From *les étrangers* to *les autochtones*: The building of a Mbororo town in East Cameroon

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Table of Contents

Abstract:

     Nestled in the sparsely populated East Region of Cameroon is the town of Mandjou. Over the last forty years, Mandjou and the greater East Region have born witness to a population boom. Since the late 1970s, nomadic pastoralists have relocated to Mandjou from other parts of Cameroon. Though once welcome, the now settled community of nomadic pastoral Fulbe, or Mbororo, faces growing hostility from *les autochtones* – the self-identified original inhabitants of Mandjou. Throughout much of West Africa, autochthony has become highly politicized. Within French-speaking Cameroon, however, the iron grasp of autochthony in the political realm has led to the decline of national citizenship. Bestowing rights and privileges based on an individual being recognized as a national citizen is secondary to the individual acquiring the status of *autochthone*. Mobile communities (i.e. nomadic pastoralists and hunter-gathers) have struggled to acquire recognition as *autochthones*. Cultivators, on the other hand, are the defacto *autochthones*; their agricultural yields and permanent homes providing them with greater visibility. In Mandjou, however, settled nomadic pastoralists have made significant progress in their quest to achieve the status of *les autochthones*. Though the shift in status has benefitted the formerly nomadic pastoral community, the same cannot be said for their Gbaya neighbors engaged in subsistence farming.

     As nomadic pastoralists moving across West Africa are settling, how do they establish claims of 'belonging' that will provide them with both security of residence and place? Within this dissertation, rather than determining the validity of the claim to autochthony as put forth by either the cultivators or nomadic pastoralists, I ask how and by what means has a nomadic pastoral community, consistently refused access to the *autochtone* status based on their perceived "mobility", transformed themselves into *les autochthones du Mandjou*. Further, I explore the shift that has occurred and the ways that the concept of autochthony – steeped in a history of being first and "rootedness to the soil" – has been altered. Critical in shifting the parameters of autochthony in the context of Mandjou, and an issue I examine within the dissertation, is the influence of the international indigenous movement. I explore the impact that "becoming indigenous" has had on discerning and identifying local *autochthones*. Additionally, I point out that while the international financial and materials flowing into Mandjou to support "indigenous peoples" has provided the former nomadic pastoral community with greater security, these same materials have contributed to the marginalization of others.

Sommaire:

      La ville de Mandjou est située dans la région faiblement peuplée de l'Est du Cameroun. Durant les quarante dernières années, Mandjou, et plus largement la région de l'Est, ont connu une forte croissance démographique. Depuis la fin des années 1970, des pasteurs nomades provenant d'autres parties du Cameroun se sont établis à Mandjou. Bien accueillis dans un premier temps, la communauté aujourd'hui sédentarisée de pasteurs Peul nomades, ou Mbororo, fait face à une hostilité croissante de la part des « autochtones » - ceux qui se considèrent comme les premiers habitants de Mandjou. À travers la majeure partie de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, la question de l'autochtonie est devenue hautement politisée. Au Cameroun francophone, cependant, la prééminence de l'autochtonie dans la sphère politique a conduit au déclin de la citoyenneté nationale. Les droits et privilèges liés à la reconnaissance d'un individu comme citoyen sont secondaires par rapport à l'acquisition du statut d'autochtone. Les communautés mobiles (les pasteurs nomades et les chasseurs-cueilleurs) ont eu du mal à obtenir cette reconnaissance. Les paysans, au contraire, sont autochtones *de facto*, leurs terres agricoles et leur habitations permanentes leur conférant une plus grande visibilité. À Mandjou, par contre, les pasteurs nomades sédentarisés ont fait des progrès significatifs dans leur quête pour acquérir le statut d'autochtones. Bien que le changement de statut ait été bénéfique pour la communauté d'anciens pasteurs nomades, on ne peut en dire autant de leurs voisins Gbaya, qui vivent de l'agriculture de subsistance.

      Au moment où les pasteurs nomades à travers l'Afrique de l'Ouest se sédentarisent, comment établissent-ils leurs revendications d'appartenance qui leur assurent autant la sécurité de résidence qu'une place dans la communauté locale? Dans cette thèse, plutôt que de juger de la validité des revendications à l'autochtonie mises de l'avant autant par les paysans que par les pasteurs nomades, je questionne comment et par quels moyens la communauté de pasteurs nomades, dont le statut d'autochtones est généralement nié du fait de leur « mobilité » présumée, sont devenus « les autochtones de Mandjou ». De plus, j'explore comment le concept d'autochtonie – ancré dans la primauté d'établissement et le degré d'enracinement dans le terroir – a été transformé. L'influence du mouvement « autochtone » international, que j'étudie dans cette thèse, a été déterminant dans la modification des paramètres de l'autochtonie dans le contexte de Mandjou. J'explore l'influence que le « devenir autochtone » a eu sur l'identification des autochtones locaux. Enfin, je mets en évidence que, bien que les ressources financières et matérielles internationales accordées aux « peuples autochtones » ont fourni une plus grande sécurité à l'ancienne communauté de pasteurs nomades, les mêmes ressources ont contribué à la marginalisation d'autres communautés.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank the residents of Mandjou for their enduring patience and hospitality. Had it not been for their generosity to share their lives with me, the writing of this dissertation would have not been possible. I would like to extend a special thank you to Biri and his family. Sight unseen and with little more than a two-minute conversation to go by, Biri welcomed me into his home and became my staunchest advocate. He vouched for me to the Mbororo community, potentially jeopardizing his own reputation to his friends, family and neighbors. Biri's co-wives, Adama and Maimouna, are two of the most exceptional women I know and are deserving of far greater praise then I could possibly articulate in a few short sentences. These two women invited me into their lives and became like sisters to me. They also happen to be the best Fulfulde instructors I could have hoped to encounter.

It was only with the unwavering support of four exceptional individuals that I was able to complete my research. Kadafi, Biri's son, declined a summer internship in order to work as my Fulfulde/French translator – a requirement since few adult Mbororo were conversant in French. Few, if any, interviews would have been possible had it not been for Kadafi's unmatched work ethic. Though my engagement with the Gbaya community was a far more complicated affair, it would not have been possible without the support of Jean Marie, Simon and Adeline. These three individuals took every imaginable to step to encourage my involvement with the Gbaya community.

The department of anthropology at McGill University has been my second home for over a decade. Graduate students could not ask for more supportive administrators. Dealing with the complex McGill bureaucracy can be both overwhelming and intimidating. Yet somehow, Rose Marie, Connie, Cynthia and Olga have learned how to navigate the complex machinery that is McGill whilst providing their unwavering support to graduate students. It goes without saying that I

vi

My bus arrived at the makeshift terminal in Bertoua in eastern Cameroon a little after three in the morning. Checking my phone, I realized that it was still too early to contact Biri, my host and the only person I knew in Mandjou, my final destination and another 7 kilometers from the regional capital. Not wanting to wake him, I found an uncomfortable wooden bench to lean on and waited for morning to arrive.

I awoke two hours later to the sound of the Imam reciting the first call to prayer over the loudspeaker. It was still quite dark but there was just enough light to make out several male figures washing their hands, feet, and faces before rinsing out their mouths. This was a familiar scene to me. I had just spent nearly six weeks living with a Muslim Mbororo family in Bamenda. After completing their ritual ablutions, the men entered the small mosque attached to the bus depot. Ten minutes later they emerged.

As the sun peaked over the horizon, I dialed Biri's number. He picked up on the fourth ring. He was occupied with a legal matter at the mosque and asked me to hail a motorbike rather than wait for him to pick me up. It did not take long to find a motorbike driver willing to drive me to Biri's residence. Sandwiched between the driver and my luggage, tied to the back of the bike, I felt secure enough to look around. In the distance was the turret of a mosque. In terms of height, it surpassed any other structure in town. As the bike sped along the asphalt road, we passed several groups of Mbororo men, all of whom were wearing long flowing tunics and carrying their prayer mats. Driving past the daily market I could see that some of the men were opening up their shops and the butcher was preparing cuts of beef for morning customers. As the driver veered off the main road, the terrain changed. There were no people on this narrow path. On either side, there was an unbroken line of tall fences that obstructed any direct viewing of the goings-on within the homes.

Minutes later, the driver stopped. He signaled that I should get off the bike before untying my luggage from the back of the bike. Grabbing my large unwieldy traveler backpack, he walked towards a large gate and called out "*Salaam Alaikum*". Seconds later I heard a male voice from inside respond with "*Alaikum Salaam*". The driver pulled the door slightly ajar, and entered. I followed.

My decision to move to Mandjou came on the heels of long discussions with Mbororo friends in Bamenda. Most were surprised at my decision to travel to a region they described as 'backwards', 'wild', and 'undeveloped'. Exchanging worried glances, friends would pull me aside to explain that there would be no electricity and there was a strong history of violence in the area. When I took the final decision to relocate my research to Mandjou, my Mbororo friends and work colleagues asked, '[w]hy travel to a place where there are so few Mbororo?'. Taking into account all of the warnings and advisories I received, I was perplexed to arrive and feel as though I was encountering not only a thriving and prosperous town but one that clearly was identifiable as being a Mbororo town.

Prior to moving to Mandjou, where I would spend the next ten months of my life, I had lived in Bamenda, capital of the Northwest Region (NW) and six hundred kilometers northwest of Mandjou. In Bamenda I volunteered at the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), an Mbororo association working to "empower the Mbororo people to achieve sustainable and equitable development on their terms and to secure their human, social and economic rights as valued active citizens of the Republic of Cameroon" (MBOSCUDA 2016). Since the early 20th century, Mbororo in NW had struggled to achieve political rights and access to natural resources. Due to their recent migration – early 20th century – to the region, Mbororo were obliged to acknowledge the territorial and political primacy of the communities that had welcomed them, the Grassfielders[1] (Pelican 2006, 2008, 2009). By the 1990s, many Mbororo were unwilling to subscribe

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[1] Grassfielder is the ethnonym to which the majority of NW residents ascribe. Grassfielders are comprised of distinct linguistic groups yet have points of commonality. The majority of Grassfield communities "are organized in more or less hierarchical chiefdoms and confederations with a variety of political institutions (Pelican 2006:39). Moreover, these

to the patron/client dynamic that been in place since their arrival in NW Cameroon nearly a century before. Though MBOSCUDA had success in redefining their legal status vis-à-vis the Cameroonian state, their status as 'strangers' has continued to pose a challenge when attempting to acquire the same access to natural resources and political representation as that of their farming neighbors.

As in the NW, subsistence farmers initially welcomed Mbororo settlers to Mandjou when they began arriving in Cameroon's East Region in the late 1970s. Moreover, Gbaya, recognized as natives to the East Region, wielded political supremacy and controlled land allocation. Mbororo were once again under the proverbial thumb of a community whose arrival in the region had preceded them. Yet unlike the NW, in a period of thirty years, Mbororo settlers to the East have challenged their status as strangers. Mbororo have not only succeeded in reducing Gbaya authority over their political rights and access to land but have also threatened to usurp Gbaya as the new natives of the town. Gbaya efforts to minimize Mbororo access to the status of 'natives' have proven to be ineffective, in part, due to their reticence to collaborate with one another and a history of being rendered invisible by colonial and post-colonial authorities.

In this dissertation, I examine the process by which Mbororo have challenged their 'stranger' status and the social, cultural, political and economic processes that have ensued. Though Mbororo communities have settled and expanded throughout the East, it is in the town of Mandjou where Mbororo challenges to Gbaya authority have become most visible; a factor in my decision to relocate to Mandjou as opposed to other potential field sites in the East Region. As the chapters of the dissertation unfold, I detail the history of Mbororo settlement in the NW in order to expose factors that have stymied Mbororo attempts to claim a physical attachment to the NW. Yet, it is these former struggles and subsequent failures to establish territorial belonging in the NW, I

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distinct communities are by and large farmers with similar "ancestral beliefs" (Ibid.). Grassfielders migrated to NW several centuries prior to Mbororo nomadic pastoralists (Pelican 2009:57). According to Pelican (2006:28), "Grassfields identity is rooted in the pre-colonial period and based on shared cultural, socio-political, and economic traits".

contend, that have contributed to Mbororo settlers achieving greater success in the East with regards to their attempt to shift from being recognized as 'strangers' to assuming the identity of 'natives'.

