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CULTURAL BOUNDARY DYNAMICS: THE AGHEM AND FULANI OF MENCHUM, NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON, 1950-2013

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Abstract

This paper uses the case of the Aghem and Mbororo Fulani in Menchum sub-division of Cameroon to develop a model for cultural boundary that pivots around the construction and reconstruction of exclusionary cultural identities and corresponding grievances. Cultural boundary is viewed as the recurring creation and re-creation of identities, multilayered expressions of belonging and the never-ending process of identification. Thus, it is a process of agent-driven discourse production, in a cultural field that is typified by historical characteristics. Using interview data, archival resources and desk review the study reveals that there was a cultural boundary in Wum around belonging and stretches the historical construction of the Aghem considered as the “host” and “custodians of the land” and the Mbororo Fulani referred to as ‘late-comers’ or “strangers”, illegal migrants or land grabbing invaders whose rights to local resources and power is mediated via their relationship with the local Grassfields population. These different positions stem from individuals’ different institutionalized livelihood practices and normative values that in this case correlate with systems of cultural identity.

Keywords: Aghem; Mbororo Fulani, Cultural Boundary, Belonging; Exclusionary, Historical Characteristics.

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INTRODUCTION

Constructing a topology of a multicultural society is knotty. Although cultural diversity is often defined by seemingly clear-cut categories such as ethnicity, race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and exceptionality, sorting out "culture" intertwined with these multicultural categories is a complex process. It is common to hear references to Asian-American culture, Black culture, Muslim culture, female culture and homosexual culture as if they have clear boundaries and are distinguished entities. The study is about the Mbororo Fulani who migrated to Wum in the 1950s and have since then settled among the dominant agricultural indigenous Aghem.¹ It deals with the relationship between the migrant Fulani and the autochthonous Aghem. The Mbororo Fulani are identified as an ethnic group that is unique in many ways when compared to all other ethnic groups in Wum and Menchum Division as a whole. In this essay I attempt to probe into the assumptions of the cultural border rhetoric and assess the underpinning view of culture. It is important therefore to

theorize culture and border/boundary in order to illuminate the cultural boundary dynamics in Wum.

Theorizing Culture and Cultural Boundary

Culture

Culture is an amorphous concept denoting anything that contributes to the unique character of a social group, thereby distinguishing it from other groups.² Today, people’s values, customs, beliefs and traditional knowledge systems that collectively named as culture is increasingly recognized as significant, and highly prioritized in research. Edward Taylor and Hatch, two leading authorities on culture, claim that culture is a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by masses as a member of society” (Kundi, (2009:95). In Baqai’s analysis, culture is a “mental map which guides us in our relations to our surroundings and to other people (Baqai, 1975:34).” It can be divided into material and non-material. Non-material culture consists of language,

¹ Aghem/Wum refers to one and the same people. Wum is the European corruption of the Kom pronunciation of Aghem. Aghem refers to the people and the land they occupy.

² It follows that culture may include artifacts, language, laws, customs and moral codes, in fact, a people’s entire intellectual and material heritage.

customs and beliefs. Material culture comprises man-made objects like tools, furniture, buildings, irrigation canals, cultivated farms, roads, bridges etc. Shiraev and Levy (2001) define culture as a set of attitudes, behaviour, and symbols shared by a large group of people and usually communicated from generation to the next. Kottak (2005:41) recounts that "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Manser (1997:309) reports that "culture is the customs, ideas, art etc of a particular civilization, society or social group". Abd-Allah (2004:3) says culture is "the entire integrated pattern of human behaviour and is immeasurably broader than its highest expressions. Beyond what is purely instinctive and unlearned, culture governs everything about us and even molds our instinctive actions and natural inclinations."

Thus, culture weaves together the fabric of everything we value and need to know such as beliefs, morality, expectations, skills, knowledge and relates to the most routine facet of our activities as well as extends far beyond the mundane into religion, spirituality, and the deepest dimensions of our psyches. Family life and customs surrounding birth, marriages, and death immediately come to mind as obvious cultural elements, but so too are gender relations, social habits, skills for coping with life's circumstances, toleration and cooperation or lack of them, and even societal superstructures like political organization. Twum-Barima (1985:1), also states that "in our consideration of the word and concept many subjects rush to our minds such as dressing, etc". The discussion thus far reveals that culture depicts the way of life.

The above definitions on culture reveal that culture is the behaviour and life style of an individual and the society. That is, how the people interact with things found in their environment. A people's sense of their culture presupposes their conviction that they differ from other groups (together with recognition of this difference by a wider society). The notion of one-distinct-culture-for-each-separate-society suggests that one culture represents a society and vice versa. This close match makes the conceptual interchange of culture and society acceptable. Henze and Vanett (1993) further explore this assumption of culture in the metaphor of "walking in two worlds" in their study of native Alaskan and Native American students.

Tradition which is the process of transmitting knowledge and beliefs to future generations is part and parcel of culture. Not only is tradition the means for keeping a culture alive but it is also the means whereby items of culture gain moral authority. Thus, the continuity or persistence of a practice over time is the principal way of testing its normative value. Culture and tradition, however, are not static or stagnant. Societies or communities sharing of any culture or tradition actively shape it in their quotidian activities. Culture is understood to be dynamic and changes continually over time. This is because it is emeshed in the turbulence of history, and because each act, each signification, each decision risks opening new meanings, vistas and possibilities (Nyamnjoh in Werbner, 2002:114). The changes could also be due to external influences, adjustments to changing environments and technologies.

