted the central authority.

The strongest instrument of empowerment was constitution of a mobile army, well-trained and equipped native soldiers, recruited mostly from outside the region, who could be sent anywhere to enforce obedience on the populations. Secondly, there was the assumption of the right to divert local resources to a colonial treasury through multiple forms of seizure (under pretext of gift-giving) and taxation, which were preceded by extensive touring and assessment. The touring notes and assessment reports now form rich sources for scientific studies because of their historical and ethnological references. Thirdly, and above all, Germans appropriated to themselves sole right to depose and approve appointments of rulers and local leaders into colonial service. Each administrative post was defended by a detachment of colonial armed forces to ensure obedience to orders of German administrators and their appointees. This way they could govern fearlessly and could follow up on their orders, rewarding obedient and loyal Lambbe while, at the same time, punishing recalcitrant ones. Under such circumstances, Indirect Rule was not uniformly applied as relations between

Germans and local rulers were personalised. Indeed, its smooth sailing depended on what Europeans wanted done in an area, at a precise time, and by whom and for whom, and this did not follow any fixed pattern.

The homogeneity of the region was far from accomplished. Islam was strong in some places and not in others, and this had to be taken into consideration in formulating and implementing colonial Ordinances and laws. Furthermore, the region had been split by international frontiers involving several colonial powers, and this affected local rulers and communities adversely. For instance, political unity in Borno, Wadai, Baghirmi, and in Sokoto, suffered gross violations of their ancient historical, linguistic and cultural unity. Though the channels of traditional interactions and contacts before colonialism stayed open and were multiplied, the limits of international boundaries as barriers to movement stayed largely open because colonial administration lacked means to enforce the law. These political, economic and religious contacts, even if unconsciously pursued as resistance to colonial rule by local populations, constituted a permanent challenge to colonial authority in the grassroots.

In these circumstances, Westernisation was often ignored and priority was given instead to the need to create administrative structures that guaranteed effectiveness in the spread of colonial rule.

The administrative vacuum was filled when a Resident, who dealt directly with the Imperial Governor at Buea, was appointed in 1906. The first, who ruled for six years long, was Kurt Strumpell, a kind administrator, a native from Bavaria in Germany who inspired respect and had a great capacity for listening to natives. He was a civilian administrator who was transferred from Togoland, a second German colony, on the coast of West Africa, where his aptitude to work in Africa had been put to the test. His appointment as head of the administration of the entire north was an important act in the geo-political regional strategy.

He was a great admirer of Fulbe whose language, history and culture he learnt in detail. All these were embodied in the fact that he went so far as to piece together Fulbe oral traditions, which were in fact accounts of the region's local history from Fulbe perspectives (East, 1935:111-113; Lacroix, 1965: 67, 123-130). The more he learnt about the glorious past of these people, the more he was full of admiration for their talents and skills and decided to throw his full weight on their regional civilising roles. The patriarchal or autocratic rule of traditional authorities retained an almost freehand in their relations with local village settlements. They continued to make onerous exaction under the guise of receiving traditional tribute payment in their role as political agents charged with collecting taxes for German and French administrators. This was easily so because they had a monopoly of knowledge of the dispositions of local populations on the one hand and the demands of colonial officials on the other hand. They knew the