I argue that much of the success Mbororo have had in welding themselves to Mandjou has involved the construction of a built environment that reflects Mbororo adherence to Islamic principles. Mbororo have not only constructed buildings of religious worship, but also other structures that convey their Islamic conviction. These structures have provided Mbororo with greater visibility as pious Muslims and have substantiated claims by their physical attachment to Mandjou. The religious aesthetic of the structures Mbororo have selected to spatially organize Mandjou has led non-Muslim Gbaya farmers, who had formerly welcomed the new settlers, to resettle outside of town. Mbororo nomadic pastoralists have effectively asserted and achieved territorial belonging in the absence of the traditional criterion, i.e. being the descendants of the first settlers of the territory. Spatial reorganization of Mandjou at the hands of newly settled Mbororo inhabitants, I contend, has provided Mbororo with unequivocal physical attachment to the town, thus improving Mbororo efforts to assert their place-based belonging. Thus, the ability to transform and modify the physical landscape has contributed to their claim of belonging. Spatial modifications render Mandjou visible to the outside world. Government officials, NGO workers, and Cameroonians residing both within and outside of the East Region see these buildings and immediately attach them to the Mbororo rather than Gbaya. Lastly, I point out that if territorial belonging has usurped citizenship as the modus operandi for determining rights then Gbaya face future challenges because they are becoming more mobile rather than strengthening their attachment to place. Ironically it is the historically marginalized and vulnerable Mbororo whose active pursuit of territorial belonging undermines the place-based identity of Gbaya and threatens to marginalize the Gbaya community.

In this dissertation, I argue that territorial belonging has replaced national citizenship as the means by which political, economic and cultural rights are secured. Though seemingly unremarkable, Gbaya relocation outside of Mandjou jeopardizes their ability to lay claim to, and potentially strips them of, their 'citizenship'. One additional thread I explore in this thesis is the rendering of Mbororo as international indigenous peoples by international development organizations and the way in which this identity has contributed to the marginalization of Gbaya.

In Cameroon, the attachment to place and the ability of an individual to be recognized as belonging to a place is critical to the exercise of political rights associated with citizenship. It is often thought that migrants, who are trying to vote or buy land, should return to where they come from – where their people were first settled – in order to exercise these rights. In a 1995 interview with Impact Tribune, Samuel Eboua, a dynamic political figure and a founding member of *l'Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (UNDP) stated, "[e]very Cameroonian is an *allogène* [stranger] anywhere else in the country…than where his ancestors lived…and where his mortal remains will be buried[2] (cited in Geschiere 2005a:58). Implicit in Eboua's statement is that all Cameroonians have a place within the country, and they belong only there. An individual deemed out of place, due to their inability to demonstrate an historic attachment, is a de facto stranger and entirely excluded from the political process (Jua 2001:41).

Yet what becomes of individuals and communities who are seen as having no place? How do mobile peoples forge belonging when they are seen as having no territorial attachment? Globally, mobile people are more often than not considered to be problematic because they are out of place and thus not coinciding with "the natural order of things" (Malkki 1997:62). Mbororo residents of

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[2] UNDP is one of several national political parties that stand in opposition to the incumbent political party, *Rassemblement démocratique du Peuple Camerounais* (RDPC). Current President Paul Biya is the leader of the RDPC and has held the political reins of the party since 1982. The RDPC is the most dominant party as well as Cameroonian's oldest; it was formed soon after the nation declared independence in 1960.

5

Mandjou have managed to attach themselves to a place and forge a kind of belonging that would have previously been incompatible with their mobility – Mbororo, like their linguistic cousins, the Fulani, Fulbe or *Peul*, are classically depicted as a pastoral people who migrate with their cattle.

Mbororo settlement in Mandjou is a departure from previous characterizations of their being mobile and always on the move. Part of the larger Fulbe/*Peul* ethnic group – perhaps one of "the most widely distributed peoples in the African continent", Mbororo are often depicted as nomadic, vis-à-vis the sedentary 'town' Fulbe with whom they are frequently juxtaposed (Frantz 1993:19). In Emily Schultz's (1979, 1984) work, in which she explores the process of Fulbeization in northern Cameroon, she sets aside the Mbororo as a sub-set of the town Fulbe and asserts that the Mbororo are the 'bush' Fulbe who live outside of town and are heavily invested in their pastoral way of life. Their mobility is largely attributed to their involvement in pastoralism – rearing of cattle – as their dominant economic activity. In fact, in Philip Burnham's depiction of Mbororo in the 1990s, it is suggested that Mbororo lose their 'identity' when they are not involved in pastoralism. Burnham (1999:280) writes:

> "[They] see their distinctive way of life as being constantly endangered by the encroaching influences of surrounding societies. There is always the risk of losing the cattle herds which are the basis of pastoral Mbororo lifeways, and in their view, a Mbororo who is forced to settle, to cultivate or trade for a living, risks becoming a 'town' Fulbe…".

Burnham's statement suggests Mbororo that tie themselves to a place risk the loss of their identity. Yet somehow Mbororo residents in Mandjou have settled and are engaged in a wide array of economic activities – with pastoralism being the exception – but have not seen themselves as becoming Fulbe. Rather, they have forged an attachment to the land that had previously been impossible and have retained their identity as Mbororo.

On Belonging: Settlement Patterns of the East Region of Cameroon and their Implications

Until recently, Mandjou was a small village little more than a stop-over for lorry drivers transporting logs from the dense forests of the Congo Basin – located further east – to Yaoundé and Douala. Mandjou was representative of the greater East Region of Cameroon, being relatively empty of human population (Geschiere 2009; Copet-Rougier 1987; Ndanga Ngnantare 2007). Recognized as the first to settle Mandjou, Gbaya are the de facto natives of Mandjou. Throughout the colonial and post-colonial era, both Mandjou and the whole of the East remained thinly populated. Land was plentiful yet few Gbaya farmers engaged in farming that extended beyond meeting their day-to-day needs. In a classic practice of swidden agricultural cycles, when their harvest yields decreased, Gbaya left their fields fallow and cleared new land. Unlike other regions in Cameroon, the government's presence was negligible. Even though there was potential in developing the agricultural sector, government officials refrained from making any form of investment. The government's limited involvement and general disinterest in the East led to the region being identified as the "forgotten" province.

In the late 1970s, Mbororo began to arrive in waves and settle in small pockets throughout the East Region. Many Mbororo families elected to build homes in Mandjou since it was the closest village to the regional capital of Bertoua (a distance of seven kilometers). The choice to reside in Mandjou sparked a sizeable growth for a village that was previously comprised of a handful of scattered Gbaya mud huts. Many of the new arrivals had previously struggled and failed to obtain permanent access to land in their former homes near Bamenda. Farmers there had long ago claimed all the land and were unwilling to cede their rights as first settlers to pastoralists. Scarcity of land in the NW due to the growing sedentary population contributed to the farmers' unwillingness to allow pastoralists permanent access to land.

Land in the East, however, was abundant, though barely developed. The national government expressed little interest in supporting development initiatives in a region that was mineral poor. As a result, Gbaya residents and the village chief initially warmly welcomed Mbororo new arrivals, whose residence was viewed as potentially stimulating an economic boom. Mbororo were willing to invest in the land and had access to financial resources that were far beyond anything available to the Gbaya community. As the decades rolled by and the Mbororo population expanded, Gbaya gratitude subsided, to be replaced with apprehension and fear that Mbororo settlers were on the verge of usurping their claim to Mandjou.

The year 2003 was significant in the historical timeline of Mandjou. Escalating violent attacks from marauding groups led many Mbororo residing in neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR) to flee and seek refuge in Cameroon. Believing Mbororo to be wealthy in cattle, bandits launched organized attacks against Mbororo communities in CAR. Frequently these groups would kidnap Mbororo women and children and demand a hefty ransom be paid in exchange for the safe return of the family member (Pemunta and Aristide 2013). By 2007, UNHCR had opened a field office with a five-person staff in Bertoua whose mandate was to provide Mbororo refugees with protection and offer financial and material assistance (UNHCR 2007). A UNHCR report published in 2011 highlighted several development initiatives aimed at supporting Mbororo refugees scattered throughout eastern Cameroon. According to the report, UNHCR "lobbied more than 180 administrative and traditional authorities to facilitate access to land for agriculture by the Bororos [UNHCR spelling]. The more than 2,100 hectares of land thus provided allowed [sic] some 67 per cent of refugee households to engage in farming" (UNHCR 2011).

Pemunta and Aristide, two social scientists assessing the implications of the "spatial reconfiguration" of several villages in the East Region following the influx of Mbororo refugees, depicted resource scarcity as a potential source of conflict between the two ethnic groups. Gbaya,

8

write Pemunta and Aristide (2013), believed the influx of Mbororo refugees had severely depleted their access to resources, i.e. land and firewood. Furthermore, explain Pemunta and Aristide, Gbaya were frustrated at the extent to which humanitarian aid organizations were willing to direct resources to Mbororo refugees based solely on their depiction as vulnerable and impoverished. Poverty was pervasive in Mandjou and throughout the East Region, yet humanitarian aid organizations had singled out Mbororo refugees as the population they were willing to support (Pemunta and Aristide 2013:278).

The growth of the Mbororo refugee population did little to hinder internal Mbororo migration from NW and other parts of Cameroon to the East Region. By early 2010, much of the humanitarian aid directed towards refugees had subsided. However, new international sources of financial and material resources emerged which shifted support towards the Mbororo community as a whole. The aid was based on Mbororo being internationally recognized as indigenous peoples. Though the indigenous peoples' status was not the same as that of refugees, both shared an association with being vulnerable and marginalized.

Between the late 1970s and 2011, Mandjou underwent a dramatic physical transformation, almost all of which was the result of Mbororo modification of the landscape. Neither the Cameroonian government nor international NGOs were driving these changes. Instead, it was the Mbororo community. As the Mbororo population expanded, physical changes were made to the town of Mandjou. Over time Mbororo actions strengthened their attachment to Mandjou. However, these particular modifications led to Gbaya feeling out of place in a town to which they had once belonged. Not only did Mbororo substantially alter the physical landscape, they began to title land that was not yet in use, creating a situation in which Gbaya were forced to work land as tenants they had once claimed as their own. Those Gbaya residents desiring to continue farming for themselves were forced to relocate outside of Mandjou in order to pursue their agricultural endeavors.

9

However, as time passed, Gbaya found themselves in the predicament of having to move with greater frequency and to extend their distance from Mandjou in order to find land that was not already under Mbororo ownership. Gbaya were being made landless.[3] Or, rather, through selling their holdings to recent arrivals, Gbaya were making themselves landless.

In Cameroon territorial belonging effectively determines 'citizenship' rights. The rights and privileges attributed to one's belonging to the nation-state, i.e. being a national citizen, are instead associated with one's acknowledged attachment to a locality. Land ownership is a symbol of said belonging, as is the ability to demonstrate that one's ancestors were the first to settle on particular areas of land. Selling land to Mbororo residents provides a slight financial respite from poverty but the act of selling land challenges Gbaya claim to Mandjou.

Belonging is an African idiom for legitimizing occupation of land. It is the people who first settle the land to which belonging is attributed. This has certainly been the case in Cameroon and can be more widely traced in the ethnographic literature on West Africa, most notably in the work of Meyer Fortes with the Tallensi of Ghana (Fortes 1987). Since the arrival of Mbororo in Mandjou, however, being first is no longer the main criterion for establishing territorial belonging. Since their arrival in the late 1970s, Mbororo have bought and titled land, started farms, built homes and constructed buildings designated for religious worship. Mbororo efforts to spatially organize Mandjou have supported their claims of territorial belonging. Mbororo have shaped Mandjou in such a way so as to weld themselves physically to the town. Having sold much of their land has contributed to Gbaya losing their physical attachment to Mandjou but it is not the only factor. Since Mbororo have spatially reoriented Mandjou to reflect their adherence to Islamic principles, the non-

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[3] This history of Mandjou is based almost entirely on ten separate interviews I conducted with long-term Mandjou residents. Much of the ethnographic literature on Gbaya is limited to Adamaoua Region and the Central African Republic.

Islamic Gbaya have struggled to engage with this new built environment and many have opted to resettle outside rather than remain settled in Mandjou.

I. Politicizing Belonging

Though not specifically addressing the concept of belonging, Liisa Malkki's research in Burundi with Hutu refugees problematizes the "naturalness" of associating people and their places. Maps – linking people to a distinctive area in a two-dimensional space – and "metaphoric practices" – like being buried in one's homeland – explains Malkki (1997:55), reflect the pervasiveness of the "naturalized identity between people and place". Invoking the work of Anthony Smith, Malkki (Ibid.:61 in Smith 1986:5) suggests that comfort is drawn from the separation of peoples and their forming "mutually exclusive units". In her own work Malkki (1997:53-4) unpacks the consequences of these "deeply territorializing concepts of identity" for populations that are categorized as being displaced or as refugees. Malkki's work focuses on challenging the tendency to territorialize people. Yet territorial belonging continues to appeal to the state as a strategy to regulate population and to local actors determined to affix themselves to a place and have their attachments acknowledged. It is this particular kind of belonging that has re-emerged and gained momentum in West African political discourse and has, to some extent, obscured national citizenship.[4] Securing territorial belonging is a highly coveted and yet increasingly unattainable status.

Discussions surrounding the concept of 'belonging' are often framed in primordial terms, linking a person's community to a place since time immemorial. However, in practice, "belonging is always relative and being there 'first' is virtually impossible to prove" (Dunn 2009:122). Yet throughout much of West Africa, belonging continues to be articulated in similarly fixed and

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[4] At a later point in the introduction, I discuss the historical antecedents of territorial belonging in the West African context and argue that the emergence of territorial belonging as a political instrument predates the post-colonial era.

unyielding terms. Though difficult to acquire, having a territorial attachment, i.e. belonging to place, is often the only means by which rights to natural resources and political power can be accessed.