Cultural Border and Boundary

The terms "border" and "boundary" are physical in origin (Johnson and Machelsen, 1997).³ The original imagery is not quite abandoned and is even intentionally played out when the terms are used in reference to culture. Cultural border and boundary used interchangeably in this article often suggest the border and boundary of a nation, a state or an ethnic community, which are clearly differentiated by identifiable markers. The equation between a culture and a territory has dominated the discourse in anthropology (Erickson, 1997; Ewing, 1998; Goodenough, 1981; Lugo, 1997; Wax, 1993). The supposition is that as long as two separate societies remain distinct from each other, their boundaries exist and cultural distinctiveness is expected. It is further assumed that if two societies, identified with two distinct cultures, come in contact, a cultural border is expected to form between them.⁴ As early as the late 1960s, Fredrik Barth (1969:14-16) conceptualized what has become a conventional notion of "ethnic boundaries" in social anthropology: ethnic groups achieve their own identity by defining themselves as different from other such groups and by constructing boundaries between them.⁵ The volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* edited by Fredrik Barth (1969) represents the highlight in the disciplinary reflection on the issue of cultural/ethnic identity and boundaries, including his fêted introductory essay on ethnic boundaries defined by the social organization of cultural differences. Accordingly, boundaries are not fixed; they are unstable, contextually interpreted, and negotiable. Despite later well-argued criticism, Barth's paper is deemed innovative from the perspective of studying ethnicity as strategically and contextually shaped. Ethnic studies became better informed by the cultural perspective. On the other side, a decade or two later, understanding ethnicity as a social process was an important element in the paradigm's shift of European national ethnologies, large and small (Gradišnik, n.d:18). Anthropologists defined culture and boundary as the study of other cultures. In doing so, they placed 'boundary' at the very centre of their concerns. The use of us/them, self/other, clearly

³ The traditional or classical theory of boundary emphasizes the protective instinct of human beings in relation to their territorial space. The theory is that human communities are pushed into territorial protectionism in order to maximally benefit from the resources derived from the relevant portion of territory. The new thinking about boundaries emphasizes the concepts of contact and link rather than separation and division as the ultimate function of boundary (see Fatile, 2010:2-5).

⁴ As in the case of culture itself, when dealing with boundaries we are often faced with essentialist and constructivist interpretations. Essentialist boundaries presume rigidity and often evoke a material, physical foundation while constructivist boundaries take into account individual and collective agency when studying the processual and contextual character of cultural belonging. Compared to the first, these boundaries are often abstract, invisible, flexible, negotiated, but always materialized in specific daily practices. In this regard, cultures and boundaries are a product of interactions, communication and symbolic language as well. See (Gradišnik, n.d:18).

⁵ The boundaries here mean social, not necessarily physical.

implies boundary (Cohen, 1994: 53). Accordingly, the term boundary is often used to point toward something that is contained and characterized by homogeneity, coherence, clear-cut separation, or difference from that which is outside. Many authors claim that individuals and collectivities define themselves in terms of what they stand against, what they are not, or from what or whom they are different. In this way, borders become central to understanding concepts and practices such as identity, belonging, and culture (Sajed, 2005).

A cultural boundary as mentioned above refers to the presence of some kind of cultural difference and is viewed as coterminous with a nation, a state, ethnic group, a community or an organization that is clearly defined by identifiable marker often physical borders. Goodenough (1981) attributed this notion of culture to Franz Boas, a pioneer German-American anthropologist:

At the end of the nineteenth century, Franz Boas began to use "culture" to refer to the distinctive body of customs, beliefs, and social institutions that seemed to characterize each separate society (Stocking cited in Goodenough: 48).

In a cultural boundary discourse as this, it is assumed that a culture is "shared" by members of a society. The extent of sharedness is contentious; nonetheless sharedness is considered a trademark of culture. This theory suggests that people within a cultural system share a set of traits unique to their group membership. Sharedness is considered a product of cultural transmission and acquisition which often take place through personal interactions among members of physical proximity. In other words, a Mbororo Fulani is expected to share with other Mbororo Fulani characteristics exclusive to Fulani culture thus same for the Aghem of Menchum. When a group is small and specific, the extent of sharedness among members may be higher. However, if a group presents a large, cross-sectional or cross-national cultural identity, such as "female culture," "middle-class culture" and "Muslim culture," the sharedness of that particular culture is blurred by other cultural identities.

Historical Context

The Aghem

People's origin and migration history is a guiding principle in determining the creation of their locale. The Aghem located in Wum sub-division of the North West Region of Cameroon have historic connections to the outside world by virtue of their origin.⁶ It is generally believed that the Aghem are of the

Munchi or Benue lands of Nigeria. However, there are contestations over this view because there seem to be no resemblance between them and the Munchi who are short. The Aghem are hefty, robust and tall. In spite of the morphological differences, the Aghem identify Munchi land as their origin (National Archives Buea, 1922:9). According to Awah-Dzenyagha (1990), the Aghem are of Ndobbo origin rather than Tikar. He believes that from Ndobbo, they moved south through north east Nigeria to meet the Munchi (Awah-Dzenyagha, 1990:10). At about the second half of the 18th century, they left Munchi (Tiv) country in one migratory wave but later broke into two trajectories. One group moved through Fungom to their present settlement while the other moved through Befang to the south of Wum (present day Menchum Valley) and then to the present site where they met the other group and formed a confederation.⁷ The confederation was an amalgamation of the headmen (*Batums*) of Su, Waingo, Zongofuh, Cheregha, Zongokwo and Wanangwen. By the mid 19th century, dynastic quarrels led to the creation of other independent groups. Magha emerged from Zongheku, Naikom from Su and Zonetuge from Waingo (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982: 202). Upon settlement they consolidated their position by the subjugation of their neighbours through expansionist wars. Essimbi was harassed around 1850 and Beba-Befang and some villages in the Menchum Valley were brought under Aghem domination. Between 1830 and 1850, the Aghem Confederation was firmly in place. By the beginning of the 20th century, when the Germans reached the area, the socio-political, economic and religious base of the Confederation had been established with the Dengkeghem⁸ (*Batum* of Zongokwo) at the helm of affairs though other villages independent of each other had their own separate *Batums*. Though the Aghem were made up of different territorial villages with semi autonomous status, they were a group of people with a deep sense of unity and belongingness and consider themselves one people with a common ancestor.