Prior to the intervention of colonial administration in sub-Saharan Africa, writes Igor Kopytoff (1987:56), the "first-comer principle", i.e. the first to occupy and settle, played a large role in "determining legitimate land rights, political supremacy or marginalization in West African societies". Ironically, it was not necessary to be the first to settle in order to acquire the identity of 'first-comer'. Kopytoff (Ibid.) argues that "primacy of occupation" was often redefined and negotiated. For example, one strategy to acquire the first-comer status was for people to establish "a civilized social order out of a socio-political wilderness" and to distinguish themselves from "those before them [that] were part of the savagery that had preceded civilization" (Kopytoff 1987:56; also see Murphy and Bledsoe 1987). Kopytoff (1987:56-7) explains that it is the 'first-comer', regardless of the way in which the status is acquired, who wields political authority over other neighboring groups. It should therefore come as no surprise that violence is often a response when one's status as 'first-comer' is challenged.

Antoine Socpa, a Cameroonian anthropologist, explored the factors that led to the steady increase in neighborhood violence in Yaoundé, capital of Cameroon, during the early 1990s. For decades, Beti residents, acknowledged to be 'first-comers' or 'natives' of Yaoundé, had sold parcels of land to newly arrived Bamileke settlers hailing from the West Region. Yet in 1991, Beti residents began to demand the return of land that had previously been sold to Bamileke.[5] In some cases, former Beti landowners demanded Bamileke pay additional sums, well after the land transaction had taken place. Acts of vandalism were often a Beti response should the new Bamileke owner refuse to cooperate. Rather than frame the conflict as one centering on ethnicity, Socpa (2006:49-51) argues

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[5] Catherine Boone (2014:2007), a political scientist working on land tenure regimes across sub-Saharan Africa, describes cases in northern Cameroon in which extended family members "attempt to reclaim family lands" – land that has already been sold to a buyer. These attempts have led to violent conflicts.

the surge in violence between the two groups corresponds with the Cameroonian government's political restructuring in the 1990s.

Threatened with the loss of international aid, Cameroon succumbed to international pressures and permitted the formation of oppositional political parties. According to Socpa (2006:51), Beti were long-time supporters of the ruling party whereas Bamileke were strongly behind the opposition. After decades of migration, Bamileke outnumbered Beti in several Yaoundé neighborhoods. Socpa suggests that potentially yielding political authority to Bamileke residents became a source of concern for many Beti. It was during this period that Beti began to invoke their status as 'first-comers' of Yaoundé as a means to justify the exclusion of Bamileke from the political scene. As the 'natives' of Yaoundé, Beti argued that only they had the right to vote and run for political office. If Bamileke wanted these same rights they should return to "*chez eux*" (their home) (Socpa 2006:63-4). Socpa's analysis of the urban unrest in Yaoundé during the early 1990s resonates with Kopytoff's characterization of 'first-comers' as being those recognized as more legitimate to wield political authority. In Socpa's case, the Beti exploited their acknowledged status as 'first-comers' as a strategy to disallow Bamileke participation in areas associated with the Beti in the newly forged multi-party political system.

Ruth Marshall-Fratani, a political scientist specializing in the politicization of identities in Côte d'Ivoire, examines the way in which the national government manipulated the status of 'first-comer' in order to undermine political challengers. In 1996, president Henri Konan Bedie restricted Ivorian citizenship to "the individual who claims…as his country the Côte d'Ivoire and is born of Ivoirian parents" (Marshall-Fratani 2006:23). Furthermore, the parents had to be from one of the few ethnic groups that were recognized as being 'native' to Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivorian government stipulated that 'native' ethnic groups were those who resided in what is present day Côte d'Ivoire prior to March 10, 1893 (the date Côte d'Ivoire was established as a French colony). This idea of citizenship

13

was heavily grounded in linking people to place and those that could not do so were identified as dangerous. Though ultimately elected to the position of president of Côte d'Ivoire in 2010, during previous presidential runs, Alassane Ouattara's presidential candidature was disqualified after several political opponents accused him of having parents born outside of Côte d'Ivoire.

According to Marshall-Fratani, eligibility restrictions did more than exclude people from running for office. They reinforced the idea that territorialized belonging was "the ground upon which citizenship should be constructed" (Marshall-Fratani 2006:23). It was during the presidency of Laurent Gbagbo (president of Côte d'Ivoire from 2001 until 2010) that *Operation Nationale d'Identification (ONI)* was introduced. Under this national policy, all Ivoirians were obliged to carry national identity cards in which their "village of origin" was identified. It was decided that rather than centralize the application process, all Ivoirians would need to return to their "village of origin" in order to obtain the identity card. Ivoirians were only acknowledged to be citizens of the state once they had the identity card. Thus, citizenship was tied to territorial belonging (Marshall-Fratani 2006:27). Individuals unable to acquire the national identity card were stripped of citizenship. Following a series of protests decrying "this extremely onerous, exclusionary, and anachronistic method" (Ibid.), the government altered the procurement procedure and allowed individuals to obtain national identity cards from their places of residence. However, the applicant was obliged "to cite local witnesses from his 'village of origin' who could testify that either the applicant or one of his parents was indeed originally from the village in question" (Ibid.). Witnesses, however, would not be enough to substantiate an applicant's claim. Throughout Côte d'Ivoire, local commissions – comprised of dignitaries such as members of the elite, politicians, traditional chiefs, etc. – were tasked with verifying the veracity of the applicant's claim, including that of witness statements (Ibid.).

Marshall-Fratani writes that the motivation behind the implementation of the ONI was to identify Ivoirians with ancestral links to the north. These individuals would be excluded from acquiring recognition as national citizens of Côte d'Ivoire. Under French colonial policy, the plantation economy thrived in central and southwest areas. These regions were sparsely populated, leading French colonial administrators to transport labor from north to south. Decades later, northern Ivoirians had remained in the south amongst their 'native' neighbors. Though descendants of northern migrants, they no longer retained any attachment to the north. Therefore, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for these individuals to acquire the necessary documentation with which to obtain national identity cards. Without such a card, the descendants of northern migrants became de facto foreigners and ineligible to acquire national citizenship (Marshall-Fratani 2006:27-8). In both Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, decentralization triggered a renewed debate about who belonged. Rather than provide funding directly to the state, external agencies sought out members of civil society and NGOs and redirected funding to them. This shift in approaches, argue Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005:389), "inevitably triggered fierce debates about belonging, i.e., over who could or could not participate in a project"[6].

Intersection of citizenship, land and belonging

Christian Lund, examining shifts in property regimes and notions of citizenship in West Africa, argues that citizenship is "organised as a relationship between individuals and an institution of public authority" (Lund 2011a:10). Moreover, citizenship designates "through which political institution a person derives rights of membership to that community" (Ibid.). Nevertheless, writes Lund

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[6] It is important to distinguish the political instrumentalization of autochthony in post-colonial Cameroon from that of Côte d'Ivoire. In the case of the latter, the state has employed autochthony to eliminate foreign elements and create a stronger nation. Autochthony is a status that ensures identification as belonging to the nation of Côte d'Ivoire. Autochthony in the hands of the Cameroonian state, however, "denies formal equality of all citizens" (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005:393).

(2011a:10), national citizenship remains "just one of several configurations". And one of particular importance, writes Lund, is that of local citizenship. In fact, notes Lund (2011b:73), local citizenship is often prioritized over national citizenship when it is needed to determine rights over natural resources, i.e. land. In his work on the politicization of belonging in sub-Saharan Africa, Martin Bøås (2009:21-22) concedes that national citizenship carries little weight when attempting "to secure the right to land". Instead it is "belonging to the land [that] guarantees the rights of present as well as future generations" (Ibid.:21).

Jacob and Le Meur (2010), anthropologists examining the relationship between citizenship and property rights in Africa, conclude that national citizenship in many African states is no longer the sole source of rights. Other forms of belonging within a political community, i.e. local, have emerged to displace the prioritization of national belonging (Ibid.). Illustrating the extent to which local belonging has emerged as a source of rights, Lund (2011b:74) writes that "not belonging, i.e. not being a local citizen, may outright deny the person a legitimate opportunity to stake a claim". Proving one's belonging often involves individuals "pre-empt[ing] competing claims by performing and establishing legitimizing symbols" (Lund 2011a:9). Being first or having historical precedent in an area is critical in the process of authenticating and legitimizing belonging and it is nearly impossible to contest origin stories, observes Sara Berry (2009:25), an anthropologist researching political land contestations in West Africa.

Berry (2009:40) writes that "competition over land and authority" has led to "struggles over the meaning of 'citizenship' in local as well as national arenas of governance and belonging". Drawing on her case histories of land struggles in rural areas of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Benin, Berry (Ibid.) documents the emergence of "intersecting tensions over eligibility for land access and political participation". Berry (1989) writes that historically – in the pre-colonial and colonial eras – belonging determined one's access to land and claims to political authority. In the late 1980s, under mounting

16

pressure from international donors and financial institutions, many West African governments agreed to restructure their economies and adopt a more democratic political structure, one that would embrace multi-party politics. According to Berry (2009:26), "[t]he reinstitution of multi-party political competition reopened debates over criteria for eligibility for political participation and social entitlement that had been suppressed". Effectively, the campaign to enforce liberal reforms "reinvigorated particularity and custom as bases for legitimatizing claims to property, citizenship and authority within as well as outside the purview of the state" (Ibid.).

Writing on the complexity of African land tenure, Sally Falk Moore argues that institutions – the state being an example – often exercise political authority that appears to characterize their position as 'legitimate', the implication being that legitimacy is somehow innate. Moore disagrees and contends that legitimacy is malleable and flexible and can be radically altered. Moore (1998:33-4) points out that local actors often are the source of undermining institutional legitimacy or, as she writes, can be actively involved in efforts to "demolish state policy". In an attempt to overthrow the state's legitimacy, argues Berry (2009:24), local actors may in fact mimic state practices, "challenging or disrupting state control over local loyalties and resources, or seeking to enhance their own visibility and influence in regional or national political arenas". Local actors are often able to mount institutional challenges because of the fact that there are competing institutions through which decisions are made on the limits of land rights and citizenship. Lund (2011b:75) writes, "no single institution unilaterally determines the content, extent or limits of property or citizenship". Rather, argues Lund (2011a:9), "more often than not several competing normative orders may be brought to bear to legitimize a specific claim". Belonging, states Lund (Ibid.), has gained momentum as a "claim to resources and to jurisdictions". Thus, it is unsurprising that multiple institutions compete to establish 'legitimate' claims of 'belonging' (Ibid.). Striving to assert claims of 'belonging' may result

in employing one or more institutions with different types of legitimacy. Moreover, legitimacy has multiple sources including local, international, and state perceptions and practices.

II. Autochthony

Autochthony is perhaps best characterized as the truest and most resolute form of belonging with over-arching botanical metaphors literally linking people to place, as if they emerged or sprouted from the soil. In the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), autochthony is defined as follows:

> **Autochthonous:**
>
> a person indigenous to a particular country or region and traditionally supposed to have been born out of the earth, or to have descended from ancestors born in this way. Hence more generally: an indigenous person; an earliest known inhabitant.[7]

The rootedness and primordial qualities implied in this definition of autochthony are misleading. The relative ease with which individuals have their status as *autochtones* rescinded from one day to the next should make it clear that there is little permanence to this status (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Dunn 2009; Jackson 2006). While there are individuals who successfully assert and maintain autochthonous identities, there is always the possibility that such identities will be taken away or one's access to the status rescinded (Jackson 2006). Stephen Jackson (2006:96) refers to autochthony as "[d]angerously flexible in its politics, nervous and paranoid in its language, unmoored from geographic or ethnocultural specificity…". Geschiere and Jackson (2006:3), in their introduction to a special issue of *African Studies Review* ("Autochthony and the Crisis of Citizenship: Democratization, Decentralization, and the Politics of Belonging"), characterize autochthony as "slippery and unstable". Yet, in many parts of the world, autochthony is depicted as

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[7] In French autochthony or *autochtonie* is defined as "*qualité, état d'autochtone*" (Le Grand Robert). *Autochtone* is defined as "*[q]ui est issu du sol même où il habite, qui est cense n'y être pas venu par immingratoin*" (Le Grand Robert). Thus, in both English and French, the term autochthony or *autochtonie* carries the same meaning.

'natural' and 'authentic.' The notion conveys a sense of continuity while being pragmatically malleable and contextually flexible.

Alec Leonhardt (2006:70), an anthropologist exploring the implications of the autochthony discourse on hunter/gatherer societies in East Cameroon, writes that autochthony "is the basis for minimizing civil rights, or outright exclusion from citizenship altogether". Effectively autochthony is an identity formed around empty claims, yet it resonates with individuals in search of refuge and security at a time when confronted with the uncertainly produced by the processes of decentralization and democratization, two very prominent trends in a globalizing world (Geschiere 2009; Cutolo 2010 and Dunn 2009). Autochthony, writes Leonhardt (2006:70), lacks coherence as a "body of principles on which rights are based. It is a mystification of ancestry, a method used for the purposes of magically extracting wealth from the state".

Globalization is often characterized as having "culturally homogenizing tendencies" with little attention given to the fact that globalization also has the potential to accelerate cultural heterogeneity (Geschiere and Meyer 1998:602). Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh (2000:425), authors who have both written extensively on the implications of decentralization and democratization for questions of belonging and national citizenship, write that the "rapidly accelerating flows of people, goods, and images…trigger equally potent tendencies towards localization". Moreover, as these flows intensify and accelerate, the anxieties and uncertainties of individuals produces "an even greater obsession with citizenship, belonging and the building or re-actualization of fences" (Nyamnjoh 2004:53). These anxieties frequently are expressed with an almost obsessive attachment to place (Page, Evans & Mercer 2010:364). I witnessed the emergence of these trends during my fieldwork in Mandjou.

Autochthony is nothing less than a global phenomenon in term of its political currency. Increasingly, the desire to establish a claim of autochthony supersedes that of national citizenship in

West Africa. In my field site of Mandjou, access to natural resources and political representation –

rights frequently associated with citizenship – stems from an individual's ability to have one's claim

of autochthony recognized. These same debates have in recent years gained unprecedented visibility

in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, France and Belgium – nation-states where national citizenship

would have seemed inviolable (See Ceuppens 2006; Geschiere 2009:130-168; Ceuppens and

Geschiere 2005).

Peter Geschiere writes that emergence of autochthony as a primary identity in many African

nation-states – out-pacing that of national citizenship – was, in part, triggered by processes of

democratization and decentralization (Geschiere 2009, 2005a, 2005b; See Ceuppens and Geschiere

2005; Geschiere and Jackson 2006; Geschiere and Nymanjoh 2000). Initially, writes Geschiere

(2009:17), democratization was thought to "bring a promising turn toward political liberalization".

Yet somewhat unexpectedly, argues Geschiere, efforts to democratize from the 1990s onwards led

many African states to exclude particular groups from rights associated with national citizenship as

an electoral strategy (Ibid.). In both Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, African leaders leveraged the

autochthony discourse to disqualify potential political challengers. National politicians encouraged

conflict between '*autochthones*' and 'immigrants' through the use of incendiary slogans in their political

campaigns (See Marshall-Fratani 2006 and Geschiere 2009).

Another critical factor that led to the re-emergence of autochthony debates throughout much of

sub-Saharan Africa was decentralization of governance.[8] By the 1980s, the World Bank (WB) and

International Monetary Fund (IMF) had grown distrustful of the state. After nearly a decade of

limited success with enforcing neoliberal economic policies, the WB radically altered its position on

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[8] See Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003; Laurent 1995 and Laurent et al 2004 for a closer examination of the impact of decentralization reforms in the African context. The World Bank treads carefully in its depiction of the effectiveness of decentralization reforms. There is a tacit acknowledgment of the limits to implementing reforms. "[Decentralization is not a panacea…[it] may not always be efficient" (World Bank 2001).

development, "from a decidedly statist approach…to an emphasis on decentralization[9] (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005:389). Believing African governments to be ineffectual, the WB opted to circumvent the nation-state entirely. With the implementation of decentralization, international donor organizations redirected funding to the local and regional communities rather than allocating financial support directly to the state. Geschiere writes that proponents of the new development approach were unwilling to consider the potential negative repercussions of pushing for greater decentralization. International donors like the WB, write Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Oliver de Sardan (2003:145), were working under a flawed presumption in which decentralization would lead to the "introduction of local democracy and political accountability…[and] activate the dynamics of development at local level". The political and economic reorientation – national to local – of many of the African states generated new concerns over who should be included as members of the local. As a consequence of particular groups being excluded, eruptions of horrific violence ensued (See Bierschenk and de Sardan 2003; Marshall-Fratani 2006; Jackson 2006 and Geschiere 2009). Geschiere and Gugler (1998:313) argue, "[i]n many regions—and certainly not only on the African continent—politics are increasingly dominated by issues of autochthony and of who 'really' belongs."

Kevin Dunn (2009:125), a political scientist examining the proliferation of autochthony discourses in contemporary politics, argues that autochthony has become "an integral part of state-

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[9] In less than a decade, there was a dramatic shift in the WB's position towards African governments. Initially the WB advocated for collaboration with them. Yet after watching the African economic crisis deepen and finding governments to be culpable, the WB radically altered its position. The WB was no longer content to collaborate with government leaders and instead sought to circumvent the state. The change in the WB's stance towards African governments is discernible in the WB reports of 1981 and 1989. Eliot Berg (1981:132), author of the 1981 WB report, stated that "Sub-Saharan African countries are in a crisis" and urged African governments and donors to forge greater alliances. Berg warned that only through collaborative efforts would African economies grow stronger. The release of the 1989 WB report illustrated the extent to which the WB's confidence in African governments had plummeted. In the introduction to the 1989 report, co-authors Pierre Landell-Mills, Ramgopal Agarwala and Stanley Please (1989:5) write, "Africa needs not just less government but better government – government that concentrates its efforts less on direct interventions and more on enabling others to be productive".

making practices" and a strategy of the state to regulate its citizens. Dunn illustrates the extent to which the state implements autochthony as a strategy to remain in power with the example of Côte D'Ivoire. Under the leadership of former President Laurent Gbagbo, "autochthonous propaganda" was utilized to depict "immigrants" as threats to national unity. Gbagbo was concerned with maintaining political power and "immigrants" were more likely to support the opposition rather than Gbagbo's political party. Gbagbo effectively fragmented his political adversaries by predicating an 'enemy of the state' status on their inability to demonstrate autochthony (Dunn 2009:114). Dunn (2009:124) elaborates on the topic of autochthony as a political instrument of the state, explaining that "[t]he representation and presence of the alien/stranger are cornerstone aspects of state-making processes and invoking the threat they pose to the social order necessitates the violent manifestation of the state and state-making processes".

Dunn illustrates the potential that autochthony has as a political strategy to exclude particular communities in order to retain political control with his analysis of Gbagbo's regime in Côte d'Ivoire. Peter Geschiere (2009:18), an anthropologist who has written extensively on the globalization of the autochthony discourse, suggests that autochthony continues to wield political currency because it strikes "such a deep emotional chord with the population in general". Moreover, argues Geschiere, it should come as no surprise that autochthony resonates with communities throughout West Africa since it circulated as an organizing political instrument long before the arrival of colonial administrators.

Geschiere's examination of the historical antecedents of autochthony in the West African context suggest that the French colonial administration played a prominent role in concretizing the category of *autochthone* as well as its counterpart, *allogène* (stranger). Nevertheless, argues Geschiere (2013:60), the French did not introduce these categories. Rather, colonial authorities witnessed a "complementary opposition between 'people of the land' and 'ruling groups'" in West African Sudan

and adopted a similar nomenclature to distinguish populations they encountered. Though French colonial authorities appropriated and later instrumentalized autochthony to distinguish amongst populations, they made several key changes. According to Geschiere, when French colonial forces first encountered autochthony being utilized as a means of categorizing populations, they noted a pattern in which local populations or *autochtones* were under the rule of leaders from foreign lands. The French colonial administration adopted the categories but opted to wrest power from the foreign rulers and seek out leadership from amongst the communities they identified as *autochthones* (Ibid.).

French colonial rulers were desperate "to try and create some administrative order in the multitude of ethnic groups, chieftaincies, and other social formations in the extensive territories they had conquered so quickly" (Geschiere 2013:58). *La politique des races,* writes Geschiere, was the overarching French colonial policy invoked to administer the natives they encountered. Autochthony was the central principle of *la politique des races,* which Geschiere identifies as "the French equivalent of indirect rule" (Ibid.). Heavily promoted by Governor General William Ponty, *la politique des races* required colonial administrators to identify ethnic groups that were local and develop their capacity to collaborate with French colonial authorities. Governor General Ponty wanted to ensure that the native leaders would be drawn from their own ethnic group. This decision was, in part, a response to multiple cases in which foreign Islamic chiefs imposed their authority over non-Islamic ethnic groups. Ostensibly, the employment of *la politique des races* would oust foreign rulers and replace them with leaders drawn from local ethnic groups (Geschiere 2013:58-9).

Maurice Delafosse played a central figure in the propagation of *la politique des races*. According to Geschiere (2013:58), Delafosse's seminal African ethnography, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*, comprised of three volumes, provided detailed descriptions of "the kaleidoscope of tribal groups, chieftaincies, and larger state formations that the French had to confront in their newly conquered territories".

23

And it was within these descriptions, argues Geschiere, that Delafosse identified whether or not a community was autochthonous. Thus, claim Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005:388), autochthony played "a vital role in categorizing these new subjects to aid in administering these vast, newly conquered areas". Geschiere (2013:60), however, notes that *la politique des races* flourished as a French colonial policy because "it [autochthony] easily articulated with distinctions already existing locally".

Carola Lentz, an anthropologist exploring the politics of belonging in West Africa, draws a similar conclusion – in terms of placing authorship of autochthony solely in the hands of colonial authorities – to that of Geschiere.[10] According to Lentz, early anthropologists erroneously characterized Africans as indifferent to establishing long-term roots to a physical place. These authors mischaracterized the association between territory and identity and subsequent declarations of control over land in order to ensure both economic and political security as a product of colonial rule (Lentz 2013:9). Lentz (Ibid.) argues for a departure from the status quo in which 'natives' – prior to the colonial interventions – are depicted as not having property and not displaying an interest in territoriality.[11] Pre-dating the arrival of colonial governments, explains Lentz (Ibid.:8), "indigenous tenure regimes were…contested pastiches of historically grounded arguments about property rights and access to land resources as well as to membership in the local political community". "[C]olonial politicization of autochthony and the territorialization of political rule eventually transformed the local mental map(s) and set the stage for new conflicts over land and belonging", explains Lentz (2013:188), but these conditions were not a direct result of colonial policies. Lentz's paradigmatic shift – one in which autochthony is seen as not a colonial product but rather a complex identity with roots that precede the arrival of colonial authorities – does not shift

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[10] 'Native' and '*autochthone*' are identities that are, by and large, synonyms. Within French-speaking regions, a 'native' is referred to as an *autochthone*. The inverse is true for English-speaking regions, an '*autochthone*' is identified as a 'native'.
[11] 'Native' is a term that colonial authorities utilized to identify the inhabitants of the territory they administered, whether indirectly or directly. In light of the fact that 'native' has come to be viewed as a pejorative, I have elected to utilize the term only when necessary, i.e. citing colonial documents.

authorship solely to that of 'natives', but simply provides a more nuanced interpretation of the source of autochthony.

Achille Membe (2002b:635) expresses concern over the potential of autochthony – which he defines as the assumption that "each spatio-racial formation has its own culture, its own historicity, its own way of being, and its own relationship with the future and with the past" – to be embraced and encouraged should it be identified as a link to a by-gone era, a 'traditional Africa'. Moreover, writes Mbembe, "[t]here is no African identity that could be designated by a single term, or that could be named by a single work; or that could be subsumed under a single category…they [forms of identity] cannot be reduced to a purely biological order based on blood, race, or geography" (Mbembe 2002a:272). Mbembe (2000:35) argues that the language of autochthony is inherently xenophobic, one centered on exclusion and difference. Furthermore, contends Mbembe (Ibid.:38), it is in post-colonial Africa that the autochthony rhetoric begins to alter and re-shape the ways in which citizenship is defined.

Autochthony beyond the state

Autochthony resonates as a critical identity in West Africa that has, to some extent, surpassed national citizenship in terms of underpinning political rights and access to natural resources. The preoccupation with autochthony as a political identity in post-colonial West Africa is unsurprising considering French colonial efforts to identify and install *autochthones* in positions of power to rule over *allogènes*. Though autochthony resonates as a powerful national identity, it has reached an audience well outside of West Africa to include the United Nations (UN), and the International Labor Organization (ILO), where the related notion of 'indigeneity' has taken hold.

Thus far I have argued that the central tenet of autochthony involves demonstrating a historical attachment of people to place and having that association to place recognized. Though the identity

may be challenged, reconfigured, even denied at a later point, being first or being the descendent of those who arrived first remains a critical feature of autochthony. On an international level, however, additional criteria contribute to defining indigenous or *autochtone*. Though being identified as a local *autochthone* is crucial in terms of accessing natural resources and political rights, part and parcel of acquiring the status of an international *autochtone* is being denied access.