The Mbororo Fulani

The Mbororo Fulani⁹ migrated into Menchum Division when all other tribes had settled on clearly defined land areas. As such, they were considered by the farming autochthon neighbours as "strangers" who should not own land. They established a tradition of loyalty to non-Mbororo traditional leaders to enable them graze their cattle. The main migrating wave that led to the permanent settlement of the Mbororo Fulani¹⁰ in Wum is said to have originated from Kano to

from Bamenda which is the headquarter of the North West Region of Cameroon.

⁷ The Ukpwa who had earlier settled in Wum were dislodged. While some of them integrated into the Aghem community, some moved to Esu and others such as Atong and Otui moved to the Wum borders and Essimbi.

⁸ The Dengkeghem (paramount Fon) was the general overseer of the Aghem confederacy.

⁹ The Mbororo Fulani have marked Caucasian (white skin) features, fair complexion, pointed noses, dark hair.

¹⁰ Structurally, there are two lineage groups of Fulani in

⁶ Aghem is located in Wum sub-division in Menchum division of the North West region of Cameroon. It is a federation of clustered villages and lies between latitudes 60° 50' north of the Equator, and between longitudes 10° and 10° east of the prime meridian⁶. (See Hyman, 1999:13). Aghem has an area of 4.700 square kilometers⁶. In the north, Aghem is bounded by two fondoms and clans such as Weh and Esu. It is also bounded in the south and south west by Beba-Befang and Modele and in the east and west by Bafmeng, Kom, Bu and Esimbi. The Aghem village is located some 87 kilometers

Painshin in Jos, now Plateau State of Nigeria.¹¹ Around 1942, they began a southward movement passing through Wamba and Lafia before they settled in Gboko in 1946. As a result of much farming and limited pasture, they left Gboko to Kashimbila and entered Cameroon through Akwaya, passing via Essimbi to Wum in 1954. Many of the Mbororo Fulani were drawn into Menchum by a popular *Aku* leader, *Ardo Umaru Mousulli* (Umaru interview, 2008). By 1960, the Mbororo had settled in Wum, Weh, Esu, Mmen, Kumfutu, and Bu.

Cultural Boundaries: The Aghem and the Mbororo Fulani

Historians have recently taken interest in African cultural studies. In spite of their curiosity, this rich field as Manchuelle (1997) observes, remains the exclusive domain of anthropologists and sociologists. Thus, the existing historiography on African cultural boundaries and their origins is fragmentary. This paper examines cultural boundary between two ethnic groups, the Aghem and Mbororo Fulani in Wum sub-division. Given the nebulous nature of the concept, we will not catalogue all the cultural differences between the Aghem and the Mbororo. We will dwell mainly with “high cultural” issues. As for the question of perspective, it is necessary to specify that this paper will examine the cultural boundary from the Mbororo Fulani perspective. This is because it is the goal of the researcher to discover how the Mbororo perceives the Aghem. In this study, Wum and Aghem will be used interchangeably as well as Mbororo and Fulani.

In Wum and elsewhere in the North West Region, the whole lifestyle of Mbororo Fulani is based on cattle which are a source of wealth, a guarantee of food, existential security and above all a status symbol.¹² This focus on cattle characterizes their whole culture (Ngalim, 2006:5-31). Historically, they have been known mainly as pastoral nomads who practice

Menchum, namely the *Aku* (*Aku-en* in Plural) and *Jafun* (*Jafu-en* in Plural) referring to distinct sub-ethnic identities that developed as a result of diverging migration trajectories. Pelican (2006:151) suggest that the two categories are best understood as distinct cultural units rather than sub-ethnic groups. In this paper, Mbororo Fulani is used to represent both sub-ethnonyms. However, I will adhere to Mbororo as a generic term for the pastoral Fulani. The majority of Mbororo in Wum are the *Aku-en*. The *Jafu-en* are found only in Iseh and Bafmen in Fungom sub-division.

¹¹ Most Mbororo Fulani who settled in Wum and Menchum Division as a whole migrated in waves from Kano where they were concentrated at the time of Usman Dan Fodio. By 1875, these nomads and their herds began a movement southwards in search of pasture, to avoid the incidence of rinderpest and the changing conditions created by the arrival of the British in the Northern Emirates of Nigeria (See Pelican 2006:151-156).

¹² The main cattle breeds are the Red (also called Mbororo) and White Fulani. Improved breeds of cattle particularly the Boran were introduced by Heifer International Cameroon to survivals of the Lake Nyos gas disaster. Thus crosses of local and improved breeds have become a popular feature of cattle production within the Wum municipality.

traditional grazing techniques which are simply extensive herding.¹³ Transhumance, a seasonal migratory pattern determined primarily by grazing needs, is part of their traditional lifestyle. They react rapidly to changes in the ecology and the climatic environment they utilize. Despite the hardships as well as other forms of ecological and economic stochasticity involved, transhumance was and is a culturally revered way of life and was a central social institution around which household and cultural practices have historically been organized. The Fulani cultural system, which retains a strong valuation of transhumant cattle herding as a central component of ethnic identity has been so resilient. From within normative Fulani cultural logic, the increasing institutionalization of agropastoral practice represents a lack of resilience, and a fundamental transformation of the cultural system to a new and stable state that is characterized as less desirable. Until recently, the Mbororo Fulani rarely practiced farming or trading. They treat the agricultural space as a function of animal husbandry (manure availability). Becoming a farmer was and is a fall from relative prosperity to a life of what they experience as degrading manual labour associated with the Aghem and other ethnicities.

This lifestyle generally keeps them away from the rest of the larger Cameroonian society (in other words, self isolation). However, this detachment should not be exaggerated. The pastoral life was pursued not in isolation but in some degree of symbiosis with sedentary agricultural communities as they exchange dairy products for grain and other goods. In a monetized world of today, they are involved in social and economic interactions with the Aghem crop farming people. Some of them even become farmers or employ farmers to produce some of their needs. Generally, favourable terms of trade between the Mbororo and non-Mbororo products are in fact vital for pastoralists’ development, as the commoditization and sale of livestock products can ease the imbalance between variable pastoral production and household food needs. Even though crop cultivation was and is seen as satisfying the material need of food security, it does not satisfy a cultural “need” and is experienced and socially constructed as a cultural degradation by the Fulani. Despite the rising prevalence and desirability of cattle ownership, crop production remained the central institution of the Aghem around which socio-economic organization hinged and on which their cultural identity as farmers has remained firm.¹⁴ The Aghem continued to self-identify as farmers, and livestock keeping only carried the positive connotation of a progressive and prosperous farmer. For the Aghem agropastoralists, the increased integration of animal husbandry in their livelihood portfolios was primarily an indicator of their success as

¹³ This system involves little inputs from the graziers and includes all systems in which the movement of herds and people are major components (pastoralism). Mobility is the basic strategy and their movements are usually opportunistic as a result of rainfall variability or other episodic events, such as rangeland fires or the outbreaks of disease. In sum, the system is fundamentally event driven (see Ngalim, 2006:59-60).

¹⁴ The crops cultivated include coco-yams, maize, beans, groundnuts, yams, soybeans, plantains, banana, pepper, vegetables and oil palm.

farmers. Phrased another way, cattle was integrated into livelihoods as a subsidiary or supplementary component of a fundamentally agricultural livelihood practice. However, Aghem graziers differ to some extent from Mbororo herders in their aims and practices of cattle rearing. As most Aghem are not habituated to consuming milk or milk products, Aghem 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, Aghem 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, Aghem graziers prefer to enclose their grazing area so as to prevent cattle from straying into their own and other people's farms. Since the 1950s, the Mbororo Fulani have tried to establish reciprocal economic relations with most of the Aghem population, whereby the host population entrust their cattle herd to hired Fulani herdsman. Economic relations form the basis of most social contact between the Mbororo Fulani and the Aghem. In spite of attempts to co-exist, the relations between the two groups were frosty and conflict prone. Relations were marred by accusations that the Fulani allow their animals to destroy crops, were engaged in stock rustling and were not dependable and trustworthy partners (Umaru Interview, 2009). Farmer-herder disputes have been a common feature of the coexistence of the Aghem and Mbororo in Wum and elsewhere in the Western Grassfields. Incidents of crop damage, blockage of water points, and mutual encroachment have been frequent and have strained the relationship between the two population groups. In a public demonstration in 1973, the Aghem women 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. 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. In 2003, Aghem women besieged the *fon's* palace in Wum, boycotting all social and ritual activity (Pelican, 2006: 229-230).

In addition to associating their ethnicity with herding life, Mbororo base their identity on certain typological moral rules that they perceive as unique to themselves. Thus, another key area for evaluating cultural otherness is by examining *Pulaaku* a core Mbororo ethical value. Their culture is highly influenced and masterminded by it. *Pulaaku* literally ("Mbororoneess" or "Fulanineess") is a concept based on Mbororo vision of the world and the vision of themselves as a people. This is accompanied by a philosophy of stoicism, indifference to pleasure or pain (impassiveness) braveness and non-complaining in difficulties which makes them endure hardship in their daily lives. Because of their ability to master the challenges and hardships they encounter and their resilience in suffering, they tend to be less creative in looking for liberating alternatives to comfort (Ngalim: Forthcoming). *Pulaaku* creates and maintains an ethnic boundary around the Mbororo and Mbororoneess and as such defines an ideology of racial and cultural distinctiveness and superiority (Burnham, 1996:106). Thus it involves superior otherness and cultural resistance to the world of the indigenes (Davis, 1995:219).

Mbororo culture can therefore be seen as exclusivist in orientation. This inward looking attitude of outsiders and guardedness induces apathy toward "modern culture" seen by the West as necessary for success in contemporary situations. The consequence for the Mbororo is the difficulty it poses for them to achieve social mobility in the face of cross cultural integration and modernity. While most Mbororo elders see *Pulaaku* as a changeless positive characteristic, Mbororo Social and Cultural Association (MBOSCUA), an institution formed by the younger generation considers it as an obstacle to socio-economic development which isolates and places them in a social confinement (Ngalim: Forthcoming). In as far as the Aghem were concerned; they lacked most of the aspects that were associated with *Pulaaku*. They could protest in public, admitted if they had problems, felt very free with their in-laws as they could sleep together in the same house. It was also difficult for an indigene to display a positive image in hard times. Most of them said *my belly no be store* which implies that they could not pretend that life was good whereas there were difficulties.¹⁵ If an indigene visited a place and food was served, he/she could feel free to demand for more with ease. Against this backdrop, there is a clear cultural boundary that existed between Mbororo Fulani and indigenous people of Aghem manifested in *Pulaaku*.