In the international arena, *autochtone* is the French equivalent of indigenous. Unlike the local context in which autochthony circulates, the international working definition of *autochtone*/indigenous comprises several factors, of which historical continuity to land is included but not critical. During her work as Chairperson-Rapporteur for the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Mrs. Erica-Irene A. Daes published a working paper, "On the concept of 'indigenous peoples'". In her discussion on the understanding of the term "indigenous peoples," Daes identifies several pertinent features that are drawn from the work of legal experts and international organizations. They include the following:

> (a) Priority in time, with respect to the occupation and use of a specific territory;
> (b) The voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness, which may include the aspects of language, social organization, religion and spiritual values, modes of production, laws and institutions;
> (c) Self-identification, as well as recognition by other groups, or by State authorities, as a distinct collectivity; and
> (d) An experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination, whether or not these conditions persist (Daes 1996:22).

Though long-term occupation of territory is introduced as a feature of "indigenous peoples", it is only one of four criteria. Daes (1996:5) acknowledges that the "semantic roots of the terms [indigenae and autochtone] historically used in modern international law share a single conceptual element: priority in time". Nevertheless, Daes remains convinced that in order to address the historical particularities and diversity of indigenous peoples worldwide, a more comprehensive definition of the term is needed.

Since the vast majority of Africans are descendants of the original people of Africa, writes Igoe (2006:402), "the appropriateness of some African groups having special indigenous status" has been frequently called into question.[12] The expansion of the definition of indigenous, beyond that of 'priority in time', was, in part, an effort to include particular African groups. Ronald Niezen (2003:5), a legal anthropologist and long-time observer of the international indigenous peoples' movement, characterizes indigenous peoples as "people whose position in the modern world is least tenable". Dorothy Hodgson (2002:1086), an anthropologist working with indigenous NGOs in Tanzania, writes that in Africa "*indigenous* has been used by distinct cultural minorities…who have been historically repressed by majority populations of Africans who control the state apparatus". Recognition as international *autochtones* or indigenous, writes Richard Lee (2006:458), "has become an avenue for entitlement, enfranchisement and empowerment". As such, it has provided formerly oppressed peoples a proverbial 'seat at the table' in negotiations over land rights, compensation packages and acknowledgment of past wrongs (Ibid.). Since the early 1990s, the international status of indigenous or *autochtone* has gained purchase for certain African groups hoping to address historical injustices.

African communities recognized as international *autochtones* or indigenous are most likely to identify themselves as hunter-gatherers or pastoralists. According to Hodgson (2009:9), their 'cultural distinctiveness', "largely produced and predicated on their distinct livelihood strategies…often conflict[s] with the dominant, state-endorsed livelihoods of settled farmers".

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[12] Miguel Alfonso Martínez was the former chairperson of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Established in 1982, the Working Group's mandate was two-fold:
"to review developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples…to give attention to the evolution of international standards concerning indigenous rights" (UNWGIP 2017). Five experts, including Alonso Martínez as chairperson, comprised the Working Group. During Alonso Martínez's tenure as chairperson, he produced a controversial report in which he argued that no African groups should have their claims as indigenous be recognized. Citing the entangled histories of migration and the difficulties in distinguishing between indigenous and nonindigenous in Africa, Alonso Martínez (1999) suggested that African groups be considered minorities.

Consequently, writes Hodgson, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists are frequently cast in an inferior social, economic and political position. They are, notes Hodgson (Ibid.), "second-class citizens".

In Cameroon, being a local *autochthone* is comparable to that of being a national citizen in Europe. The rights bequeathed to individuals possessing national citizenship are accessed through one's recognition as a local *autochthone*. By this measure, Gbaya residents of Mandjou are local *autochtones* since their ancestors were the first to arrive and settle the town. Gbaya, however, are not international *autochthones* or indigenous. Mbororo engagement in nomadic pastoralism – temporary encampments as they traveled with cattle – prevented them from establishing a permanent attachment to place. Moreover, it was unlikely Mbororo arrival would have preceded that of any farming community. As a consequence of their mobile past, Mbororo continue to struggle to acquire access to natural resources and political representation. If local autochthony is the gauge by which rights are determined, then Mbororo are ostensibly 'second-class citizens.' Thus, Mbororo have sought support vis-à-vis international governing bodies to access the international status of indigenous peoples or *les peuples autochthones*. Such recognition has permitted Mbororo to circumvent the Cameroonian state in order to rectify on-going marginalization encountered within Cameroon.

As I argue in this dissertation, Mbororo settlers in Mandjou have made inroads in terms of establishing their status as local *autochtones* by way of physically transforming the town. Ironically, their transformation into local *autochtones* has had little impact on their status as international *autochthones*. Internationally speaking, Mbororo continue to be recognized as a marginalized and vulnerable community. Gbaya, on the other hand, struggle to retain their status as local *autochtones* in Mandjou as their physical attachment to the town becomes more tenuous. As the Gbaya increasingly find themselves without territory, they have, to some extent, become 'second-class citizens.' Yet unlike Mbororo, they unlikely to gain access to the international status.

III. The built environment, spatial organization and belonging

Mbororo residing in Mandjou, unlike Mbororo in other regions of Cameroon, have made significant progress in acquiring the status of local *autochtones*. Though Mbororo acknowledge Gbaya settlement preceded their own, Mbororo attribute their claim to the status of local *autochthone* based on their modifications to the physical landscape. Mbororo engagement in the spatial reorganization of Mandjou has provided them with a means of anchoring themselves to the land. It is through the focus on the built environment, a component of spatial organization that has been a contributing factor for Mbororo to gain status as local *autochthones*. The spatial reorganization of Mandjou has impacted the way in which Gbaya and Mbororo relate to one another.

Deborah Pellow, an anthropologist researching the spatial and social evolution of a Muslim migrant neighborhood in Accra, Ghana, suggests that social relations have a spatialized quality. According to Pellow (2008:2-3), "social values, roles, and behaviors, are embedded in this spatial environment. Pellow (Ibid.:3) argues that one cannot view spatial organization as simply a reflection of "cultural codes and meanings" but rather, it is critical to interrogate the human interactions that contribute to the ways in which space is configured.

It is through the built environment that spatial organization is materially produced (Rapoport 2002:475). Denise Lawrence and Setha Low's (1990:454) comprehensive annual review article, *The Built Environment and Spatial Form*, defines the built environment as "any physical alteration of the natural environment, from hearths to cities, through construction by humans". Built forms are often depicted as features of the built environment including "building types (such as dwellings, temples or meeting houses), created by humans to shelter, define, and protect activity"[13] (Ibid.). According to Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003:2), "as an object of study, the building becomes a point of spatial

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[13] Lawrence and Low (1990:454) suggest that the term, 'built form,' can extend to spaces that are not enclosed, such as streets or plazas. Furthermore, features of buildings, such as doors and windows, may also be considered 'built forms'.

articulation for the intersection of multiple forces of economy, society and culture". Anthony King, art historian and sociologist, argues that "buildings, indeed, the entire built environment, are essentially social and cultural products. Buildings result from social needs and accommodate a variety of functions – economic, social, political, religious and cultural" (King 2003:1). Urban geographer, Doreen Massey (1994) posits that spatial practices and social relations are intertwined and inseparable.

In Pellow's (2008:7) discussion of the interaction between spatial organization and social relations, she points out that social institutions that result in a built form have the potential to promote a particular form of behavior and "foster a sense of cohesion". In Mandjou, I argue that Mbororo residents have constructed religious structures that provide them with a means of engaging with one another as well as ensuring their adherence to the principles of Islam. Mbororo spatial practices and their methods of reconfiguring Mandjou are premised on their desire to be acknowledged as good and pious Muslims.

Though spatial practices can serve to unite a community, they also have the potential to exclude members of a community. Low argues, "when critically examined, space and spatial relations yield insight into unacknowledged biases, prejudices, and inequalities that frequently go unexamined" (Ibid.). David Sibley (1995:xi-xii) discusses how there are "implicit rules of inclusion and exclusion in a built form that contribute to the structuring of society and space in a way which some will find oppressive and others appealing". Joel Streicker's (1997) research in Cartagena (Columbia) in the mid-1990s explores the spatial reorganization of urban space at the hands of the wealthy. Born from a desire to attract foreign tourists and replicate North American culture, the elites fled to the coast. Subsequently, writes Streicker (1997), elites radically altered the design of their homesteads to prevent the poor from gaining access.

Teresa Caldeira, an urban anthropologist, explores the spatial reconfiguration of urban Sao Paolo since the 1980s in her ethnography *City of Walls*. "Fortified enclaves," writes Caldeira, have permitted upper and upper middle classes to live in isolation behind heavily armed walls. Caldeira (2001:214) argues that these walls separate economic classes, transforming public space from one relating "to the modern ideals of commonality and universality" to one that showcases "separateness". Caldeira (Ibid.:291) notes that the "fortified enclaves" prevent the poor, a source of insecurity to the rich, from having direct contact with the middle and upper class. Caldeira contends that these fortified enclaves have impeded social relations and led to the distancing between economic classes.

Mbororo spatial practices in Mandjou have not only impeded their social interactions with Gbaya residents but have led to the physical exclusion of Gbaya from the town. As a corollary, Mbororo are now seen as the builders of Mandjou, their having transformed the land. This is now seen as a more legitimate and authentic claim to land, one that supersedes that of being first. I argue that the spatial reconfiguration of Mandjou at the hands of Mbororo residents, while fostering unity amongst Mbororo, has led to the social, economic and physical exclusion of Gbaya.

Fulbe of West Africa

The Fulbe are widely dispersed, stretching across much of the Sahelian Region and extending south into the lower quadrants of Cameroon and Central African Republic. The Fulbe – referred to as Fulani, Fula or *Peul* (French) – inhabit geographically disparate places and have emerged as one of the most populous ethnic groups in Africa. In light of the vast geographic distance separating one Fulbe community from one another it should come as no surprise that differences emerged in terms of political organization, economic livelihoods, religion, etc. In colonial texts and in pre-colonial oral narratives and historical documents, Fulbe are identified paradoxically as mobile peoples who are

heavily invested in cattle and as sedentary political elites in urban centers who pursue a variety of economic activities (See Dupire 1962, 1970; Riesman 1977; Stenning 1959 for depictions of the former and See Azarya 1978 for the latter). In his early work, Stenning (1959:4) writes, "[F]ulani populations show marked differences in their mode of life, social organization, and degree of political autonomy". Catherine VerEecke, an anthropologist working with nomadic Fulani in the Adamaoua Region of Nigeria, comments that "Fulbe society is and has always been dynamic (VerEecke 1993:146).[14]

Within the sub-field of Fulbe Studies, researchers have put forward the question as to the feasibility of continuing to use the ethnic category of Fulbe to encapsulate all of these distinct groups.[15] Two particular cultural components continue to work as a means to unite Fulbe: language (Fulfulde) and '*pulaaku'*. Pulaaku depicts how a Fulbe "should act vis-à-vis specific types of people, such as affines, agnates and elders, as well as the public in terms of behaviour and appearance" [16] (Azarya, Eguichi, and VerEecke 1993:3). Speaking in generalities, *pulaaku* is a code of behavior or as VerEecke (1993:146) writes:

> Indeed, because it forms the core of a Pullo's identity (something a Pullo is born with) its meaning is not easily conveyed to others…Thus, pulaaku is an in-born natural element that is outwardly manifested in a Pullo's thinking, feeling and behaving...

In the Adamaoua Region of Nigeria, the location of VerEecke's (1993) doctoral research, the elements most frequently associated with the expression of *pulaaku* are: reserve, endurance, bravery,

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[14] In her article, "Bounded and Multiple Identities: Ethnic Identifications of WoDaaBe and FulBe", Kristín Loftsdóttir (2007:6-7) provides a visual illustration – a list of over twenty ethnographies in which reference is made to the FulBe – to demonstrate the complexity of the FulBe identity and underscore the futility in attempting to impose coherency in the classification of members of a community as "FulBe".

[15] Major meeting held to discuss this very issue, resulting in the publication of Unity and Diversity of a People (Eguchi and Azarya 1993).

[16] Ethnographers Anneke Breedveld and Mirjam de Bruijn (1996:795) counter arguments sustained by ethnographers that *pulaaku* is "*la valeur central de la vie même des Fulbe*". Breedveld and de Bruijn charter new territory in Fulbe studies since they are problematizing the continued use of *pulaaku* as a defining feature of all Fulbe. Furthermore, Breedveld and de Bruijn argue that when Fulbe ethnographers encounter *pulaaku* they fail to interrogate the localized use of the term. Breedveld and de Bruijn (Ibid.:815) write that the various political, ecological, historical and social contexts in which researchers encounter Fulbe, suggests that the term *pulaaku* is unlikely to retain a single signification.

herdsmanship, freedom, kindness, and generosity. Non-Fulbe are far more likely to identify the abrasive attributes of *pulaaku*, i.e. "superiority vis-à-vis other groups" (Burnham 1999:281). In the case of urban or settled Fulbe, some components of *pulaaku* are not as applicable (i.e. herdsmanship), yet this is of little consequence since the concept allows room for adaptation. VerEecke (Ibid.:147) explains, "[i]t is because of *pulaaku*, many Fulbe agree, that they are all one people". Nevertheless, the content of *pulaaku* is dynamic and likely to shift in focus, not unlike VerEecke's above depiction of the Fulbe ethnic category.

Though *Pulaaku* remains significant in terms of unifying Fulbe and distinguishing Fulbe from other ethnic categories, many Fulbe communities associate the practice of Islamic orthodoxy as a gauge of their *pulaaku*. Victor Azarya (1999:9), an anthropologist working in urban centers with settled Fulbe communities, writes that "the central element of pulaaku [has] shifted to Islamic knowledge, education and piety". In the introduction to the edited volume, *Unity and Diversity of People: The Search for Fulbe Identity*, Azarya, Eguichi and VerEecke (1993:4) write, "[f]or many of today's Fulbe, with the exception of some of the nomads, a significant part of their identity is indeed based on Islam. In at least some Fulbe communities, Islam has begun to surpass pulaaku in importance as a guiding path".

Emily Schultz, conducting fieldwork in northern Cameroon (town of Guider) during the mid-1970s, distinguishes town Fulbe from rural Fulbe. In Guider and throughout much of northern Cameroon, rural Fulbe are identified and self-identify as Mbororo (Mbororo'en is the plural form).[17] The Fulfulde language and their shared status as Muslims, though at times only nominal, are the only visible components of being Fulbe that the two communities shared. Schultz (1984:51) describes Mbororo'en as:

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[17] I limit my use of the plural form of Mbororo to my engagement with Schultz's work on account of its limited use in other ethnographies engaging with Mbororo communities.

"transhumant pastoralists who avoid involvement with the religious and political institutions controlled by sedentary urban Fulbe, and eschew all ties that might jeopardize their freedom and the prosperity of their herds. Urban Fulbe do not consider these pastoralists to be true Fulbe at all, and call them Mbororo'en" (Schultz 1984:51).

Likewise, Mbororo'en, writes Schultz, distance themselves (culturally) from urban Fulbe. Mbororo view urban Fulbe with suspicion and "accuse [them] of having forsaken traditional Fulbe commitments by settling in towns and giving up pastoralism" (Schultz 1984:51).

Schultz's depiction of a fractured Fulbe community resonates with the findings of Philip Burnham, an ethnographer working in the Adamaoua Region from the late 1960s onwards. Burnham distinguishes Mbororo from town and settled Fulbe. Cognizant of the fact that outsiders have the tendency to group all Fulbe together, Burnham (1996:96) writes that Mbororo are in an "ethnically segmented and often oppositional relation to the politically dominant, sedentary Fulbe of Northern Cameroon". In an effort to challenge their political marginalization, some Mbororo have adopted components of the Fulbe lifestyle.

Becoming Fulbe

Schultz introduces the concept of Fulbeization, a process by which non-Fulbe adopt features that are identifiably "Fulbe". Should non-Fulbe succeed in emulating cultural markers associated with the Fulbe lifestyle, argues Schultz, within a span of one to two generations they will self-identify and be recognized as Fulbe. Schultz identifies three critical features of Fulbe lifestyle that non-Fulbe adopt in order to become Fulbe; learn Fulfulde, become Muslim and adopt the Fulbe dress (tunics for men and veils for women). The ethnographic subjects of Schultz's exploration of Fulbeization

were drawn from non-Islamic ethnic groups.[18] Though recognized as nominally Muslim, Mbororo were excluded from Schultz's research (1979, 1984).

Both Tea Virtanen (2010), an anthropologist who worked with Mbororo communities in Adamaoua during the 1990s, and Philip Burnham (1996) invoke Schultz's concept of Fulbeization to discuss changes in the Mbororo everyday way of being. Both authors illustrate the ways in which Mbororo, who settled in close proximity to urban areas, adopted practices typically associated with being Fulbe. Since Islam is a prominent feature of the Fulbe identity, Mbororo appropriated practices that demonstrated their engagement with Islam. Fulbe residing in villages and towns, writes Virtanen (2010:125) cited Mbororo inconsistency in practicing daily prayers, irregular fasting during Ramadan and reluctance to sell cattle to fund their pilgrimage to Mecca as evidence of Mbororo being "the least Islamic". Under pressure from town Fulbe "to become better Muslims", writes Virtanen (Ibid.:136; 2003:210), some Mbororo incorporated "practices that redefine the limits of autonomy for their wives" (2003:217). Milk selling, suggests Virtanen (2010:136), was a "traditional" activity with which many Mbororo women she interviewed were engaged. Yet to sell milk necessitated wives traveling to the market, a practice that town Fulbe deemed immoral since it contradicted the Islamic practice of female seclusion. Many Mbororo men have prohibited their wives from engaging in milk selling, concludes Virtanen (2003:216), in an effort to bring "their [Mbororo] society culturally closer to that of the Muslim village people". Burnham (1996:105) noted a similar change in terms of greater restrictions on Mbororo women's mobility when he returned to the field in the 1990s. Refusing to allow their wives to engage in milk selling, writes Burnham (Ibid.:105-6) was a result of Mbororo men trying to mimic the Islamic practices of town Fulbe.

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[18] Emily Schultz (1979, 1984) uses the term "pagan" to refer to ethnic groups that are not Muslim. Due to the pejorative connotation that this particular term denotes, I have replaced "pagan" with "non-Islamic".

Charles Frantz strongly believes that the end of nomadic pastoralism (brought on by cattle diseases and poverty) will surely spell the demise of Mbororo. For Frantz, it is only a matter of time before Mbororo will be indistinguishable from settled Fulbe. With subdued certainty, Frantz (1993:22) declares, "it seems likely there will be fewer Mbororo'en in coming decades". Burnham's work on Fulbeization within Mbororo communities argues that Mbororo not only have an awareness of potentially losing their Mbororo identity but also express fear of being identified as Fulbe.[19] Mbororo observed that high physical proximity to Fulbe is 'risky' since it increases the likelihood of one becoming Fulbe (Burnham 1996:108).

If the framework employed to distinguish Mbororo from Fulbe stipulates that Mbororo are nomadic and heavily invested in pastoralism and Fulbe are settled and engaged in a diverse set of economic livelihoods, then Mbororo residing in Mandjou are, by all accounts, Fulbe. At the very least, Mbororo in Mandjou would be difficult to distinguish from the town Fulbe depicted in the works of Burnham and Virtanen. The Mbororo residing in Mandjou retain very little involvement with cattle herding and have built permanent homes throughout the town. Moreover, they are pious Muslims who strive to adhere to the principles of Islam. Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, Mbororo have incorporated components of being Fulbe without identifying as Fulbe, as Charles Frantz (1993) predicted.

The Exile of Usman dan Fodio and the Creation of the First Fulbe State in Cameroon

Over five hundred kilometers lie between Ngaoundere (capital of present-day Adamaoua Region) and Mandjou, yet their histories remain intertwined. It was Shehu Usumanu bi Fodiye (Usman dan Fodio), Islamic scholar and a member of the Fulbe elite, who played a critical role in

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[19] Stenning's early work with nomadic Fulani addresses the issue of settlement and the potential loss of identity should they settle. According to Stenning, nomadic Fulani feared the day their feet touched the ground. Settling, states Stenning (1959:22-3), was an indication of becoming Fulbe.

linking these geographically disparate locations. Dan Fodio was the architect of the Sokoto Caliphate

that by the mid-1830s stretched from present-day Burkina Faso to Cameroon. Born in 1754 in

Maratta, dan Fodio and his family resettled to Degel (a town located in present day northern

Nigeria) in the state of Gobir during his youth.[20] Dan Fodio was a young child when he began his

Islamic education. By 1788, dan Fodio was a well-regarded theologian with a sizeable following who

advocated for a greater adherence to Islamic doctrine. His efforts to encourage Islamic orthodoxy

came at a time when "the situation in Hausaland was anything but Islamic; the rulers had turned into

autocrats, justice was subverted and in fact the *Shari'ah* law in most cases disregarded" (H. Maishanu

and I. Maishanu 1999:127). Dan Fodio's vehement appeals to the government to release political

prisoners and eliminate "uncanonical taxes" politicized what had previously been a religious

movement (H. Maishanu and I. Maishanu 1999:125).

Sarkin Gobir Nafata, the king of Gobir and former student of dan Fodio, alarmed at the

exponential growth of dan Fodio's popularity, implemented a series of laws to undermine his

influence. Firstly, only dan Fodio would be permitted to preach, thus limiting his ability to reach a

larger audience. Secondly, his followers who were not born into Islam were strongly encouraged to

abandon Islam and embrace their traditional religion. Lastly, Muslims were banned from wearing

Islamic dress (i.e. women veiling, men wearing a turban, etc.) (H. Maishanu and I. Maishanu

1999:125). Outraged at the government's response to dan Fodio's growing influence, many of his

followers (including Abd al-Salām, arguably one of dan Fodio's most devoted disciples) fled Gobir

and resettled in the village of Gimbana (located in the neighboring state of Kebbi (Gwandu

1977:47). Nafata died shortly after dan Fodio's followers relocated to Gimbana and his son Yunfa

was named his successor. As the newly installed Sarkin Gobir, Yunfa ordered Abd al-Salām to return

to Gobir; he refused. Enraged at having his orders dismissed, Yunfa sent an armed expedition to

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[20] Gobir was one of the seven Hausa kingdoms that comprised Hausaland.

attack Gimbana. The battle that ensued led to the death of many of Abd al Salām's followers (H. Maishanu and I. Maishanu 1999:126). Yunfa's military convoy, victorious, was en route to Alkalawa (capital of the state of Gobir) via Degel (home of dan Fodio) when they were ambushed by members of dan Fodio's devoted flock. Enraged by the clandestine attack against his military convoy, Yunfa threatened grave retaliation against dan Fodio's devotees if dan Fodio remained in Degel. These threats, ostensibly, forced dan Fodio into exile. Moreover, Yunfa would only allow dan Fodio to leave with family members, implying that dan Fodio's followers were not permitted to accompany their religious leader. Yunfa's ultimatum, likely an effort to create a wedge between dan Fodio and his followers, was ignored; dan Fodio agreed to leave Gobir, but not without his disciples (Gwandu 1977:47-8). Thus, began dan Fodio's *hiraj* (emigration) to Gudu, along with his disciples (H. Maishanu and I. Maishanu 1999:126). In response to the *hiraj*, Yunfa declared war against dan Fodio. In 1804, after several battles had been waged between dan Fodio's followers and Yunfa's military, dan Fodio declared *jihad* (holy war) against the ruling Hausa (Ibid.). This jihad would become known as the Fulani War or Fulani *Jihad* and resulted in the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate.

The Wolarbe, one of several Fulbe lineages, answered dan Fodio's call of *jihad* and were responsible for extending Islam into present-day northern Cameroon as well as conquering the territory and people they encountered.[21] These Fulbe lineages, writes Burnham (1996:17 and 1995:154), "directed their *jihad* against the pagan tribes of the Benue valley and southwards on the Adamaoua Plateau". Though the expected rationale for Fulbe pursuing the *jihad* would have been

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[21] According to Phillip Burnham, historical data on the Wolarbe are scarce. The Wolarbe did not subscribe to a sedentary lifestyle. When Wolarbe answered dan Fodio's call of holy war, they resided in the Benue river valley. The Wolarbe, though not practicing an urban lifestyle were "familiar with the urban political forms" (Burnham 1996:18). From this point forward I will refer to Wolarbe as Fulbe. It should be noted that Wolarbe Fulani does not refer to Wodaabe – a Fulani nomadic pastoral group who have been the focus of Derrick Stenning's (1959) monograph as well as the work of Margaret Dupire (1962, 1970).

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the expansion of Islam, Fulbe had more pressing concerns. Eldridge Mohammadou, prolific

Cameroonian historian, argues that Fulbe engagement in *jihad* was a political, rather than a religious

venture. Fulbe were eager to expand their territory and ensure their political dominance

(Mohammadou 1981:238). Part and parcel of Fulbe asserting their political authority was the aim of

establishing a series of Fulbe states throughout the Adamaoua Plateau.

Between the 1830s and 1840s, Ngaoundere emerged as one of the most powerful Fulbe states.

The rapid integration of conquered local ethnic groups, suggests Burnham (1996:18), played a critical

role in Ngaoundere's political and economic success.[22] It was in the 1850s that Fulbe leaders began

to move well beyond the state of Ngaoundere, into the hinterland, to exploit highly valued

commodities, i.e. ivory and kola nuts (Burnham 1996:17).