The Aghem and Mbororo Fulani also differ in the patterns of social interactions which they prescribe for males and females. In the Mbororo community of Wum, patriarchal authoritarianism as a mode of social organization gives primacy to men in decision-making. Society is dichotomized into domestic and public spheres. This excludes girls and women from the public spheres. Forms of social segregation, including religion are enacted ostensibly to check immorality and promiscuity. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in the Upkwa settlement on the 27 April 2008 revealed that Mbororo girls were treated as social minors by their fathers and confined to subordinate roles on the assumption that they were better protected and more useful in the consigned second-class position (Ngalim: Forthcoming). The myth of women's intellectual inferiority was propagated to buttress this fact and, to worsen a bad situation they were forced into early marriages at the age of twelve. Young girls were forced into early marriages or confessional endogamy (Ngalim: Forthcoming). The perception of the young girl and women as custodians of the social values of family and the marriage creates stereotypes in which women were supposed to specialize in domestic chores. The Fulani gerontophallic structure and the generationally asymmetric control over access to resources greatly reduce youth and women spaces of possibilities. The youth and women are frustrated by their inability to achieve autonomy and to ensure a future for themselves because of the greed of their elders. The elders are revered as wise and continue to perform leadership roles in the community. However, it is important to point out that though the Fulani society has been run by gerontocracy and patriarchy for a long time, one cannot overlook its importance. All the same, the situation has not been static. Young Mbororo especially the boys are disrespectful of elders and sexually loose as compared to the previous generations. These actions have provoked moral and civic panic among

¹⁵ Interview with Mua Ruphina Mbong, Weh, 6th April, 2012.

adults. There is thus evidently a conflict of generations in terms of cultural perceptions, customs and practices. One can also observe that this situation is more acute for young girls for whom issues of control of their lives (sexually and choice of life partners) is a central issue. However, the hierarchical structure of the Mbororo society is very strong. Their patriarchal culture requires the women to be submissive to the dominant father and dominant male. They effectively create this subordinated group and control productive and reproductive resources. Youth access to control over production resources (land, labour, capital) as well as their ability to decide whether to engage in other alternative trades is affected by power relations within the household. Power centres are generally skewed in favour of the dominant father and dominant male, leaving the young and the women in an underprivileged and weaker position. The enforcement of this culture means that their participation in decision making is remarkably reduced.

As in the Mbororo Fulani society, the extended family systems and strong kin and lineage relations remain important in the Aghem clan since they provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and protection. In Wum, this system allows access to resources and enables the exchange of children across nuclear family units but they also entail obligations and responsibilities. A woman in Wum occupies various positions – a mother, a wife, a daughter, a priestess, or even a witch. The way she is perceived depends on the position she occupies. Wives were and are valued for the purpose of procreation. They also provide helping hands on the farm while the children they produce also work on the farms and in household chores. They are, therefore, also valued as factors of economic production. The Aghem predominantly female farmers tend to cultivate such crops like maize, groundnuts, beans and vegetables on valleys, plains and the hill sides of land that belongs to their male folks. During pre-colonial times, women through their economic power were able to exert considerable influence on matters within and outside the household, and their status was generally higher.

The society was a subsistence agrarian society based on the female dominated household economy. There was little specialization of production. Producers relied heavily on a plentiful supply of land to provide for their subsistence. Moreover, because women largely controlled subsistence agriculture and the fruits of their labour, they exercised considerable social and political power and enjoyed a greater sense of autonomy. As such their overall status was generally higher. Granted, their workload was enormous, but this was, in a way compensated for by increased power within and outside of the household. The colonial rule in Wum drastically transformed the economic, political and social structures of traditional set up. Traditional subsistence economies were transformed into monied or capitalist ones. Agriculture was commercialized. Cash crop production increasingly replaced food production. It is worth noting that, although cash crop production dominated the economy during colonial times, subsistence agriculture though fairly transformed, continued to co-exist with it. During the post-colonial period, the economy of Wum remains essentially agriculture in nature. In fact women's work never seems to end. All day all night they tended to be doing one thing or another- cooking, cleaning etc. They subsidized the meagre wages their husbands earned and

in so doing these women inadvertently helped to raise domestic revenue. Increasingly they engaged in petty trading to supplement their family income although agriculture was and is still their dominant niche. Notwithstanding Mbiti's idealisation of marriage as a universal institution in African societies, there is growing evidence of the existence of marriage variants which undermine the notion of the universality of patriarchal marriage in Africa. Suda (1996:78) noted that "other new experimental alternatives to traditional marriage are prevalent in African families." In Wum, marriage was and is generally regarded as an important accomplishment in life. In spite of its significance, there were and are a number of structural and cultural factors that complicate intermarriage of the Aghem and Mbororo. Among them were considerations of a sedentary versus mobile lifestyle, divergences in Aghem's and Muslims' marriage systems, and notions of cultural superiority (Pelican, 2006: 311). The Aghem preferentially marry partners from their own ethnic group, or from neighbouring Grassfields groups with whom they share friendly relations. In Menchum, marriages between Aghem and neighbouring Tikar ethnic groups such as Weh, Esu, Kom, Mmen and Kuk were fairly common.

They 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 was socially acceptable, though with a few exceptions. Intermarriage between Mbororo Fulani and the Aghem was and is prohibited. This interdiction was because of the obligation of religious conversion. Also, the incompatibility of the different marriage systems of the Aghem and Mbororo Fulani was a complicating factor. While the Aghem practiced a bridewealth system, the Mbororo practiced 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 belonged to the bride. Thus, for Aghem parents giving their daughter to a Mbororo husband implied a twofold loss; they received no bridewealth and have no claims to continuous assistance from their son-in-law.

From the perspective of most Mbororo, interethnic marriage with the Aghem was not desirable and normally discouraged. Fulani classify all non-Fulani as *haaBe* and tend to consider them as culturally different or inferior. To preserve their cultural (and racial) purity, Mbororo tended to reject intermarriage with *haaBe*, although such a discriminatory approach conflicts with the Islamic doctrine of Muslim equality (Pelican, 2006:314). Mbororo interviewees in the Grassfields were familiar with the tradition of betrothal marriage in which, idyllically, patrilateral parallel cousins (*kooggal*) were engaged in their childhood by their parents (cf. Stenning 1959: 41-46, 112-116). In spite of their admiration by some Aghem for their 'sense of togetherness', their friendliness towards strangers, their bounteousness, and

their concern for the needy boosted by Fulani norm of charitable trust, such as alms (*sadaka*) and levies (*zakka*),¹⁶ the Mbororo were and are habitually seen as undomesticated and violent, and as people who assaulted and hurt farmers over discrepancies on crop damage. They were also considered as rearward and as “people of the bush”, since they shunned the benefits, infrastructure, and comfort of the Aghem locale.

One of the most important outcomes of marriage in Mbororo society was child birth and upbringing. Culture stipulates that before a woman’s first delivery, she left her home to live with her parents in order to deliver of the baby. She was forbidden to talk to strangers or to visit or be visited before delivery. After delivery, she was expected to live there for a period of one year six months. After this period, the basic needs of the girl and household equipment were purchased for the eventual festive taking home ceremony of the bride to her husband’s residence. A special feast was organized on the day of her return to the husband. In accordance with the high premium that the society places on children, the birth of a child was heralded by an elaborate social celebration. During the outdoor ceremony, milk was used to wash the baby’s hair before shaving the hair and throwing it into the kraal to indicate that the child shall grow up to have a strong interest in cattle herding and prosperous in cattle. It was also an indication that the child will grow up to swear by the milk in testifying during a case or to deny or confirm a statement or event.¹⁷ The *barkeehi*¹⁸ leaves in the milk are believed to be useful for the protection and blessing of the child. The Fulani refer to *barkeehi* tree as “tree of happiness” or “tree of blessing”. The child was named seven days after delivery. Only after naming was the child referred to as a person. The name of the first child was customarily given by the mother’s father. However, *Mallams* (Islamic clerics) now name them. Male children, between seven and twelve grazed cattle and learned necessary skills from their fathers such as rope making, horse riding and care of cattle. Girls in the same age grade milked cows or helped to restrain calves from their mothers in order to milk. They were gradually taught how to cook, clean the hut and its surrounding and fetched water. They also assisted in the washing of dresses for their fathers and brothers. In Aghem, a husband cohabits with his wife until five months after she becomes pregnant. The first child was born always in the house of the mother’s mother. After giving birth, the mother was washed in water, and her child in a liquid extracted from *Tulu* leaf, dissolved in water. Twins are regarded as a great blessing. Two weeks after their birth a

¹⁶ The Mbororo are also admired for their respectful way of interacting with each other, their calmness, and abstinence from alcohol and other kinds of intoxication.

¹⁷ Milk symbolizes fertility and is used in many rites such as naming ceremonies, weddings, installation of chiefs, annual gatherings and marking of cattle. Milk is the source of life, a privileged gift, and a mark of hospitality and friendship. The offering of milk is the most frequent fertility rite among the Fulani.

¹⁸ *Barkeehi* tree (*Bauhinia Reticulata*) is used for medico-magical purpose and for ritual purposes, and for all of the purposes associated with fertility of the herd. Thus the *barkeehi* leaf has a sacramental function conveying the blessing of God to the Fulani in the form of fertility of both herd and family.

dance called *wanga* attended by all relations and friends was held. They wear a necklet of *Tulu* leaves. After birth, the woman’s umbilical cord was cut and buried at the foot of a plantain tree, the first fruit of which was eaten by the mother. For the first two days after birth, the child is suckled by a foster mother. The mother was allowed out of her house when she was strong enough. The Child was not allowed out until from two weeks to a month after birth. The baby was then taken to a stream where a fowl was killed and its blood sprinkled on the child. After incantations the blood was washed off in the stream. The ceremony was said to make the child of strong physique and to ward off sickness. After the ceremony, the father was obliged to give a feast to all relations and friends. The child was named at birth without any particular ceremony (National Archives Buea, Ad 17, File No. 4583A, 1932).