Fulbe and Gbaya encounter

Hundreds of kilometers separated Ngaoundere from the western edge of Gbaya territory, well

outside of the political reach of the powerful Fulbe state. Yet in the 1850s, the draw of highly prized

commodities, i.e. ivory, kola nuts and slaves, drew Ngaoundere's gaze to the region. Eager to gain

access to these commodities yet concerned about over-extending themselves were they to attempt to

conquer Gbaya, Fulbe leaders adopted an approach that favored "indirect exploitation of the Gbaya

region" (Burnham 1995:161). Rather than incorporating Gbaya into the state of Ngaoundere, as had

been the case with other non-Fulbe encountered in the Adamaoua Plateau, Fulbe established

"permanent colonies of Muslim traders among the Gbaya" (Ibid.). To be clear, these colonies were,

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[22] One of the tactics Fulbe employed to facilitate their administration was to allow chiefs of conquered groups to retain their political authority. The territory (chief and community) was "allocated to the *tokkal* (political following) of a titled Fulbe or slave official in Ngaoundere court (Burnham 1996:19). *Tokke* (plural of *tokkal*) were comprised of both conquered people and Fulbe. Chiefs that were permitted to retain their authority were expected to collect taxes from their community and "raise levies of soldiers for Fulbe war expeditions" (Ibid.). In return for their allegiance, Fulbe provided members of a *tokkal* with the opportunity "to secure booty in war" (Ibid.). Addressing the use of "[s]patially dispersed administrative organization", Burnham (1996:19) writes that this type of organization was an effective means of reducing the possibility of secession.

in fact, Gbaya towns that entered into tributary relations with Ngaoundere rather than villages organized at the behest of Fulbe leadership. The presence and subsequent economic activities of Muslim traders residing in the colonies was critical in channeling valued commodities from Gbaya territory to Ngaoundere (Burnham 1996:27).

Though Ngaoundere succeeded in establishing colonies within Gbaya territory, they failed to incorporate the region into their political organization. This was due, in part, to the geographic distance between the areas. Burnham (1995:160) writes that the distance "rendered continuous effective Fulbe control very difficult". Though Ngaoundere had managed to incorporate and transform enemy groups into allies within the span of a generation, it simply did not have the human resources to effectively govern a sparsely populated territory that covered tens of thousands of square kilometers[23] (Ibid.). The Fulbe, writes Burnham (1995:161), viewed the unconquered Gbaya territory "more as a source of valued commodities…than as a potential increment to their territory". Nevertheless, argues Burnham (1972:41-2), the decision to minimize efforts to incorporate Gbaya into the Fulbe state was a result of the Fulbe failing to "submit all the scattered Gbaya clans to their [Fulbe] political control" after multiple attempts. According to Burnham (Ibid.:41), "Gbaya acephalous political structures grafted poorly onto the Fulbe patrimonial administrative system". Though the Fulbe state failed to "effectively administer" the Gbaya territory, its "political and economic influence…stimulated tendencies toward political centralization among formerly un-centralized peoples like the Gbaya" (Burnham 1996:27). Some Gbaya leaders, as a result of continued contact with Fulbe leaders, began to acquire "the despotic characteristics of the Fulbe

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[23] At the time of the French colonial penetration into Adamaoua Plateau in the late 19th century, the approximate western frontier of the Gbaya territory was the Lom River. Gbaya clans were thinly distributed across southeast Cameroon and northwest Central African Republic (formerly Ubangi-Chari) (Burnham 1975:578). French explorers encountered a Gbaya territory that had undergone expansion in the latter half of the 19th century. In her historical analysis of the founding of the Gbaya *chefferie* in Bertoua, Copet-Rougier discusses Gbaya migration into eastern Cameroon during the 1850s. According to Copet-Rougier (1987:349), the mass exodus of Gbaya from northwest Central African Republic was a result of on-going conflicts between Gbaya and Fulbe.

chiefs" (Burnham 1972:71). These same leaders attempted to mimic the court display of Fulbe chiefs and to establish "large, nucleated villages" based on the Fulbe pattern (Ibid.:70).

Fulbe influence, i.e. spatial organization and political administration, extended to the East Region of Cameroon (Copet-Rougier 1987; Burnham 1996). Between 1850-1860, Ndiba, a respected Gbaya chief, travelled from present-day Central African Republic into East Cameroon and founded the town of Gamane. Elisabeth Copet-Rougier (1987:353), an anthropologist whose research has provided details on the proto-colonial relations between Fulbe and Gbaya, speculates that violent confrontations with Fulbe spurred Ndiba's resettlement. Nevertheless, argues Copet-Rougier (Ibid.), the physical distance was not enough to shake Fulbe influence. Ndiba's efforts, writes Copet-Rougier (Ibid.), were pivotal in physically bringing together scattered Gbaya clans into one central location, Gamane. And following in the footsteps of the Fulbe, notes Copet-Rougier, Ndiba launched multiple attacks against neighboring ethnic groups to force them into submission.

Following Ndiba's sudden death, Mbartoua, Ndiba's son, stepped into the role of Gbaya chief. Mbartoua was a far more militant leader and did not hesitate to employ violence to force neighboring ethnic groups into submission. To facilitate integration of conquered populations, Mbartoua demanded their resettlement in Bertoua (formerly Gamane), a military strategy learned from the Fulbe. Copet-Rougier (1987:354) suggests that the Fulbe influence was unmistakable within the Bertoua *chefferie*. In one of the most telling examples, Mbartoua advocated for marriages between Gbaya elite (nobles and members of his family) and the daughters of conquered chiefs. According to Copet-Rougier (Ibid.) these marriages were critical for Mbartoua to consolidate his power over the populations he had conquered. Mbartoua's reign was short-lived. Following Mbartoua's death in 1903 at the hands of a young German lieutenant, the powerful chiefdom Mbartoua had fought to establish, crumbled. Though Mbartoua's demise precipitated the collapse of the Bertoua *chefferie*, Copet-Rougier speculates that had Mbartoua lived, it would have only been a

matter of time before fissures emerged and the *chefferie* weakened. A critical factor in the emergence

of the Bertoua *chefferie* was the looming external threat of the powerful and dominant Fulbe.

However, explains Copet-Rougier (Ibid.:359-60), once the colonial administration rendered the

Fulbe state impotent, Gbaya leaders could no longer invoke the threat of eventual Fulbe domination

as a strategy to retain authority over conquered populations. Over a century has passed since the

death of Mbartoua yet he remains a pivotal figure for Gbaya settled in the East Region. For Gbaya

residents living within and outside of Mandjou, Mbartoua's reign is considered the golden era for the

Gbaya, a period when Gbaya were respected and admired.

Colonial entanglements in Cameroon

European presence in Cameroon extends as far back as the late 15th century with the arrival of

Portuguese traders, who engaged in trade relations with the Douala, an ethnic group residing along

the Cameroonian coast. Though the Portuguese were unable to retain control over trade routes –

yielding to pressure from the Dutch by the 17th century – they were responsible for the country's

future appellation. Portuguese merchants referred to the Wouri River, the water route they navigated

in order to engage in trade with the coastal Douala, as *Rio de Camaroes* (River of Prawns). It is from

the singular form of *Camaroes*, *Camarão*, that the nation-state of Cameroon (English) or Cameroun

(French) draws its name (Ardener 1962:341).

Like the Portuguese before them, the Dutch were unable to ward off the advances of other

European competitors vying to control coastal trade routes. By the 18th century the British

monopolized trade along the Cameroonian coastline. Towards the latter half of the 19th century,

several German traders traveled independently to the region and established trade relations with

Doula chiefs; the established middlemen between European traders and communities located

further inland. Though conflicts emerged between British and German traders, neither government

was willing to expend the financial resources necessary to annex the region in order to ensure that

the Douala refrained from engaging in trade with other European merchants. Upon learning that France had sent expeditions to the region in order to negotiate trade agreements with local chiefs, the German and British governments, fearing eventual French usurpation, began to re-evaluate their position on annexation. The British, however, working on the premise that neither the German Reichstag (German Parliament) nor Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck (leader of the German Confederation) were eager to acquire colonies, proceeded carefully and methodically with plans to establish political and economic control over the region[24] (Rudin 1938: 29-30). Unfortunately, writes Rudin, the British miscalculated Germany's interest in the region. After a series of crafty maneuvers, Germany officially gained control over *Kamerun* on July 14, 1884.

Following Germany's loss to allied forces in 1916, *Kamerun* was provisionally sub-divided into French and British Mandates. The French were allocated approximately four-fifths of the total area (432,000 km2), a region they referred to as *Cameroun* (English: French Cameroun). The British controlled the remaining one-fifth (88,000 km2), composed of two non-contiguous regions bordering Nigeria, which they referred to as the British Cameroons[25] (Ngoh 1979:25). Though these two land masses were united under the appellation of British Cameroons, the British colonial administrators renamed the regions Northern and Southern Cameroon (Ardener 1962:341). Along with the change in appellation, the colonial rulers felt it necessary to place the physically disconnected regions under separate political administration within Nigeria – Southern Cameroons under the administration of Southern Nigeria and Northern Cameroons attached to Northern Nigeria (Ngoh 1977:77). According to Adig (2017:216), the decision to uncouple the British

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[24] In correspondence between Lord Ampthill, British Ambassador to Germany, and the English Foreign Office, Lord Ampthill pointed out that most members of the Reichstag [German Parliament between 1871-1918] were opposed to engaging in colonialism. To further reassure the English Foreign Office that Germany had no intention to annex the region, Lord Ampthill pointed out that Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck had consistently voiced his opposition to Germany acquiring colonies (Rudin 1938:29-30).

[25] It is important to note that additional nomenclature used to refer to French Cameroun is East Cameroon and for the British Cameroons it is West Cameroon (Ibid.:79).

Cameroons was based on the radical political, cultural and economic differences between the two regions.[26] Southern Cameroonians, contends Adig (Ibid.:214), were displeased with the British colonial authorities' decision to place Southern Cameroons under the political aegis of Southern Nigeria (later to be re-named the Eastern Region). It would be during the independence movement of the 1950s that Southern Cameroons would take steps to acquire independence from the Eastern Region of Nigeria.

By the mid-1950s, independence from the British colonial rulers was no longer discussed in hypothetical terms, but rather, was a foregone conclusion. In the case of East and West Cameroon, what remained undecided was whether or not these two territories, once joined under the appellation of German occupied *Kamerun*, would be reunified as an independent and sovereign nation-state. Elections were held in 1959 in both French Cameroun (East Cameroon) and British Cameroons (West Cameroon). As expected, Ahmadou Ahidjo became the premier of French Cameroun. In the British Cameroons, however, the results of the election were unexpected. In a surprising turn of events, John Foncha was elected to the post of premier. Foncha's win was a devastating blow to the British colonial administration, who had strongly campaigned for Foncha's opponent, Emmanuel Endeley. This was a critical election since the winner and his political party would be tasked with negotiating the political future of British Cameroons (West Cameroon), to join Nigeria or reunite with East Cameroon.[27] Throughout his political campaign, Foncha had advocated for reunification with East Cameoon while his opponent was adamant that the only future for West Cameroon would be to join Nigeria. Foncha's unexpected victory provided him with the

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[26] During this period of political reorganization, Nigeria was divided into three autonomous regions; Colony of Lagos, Northern Region and Southern Region (Adig 2017:214). It would be these three regions, writes Adig (Ibid.), that would become "the foundation of the Nigerian federalism".

[27] At the time of John Foncha's election (1959), British Cameroons was under the political administration of Southern Nigeria and thus part of Nigeria. Endeley's support of joining Nigeria was contingent on British Cameroons acquiring the equivalent political standing of the other three autonomous regions that comprised the Nigerian federation.

"constitutional power to pursue reunification" with French Cameroun (Njeuma 1995:32). However, for Foncha and the members of KNDP, explains Awasom (2000:106), "[r]eunification was a long-term objective to be achieved only after the Southern Cameroons had acquired its independence". Foncha prioritized gaining independence from the Nigerian Federation (Ibid.).

British authorities decried the results of the election on the grounds that Foncha had defrauded voters by not publicly declaring his party's intentions to seek reunification with French Cameroun. In retaliation, the British government refused to validate the election results. Nearly two years after Foncha's unpredicted win, the United Nations intervened "to organize plebiscites in the British Cameroons to determine the people's wishes on how to end British Trusteeship" (Njeuma 1995:33). In preparation for the plebiscite, traditional leaders and representatives from the political parties within Southern Cameroons convened a conference in Mamfe (city in Southern Cameroons) to discuss the format of the questions that should be presented to the electorate. After several days of animated discussion, delegates were in unanimous agreement on two issues; the plebiscite would be comprised of two questions and one of the questions would be whether or not to join the Nigerian Federation. Twenty-nine delegates (67%) desired to have the second question be the option of cutting all ties with Nigeria and gaining total independence. The remaining fourteen delegates (33 %) voted to include reunification with East Cameroon as the second option (Awasom 2000:109). The United Nations ignored the results of the Mamfe Conference and chose to pose the following questions:

1. Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria

   Or

2. Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of

   Cameroun? (Awasom 2000:110 citing Federation of Nigeria 1961)

Separate plebiscites were held in Northern and Southern Cameroons in February 1961. Northern Cameroons voted to join Nigeria and Southern Cameroons voted to join *le Republique du Cameroun.*

The official date of unification was October 1, 1961. Upon reunification, Ahidjo was named president and chose to rename the country, *la République fédérale du Cameroun* (the federal republic of Cameroon).[28] Depicting Cameroon as a republic was little more than a gesture since Ahidjo was steadfast in his belief that a strong centralized government was the only means of promoting national unity. According to Monga (2001:202), and discussed in greater detail in chapter one, as the first President of Cameroon, Ahidjo was confronted with "the challenge of creating and developing a nation out of…[a] complex set of circumstances". Ahidjo was tasked with "creating a country, and developing a new national consciousness among a group of peoples with different colonial experiences, political memoires and convictions" (Monga 2000:725). In 1982, after more than two decades in power, Ahmadou Ahidjo resigned, but not before handpicking his successor, Paul Biya. Over thirty years after succeeding Ahidjo, Paul Biya remains president of Cameroon with his current mandate expiring in 2018.