Death and funeral celebrations were equally indicators of cultural boundaries in Wum. When a Fulani dies, the closest relatives would wash the body and cover it with a white cloth in the form of a shroud. The wrapped dead body is carried to the graveside with the face of the deceased facing the east. After prayers led by the Imam, the carcass is lowered into the grave making sure that the head lies in the south but faces the east. The body is then covered with wood and then with soil. The final funeral rites usually take place on the 3rd or 7th day after the burial. Property is shared and a successor is selected to replace the late father. The widows are expected to mourn their husbands for a period of four months ten days. After such a period, they are free to re-marry. Death to the Aghem is a departure ceremonial to join the ancestral kingdom. Death is announced through gun firing, screaming, weeping and the beating of drums. The body is washed, dressed and laid in state. If the person had been initiated into various sacred societies and sanctuaries through specific rites of passage, he or she is deritualised in order to liberate the body from powers bestowed by the rites before the body is laid in state. Burial was before sunset by close relatives and friends. Corpses were buried with articles like pipes (for smokers), bags and other things needed to continue living in the other world. While burial was done, mourning goes on. In the case of an elderly person, sons-in-law were obliged to contribute to a common pool of resources to mourn the dead. They were expected to provide a goat or pig, at least 20 liters of palm wine, a fathom of cloth and gunpowder. Other relatives and friends contributed corn, groundnut, oil, meat, wine and other food items to celebrate the life of the dead person and entertain mourners, dance and sacred groups. Initially, mourning was a month. Later, it was reduced to eight days and in recent times it is three days. During mourning, the patrilineal relative differentiated themselves from the matrilineal family.

Aghem people use the matrilineal system of inheritance. In Wum, an individual is bound to his mother’s family. It is believed that the blood comes from the mother. The people inherit the uncle’s property (*wofa adee*). Most people rely on their uncles’ wealth. The property of a dead man is inherited by certain nephews, the sons of his sisters by the name mother, in other words his mother’s daughter’s sons. The eldest of these nephews inherit all property except the women who are allowed to choose freely the heirs they care to marry or take a new husband outside the family. If the deceased leaves no

mother's daughter's sons, the property goes to mother's sister, son, failing that to mother's sisters daughter's son and failing that to mother's daughter's daughter's son. Conversely, the Mbororo Fulani are a patrilineal people and descent is traced unilaterally through the male line. The relationship among a person's male relatives tends to be particularly strong. Sons inherit the property of their deceased parents, although part of the property may be given to the female children. In accordance with the Mbororo Fulani patrilineal inheritance system, it is the eldest child who takes most of the property belonging to the deceased father. Assets, which are frequently inherited from the men, include livestock, cash, clothing, vehicles, houses, land and even books, if the deceased person happens to be an Islamic cleric. Traditionally, it is the eldest son who decides what is to be given to his junior brothers, his sisters and his father's wives (including his mother). When a woman dies, it is her eldest child, male or female who inherits her property such as livestock (usually small stock), beads, earrings, utensils, and bangles.

Religious beliefs and practices were also key identity markers which distinguished Mbororo Fulani from indigenes of the area. The Mbororo Fulani were Muslims which implies that they believed in *Allah* and Islamic doctrines. Like other Muslims, they pray in the mosque. Women do not go to the mosque on ordinary days except Friday and while in the mosque, they do not mix with the men. The two do not see each other for fear of seduction. Before sedentarisation, the Mbororo Fulani faith in Islam was nominal and secondary to their cultural attachment to *Pulaaku*¹⁹ and its resonance with pastoral lifestyle (Steening 1959:398). There was much to conform that the Mbororo Fulani in general were not very austere in the performance of their daily prayers. The concern for the well-being of their cattle was the principal factor that prevented many of them from performing their quotidian prayers. This in turn allowed partial or exploitative reading of the Qur'an and its subsequent interpretation.

However, today most if not all of the Mbororo Fulani practice Islam and fully or partially respect its five pillars: confession of basic faith, daily prayers, compulsory contribution in support of Islam and fellow Muslims, the Ramadan fast and pilgrimage to Mecca (Aliou 2004:34). Islam is inseparably associated with the Fulani. Many Aghem peoples face difficulties in keeping up with Fulani doctrine and practices. While some welcome the structure provided by the five daily prayers (*subli*,²⁰ *juhuri*,²¹ *ashri*,²² *mangrib*²³ and *ishahi*²⁴), others experience their performance as disrupting their usual working and sleeping routine. Most exigent, is the fasting that lasts for 28 days during which Muslims are allowed to eat and drink only before sunrise or after sunset. Generally, learning to adhere to the religious requirements takes time and dedication. This religious identity was and is different from the Aghem host community which is mainly dominated by Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Regarding God to be

unreachable directly, they worship Him through the super natural. They believe in the omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience of God so He cannot be confined to churches. They reserve the highest allegiance for their lineage ancestors.²⁵ Since people fervently believe in life after death, it is believed the dead, living in the spiritual realm are closer to the Creator so he is called upon to intercede on behalf of the living. Here ancestors serve as mediators between God and the living.

Masquerades are an integral element of the socio-political organisation of Grassfields groups in Cameroon and have religious and socio-political connotations (cf. Argenti 1996; 2006, Koloss 1977; 2000: 97-103; Von Linting 2004). Masks are understood as powerful mystical beings that can cause illness and death, and whose function is to supervise religious and social deportment. Most Aghem people belong to family associations or secret societies whose members safeguard the knowledge of their spiritual power. While the mainstream Aghem believe in the effectiveness and genuineness of masks, the Mbororo fundamentally rebut the *ju-ju*'s authority with recourse to their Muslim faith. Representatives of the Mbororo community pointed out that these prescriptions conflicted with Fulani philosophy and practice, and thus were undesirable to Muslims in Aghem because of their different religious and cultural background. Mbororo argued that they respected only *Allah* and did not bend down before idols or masks. Thus, they refute them their mystical power and treat them as disguised human beings. Among the Aghem it is obligatory that the viewers remove their head paraphernalia and crouch 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*.

Another noticeable boundary between the Mbororo Fulani and the Aghem was seen in their appearance and dressing. The Fulani are phenotypically distinct from the negroid Aghem of the semi Bantu group. Prior to the coming of the second wave of the Mbororo Fulani into Wum in 1950s, the indigenes already had the traditional attire of jumpers with large half open arms. They wore *fendam* and *Ndinga* caps made of fibre. The women dress in wraps and blouses. The noble women and those in secret societies like the *Kefap* put on decorative beads of different colours round their wrist and neck. The youths wore Western dressed like shirts, jean and T-shirts. The Fulani men were and are often seen wearing a solid colour of shirt and pants, a long cloth wrapped around their faces, carrying their walking sticks across their shoulders with their arms resting on top of it. It is also worth mentioning that the Mbororo Fulani entered Wum with a new way of dressing. It included the *Sahro* (loin cloth), the *gaoundoura* (a big gown worn with a jumper inside by men). They put on caps with different colours which corresponded to their dressing. This dressing style is still intact especially with the elderly and aged people.²⁶ The women were very contented with their wrapper.

¹⁹ Pulaaku is the socio-cultural code of the Mbororo. The details are discussed below

²⁰ Morning prayer said from 5:30 to 6:00 a.m.

²¹ Afternoon prayer said from 1:30 to 2:00 p.m.

²² Afternoon prayer said from 3:30 to 4:00 p.m.

²³ Sunset prayer said from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m.

²⁴ Night prayers said from 7:00 to sleeping time

²⁵ Ancestors are not worshiped for they do not create.

²⁶ This new form of dressing introduced by the Mbororo Fulani had an impact on the indigenous people of Wum area. It acted as an index of opulence for they obtained it as a sign of wealth and prestige.

One of them was placed across the shoulder.²⁷ Graceful and seen carrying milk products stacked in tiers on their heads in calabash bowls, their hair is long and is braided. It is common for Mbororo Fulani women and girls to have coins attached to their braids. The women enjoy wearing many bracelets on their wrists. Married Muslim women wear veils when they leave their household. The Fulani attire and dressing style remained unchanged. However, some of them especially the young ones preferred Western dressing to the traditional attire of Aghem indigenes. Languages and dialects are of preeminent importance, effective tools and means of identifying cultural borders in Wum. It portrays cultural value such as identity. The Mbororo language is *Fulfulde* which they have in common with other FulBe sub-groups, although there are considerable dialect variations. Aghem is the language the people from Wum speak.

In the domain of architecture, the Mbororo Fulani started the construction of temporal beehive-shaped huts in the early 1950s called *Mbuteru*. They used forest twigs and poles stuck into the ground and bent inward to join at the top. The *Bonguru* was another architectural style made of stick and mud wall with tall grass roofs. They were similar to the *Mbuteru* because both were round. The slight difference was the wider nature of the *Bonguru* in diameter. In the early 1990s, the Mbororo Fulani started adopting sedentary life thus the construction of permanent structures. A typical Fulani compound is a homestead (*wuro*) with concentric rooms and huts built of thatch or mud. The Mbororo settlements are dispersed and isolated from Urban centres making it difficult for the Mbororo especially the women to gain access to markets and information that could be useful for their improvement. The Aghem who first settled in this lush savannah zone tend to build their dwelling places in close crammed places while their farm lands are kilometers away. They Aghem constructed permanent structures made of sun dry bricks, mud and savannah grass. The houses are square in appearance with small windows and a bamboo ceiling for drying of maize and groundnuts. In recent times, some sedentary Mbororo Fulani replicated the built forms of the Aghem indigenes especially as from the 1990s. In spite of this, there was still a visible boundary in their architectural styles.

Conclusion

Culture is the most complicated idea in the humanities. The discussion of cultural boundaries may not be separated from a culture concept and the existence of cultural difference. The concept of culture tends to aggregate people and processes, rather than integrates them. This is an important distinction for it implies difference rather than similarity among people. Coming from Nigeria the Mbororo Fulani was used to food and clothing habits different to those encountered in Wum sub-division. Their 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 identity markers and ethnicity emblems. The Aghem and the Mbororo Fulani have lived in very close proximity to one another for long spans of time. Over several decades, the Mbororo and their children in Wum have grown up with Grassfields children, have learnt their

neighbours' language, have adopted a number of Grassfields customs, and do not know any other home. In spite of this, the Mbororo Fulani still hold firmly by their culture and it is exacerbated by Mbororo traditional culture-*Pulaaku*. It makes them unique and different. There is extremely limited overlap in their cultural systems. Their histories, identities, language, and social institutions are distinct, and the social networks within ethnicities are far denser than the social networks between them. Perhaps even more important than what differentiates them from their neighbours are the significant identity markers that they have in common, such as their occupation, language, values, beliefs, rites, and life patterns. The Aghem and the Mbororo Fulanis' construction of differences between their two cultures and the conceptualisation of their positions (niches) within the economic, socio-ecological systems, can be seen in the ways they describe themselves, each other, and the respective socio-cultural values they assign to certain subsistence behaviours in the Wum sub-division. This conceptualisation of Mbororo Fulani in relation to the Aghem draws a strong binary polarisation of the bush and the city/villages, of purity and dirt, identifying the former with Mbororo Fulani, the later with the Aghem.

It is difficult for many people to acknowledge the idea that cultures are fluid and constantly changing. However, no cultural group or practice has ever been static or ahistorical. Similarly, no ethnic group, however, has impermeable boundaries, for people can and do change ethnic identities (Barth, 1969). Neither, moreover, does any group's boundary remain permanently fixed. In one sense, the sedentarisation and agriculturalisation of some Fulani is substantiation of institutions that have the aptitude to transform and learn, acclimatizing to new circumstances. However, it is concomitantly expressed and socially constructed as a process of cultural loss, because of Fulanis' inability to forge livelihoods in a way that maintain endogenously valued practices and institutions.

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