Methodology

This thesis is based on thirteen months of fieldwork in Cameroon, carried out between November 2009 and September 2011. The bulk of my research occurred between November 2009 and October 2010, with an additional two-month period in the summer of 2011. Between November 2009 and January 2010, I resided in Bamenda, regional capital of the NW, and volunteered with MBOSCUDA. Activities varied during my stint as a volunteer. Much of my time

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[28] In 1972 the name was changed to the *la République unie du Cameroun* (United Republic of Cameroon). In 1984, under the Biya administration, the county was renamed *la République du Cameroon* (the Republic of Cameroon).

was spent accompanying staff to local grant-writing workshops. By 2009, international NGOs were reducing their financial contribution to support MBOSCUDA's direct administrative costs, i.e. staff salaries. These workshops were aimed to bolster MBOSCUDA's self-sufficiency and ensure their competency in seeking additional funding. International organizations continued to fund projects and on several occasions I travelled with MBOSCUDA staff to remote Mbororo communities to gauge the "success" of the on-going projects. My stint as a volunteer with MBOSCUDA was critical in terms of enhancing my understanding of MBOSCUDA's role as an ethnic association advocating for Mbororo cultural and political rights.

Though I continued to travel to Bamenda and Yaoundé in order to attend national MBOSCUDA conferences as well as international forums in which MBOSCUDA staff presented evidence to potential funders regarding challenges facing Mbororo in Cameroon, my primary residence between February and October 2010, was the town of Mandjou. I returned to Mandjou for an additional two months in the summer of 2011. For the duration of my fieldwork in Mandjou I lived with Biri, a fifty-something Mbororo entrepreneur from the NW, his two wives and four children.

Though Biri was a newcomer to Mandjou (he arrived in August 2009 with his family in tow) he had already become one of the most well-respected Mbororo residing in Mandjou. As one of the few Mbororo educated in French, Mbororo men (young and old) often sought his advice when faced with the prospect of interacting with local government officials, for whom the administrative language was French. Biri, born and raised in the NW, was one of the founding members of MBOSCUDA and had spent the better part of his 20s and 30s mediating conflicts between Mbororo and Grassfielders. Discouraged from attending Western schools, the lack of a formal education made Mbororo frequent targets for economic exploitation. Biri was committed to improving the lives of Mbororo, a people who had historically been political and socially

47

marginalized. Moreover, unlike most Mboro during the early 1980s, Biri had completed secondary school. Biri's education and desire to improve the lives of Mboro made him a natural advocate. MBOSCUDA's prioritization on education had led to a steady rise in the community's literacy and a larger Mboro presence in both primary and secondary schools. As the number of educated Mboro increased in the NW, the need for individuals with Biri's particular skill set diminished. In Mandjou, on the other hand, the literacy rate within Mboro community remained low. Mboro children were being encouraged to attend school but the vast majority of adults aged twenty and above had attended primary school intermittently. A lack of formal education, coupled with limited interactions with non-Mboro, resulted in Mboro adults often struggling to communicate in French. Thus, in Mandjou, Biri found himself once again working as an advocate on behalf of Mboro residents.

Biri's home, specifically his parlor, became my primary research site during my first months of fieldwork. From the sidelines, seated in an overstuffed floral armchair, I watched as Biri greeted the steady flow of Mboro men who came to seek his council. Since the conversations were entirely in Fulfulde, Biri would pause every now and again to provide me with a brief French translation. Once the guest had departed, Biri would sit patiently as I referred to my notes and peppered him with questions. It was from within Biri's parlor that I was exposed to the everyday struggles facing Mboro residents. It was where I first became aware of the tensions simmering between Gbaya and Mboro. My presence in Biri's parlor, though initially met with apprehensive looks from his visitors, not only facilitated my introduction to the Mboro community but provided a means of reassuring Mboro residents that I was not engaged in nefarious activities. Biri did not necessarily have to make this explicit but the fact that he allowed me to live with his family and have his ear put neighbors at ease. During the latter half of my fieldwork I sought out interviews with many of the Mboro men I had initially met in Biri's parlor. While some of these interviews were conducted in

French, most of my informants were more comfortable expressing themselves in Fulfulde. For these interviews, I was able to hire Biri's son, Kadafi, to work as a translator.

I would be remiss if I did not address the issue of gender segregation since the mechanisms in place to reduce physical contact between men and women were part and parcel of the everyday Mbororo lived experience in Mandjou. It was rare to see a married Mbororo woman outside of her home. Mbororo wives needed to secure their husband's permission prior to venturing beyond the large walls surrounding her home. Typically, a Mbororo husband would allow his wife to travel outside of the compound to visit a sickly neighbor or a mother who had recently given birth. However, when these occasions arose, Mbororo women were expected to bring along their younger children as chaperones and they were only permitted to take leave of their compound once the sun had set. Married Mbororo women who were visible outside of the home during daylight hours were most likely en route to *madrasa,* an Islamic learning center. Beyond the high walls that enclosed nearly every Mbororo home, it was Mbororo men who were seen praying, eating, and working alongside one another. Even in the daily market, Mbororo husbands and small children were responsible for purchasing food ingredients. Married Mbororo women were absent from public spaces and spent most of their lives hidden behind the large enclosures that surrounded their homes.

In light of the strict adherence to gender segregation it might appear as though my gender (self-identifying as female and being recognized as female by Mbororo) would have restricted my contact with Mbororo men. Strangely enough, in practice, my physical mobility far exceeded that of either gender. Eating, for example, is a highly gendered activity in the sense that Mbororo women and men do not consume meals together. Mbororo women and children eat with one another in the woman's salon, while the Mbororo men congregate in the parlor of the male head of household. In Biri's home, as well as in the homes of most of the Mbororo men I interviewed, I was often invited so share meals with men and eat from the same communal bowls. Yet I also regularly shared meals

49

with Biri's wives and married female friends. As I noted above, a married Mbororo woman's movements were restricted and permission had to be sought from her husband prior to leaving the homestead. Unlike married Mbororo women, however, I not only had the freedom to circulate but also had unrestricted access to physical sites that were exclusively male, i.e. restaurants and prayer rooms.

My slow progress in acquiring competency in Fulfulde proved to be a rather unexpected obstacle during fieldwork and ultimately restricted my contact with married Mbororo women, who rarely spoke more than a handful of French words. While it was possible to hire translators when interviewing Mbororo men who preferred to communicate in Fulfulde, the same could not be said for married Mbororo women. Due to the strict adherence to gender segregation, I could only hire a Mbororo woman as a translator if I had any hope of conducting interviews with married women. After several months of searching, I was able to find two Mbororo women who were eager to work as translators and had the fluency in both French and Fulfulde. However, neither woman was able to secure the permission from her husband to work as my research assistant.

Thus far I have spoken at length about the ways in which I sought to engage with the Mbororo community in Mandjou. For the better part of five months most of my interactions involved Mbororo residents. By the time I began my fieldwork there were few Gbaya living in Mandjou. It was only at the daily market that any significant Gbaya presence was discernible. Gbaya women set up temporary stalls to sell foodstuffs in the early morning and returned home after selling their goods. Thus, Gbaya women maintained an intermittent presence at the daily market as food sellers. Gbaya men, on the other hand, were almost entirely absent from the town of Mandjou. It was thus by chance that I met Jean Marie, an unemployed carpenter who was struggling to support his wife and five children, at the market. Jean Marie had recently relocated further outside of Mandjou but the Kingdom Hall (the physical site of worship for a Jehovah Witness) he and his family attended

50

was located on the other side of Mandjou. Consequently, Jean Marie walked through the center of Mandjou to attend religious services and additional bible study courses. Over several months it was Jean Marie who encouraged me to attend Gbaya-led activities and travel beyond the edges of Mandjou into what was increasingly becoming the line between two very distinct spaces. To encourage relationships, I worked alongside Gbaya farmers in their fields. I also attended weekly *tontine* meetings. A *tontine* shares similarities with ROSCAs – rotating savings and credit association that are pervasive in East Africa. At the start of each meeting, members contribute to a community pot; the proceeds of which are distributed to a different *tontine* member at the end of the meeting. *Tontine* members are required to contribute to their individual savings accounts at every meeting.

Though I spent time with Gbaya friends and built a social network over several months, the fact that I was living with a Mbororo family was met with disapproval from within the Gbaya community. Regardless of my efforts to engage with Gbaya residents, there were moments when I sensed their frustration at my decision to reside with a Mbororo family. Ensuring my safety was the primary reason I decided to remain a member of Biri's household for the duration of my fieldwork. My status as a Canadian researcher made me a target for a potential break-in. Not only was Biri's home surrounded by an enclosure – limiting my visibility – the entrances to his home were made of iron and could be locked from the inside. Most Gbaya homes were far less secure – no locks on the doors.

In addition to the more informal interactions with Mbororo and Gbaya residents, I carried out dozens of interviews with local residents (Gbaya men and women, Mbororo men) throughout both periods of my fieldwork. Initially I conducted ten interviews with life-long Gbaya residents in order to expand my knowledge of the history of Mandjou. In the months that followed, I conducted fifty additional interviews with Gbaya (men and women) and Mbororo (men only) to gather their opinions on the state of Mbororo and Gbaya relations as well as their thoughts on land titling and

51

"development" in Mandjou. In order to gauge the government's position on land titling I interviewed several staff at the Ministry of Land Tenure and followed up with questions about land registration with the mayor's office.

Yet perhaps my most important set of data on the topic were a series of interviews I conducted with Gbaya and Mbororo residents in the summer of 2011. My return to Mandjou in July 2011 coincided with the violent murder of a young Gbaya man. The events leading up to his death and the subsequent political unrest were the subject of seventeen interviews with Gbaya and Mbororo men.

Outline of the thesis

A note to the reader: every chapter of the dissertation begins with an anecdote from the field. These are small snapshots of my research that resonated with me at the time and were the starting points for the development of the actual chapter. An introduction to the chapter follows the narrative.

Chapter one provides the historical context of belonging in Cameroon and illustrates the way in which it has been used by local actors, colonial administrations and the state as a means to control access to resources and political power. Consistently, being recognized or identified as belonging was attributed to demonstrating historical continuity to a particular place. Mobile people, therefore, have historically struggled to achieve belonging. In this chapter I argue that Mbororo have succeeded in redefining the parameters of belonging, one that focuses on their pivotal role in economic development rather than prioritizing being first to settle the land.

In chapter two I compare the challenges Mbororo have confronted in the NW in terms of gaining access to local belonging with that experienced in Mandjou in the East. I argue that Mbororo efforts to shift the way in which local belonging is articulated include buying and titling as well as

developing land and making it productive. In this chapter I interrogate Gbaya responses to Mbororo claims of belonging.

In chapter three I provide detailed sketches of prominent religious structures that are recent (in the last thirty years) additions to the Mandjou landscape. I argue that these particular structures encourage Mbororo to engage in daily practices that will lead to their being virtuous and pious. Within this chapter I explore the role of the built form in terms of how the structure itself encourages acts of recognizable piety. These structures not only substantiate Mbororo claims of being 'good Muslims' but have garnered Mbororo recognition, by way of the structures' materiality, as such. Though an unintended consequence, the structures have led to greater Gbaya exclusion from the town of Mandjou. In an era when the importance of establishing one's belonging surpasses that of national citizenship, these religious structures have allowed Mbororo to forge a stronger attachment to Mandjou. Consequently, Gbaya claims to belong to Mandjou are under threat as the Gbaya and their buildings are displaced from the town.

Chapter four examines Gbaya propensity to be mobile and documents how mobility has allowed for their transition to alternative economic endeavors that have been essential for Gbaya survival. The hunting of bush meat is an activity that has provided Gbaya with a source of income and animal protein. However, both the Cameroonian state and local Mbororo residents have condemned the activity. Furthermore, Mbororo residents in Mandjou argue that Gbaya mobility along with Gbaya engagement in illegal activities (i.e. hunting bush meat and involvement in the buying and selling of bush meat) serve to undermine Gbaya claims of belonging to Mandjou. Though mobility formerly provided Gbaya with a strategy to prevent excessive political regulation from the colonial and later post-colonial administrations, mobility post-1990s has been exceedingly detrimental to Gbaya establishing claims to political rights and natural resources.

Chapter five moves from the local to the international scene and back again to illustrate the challenges produced by the misreading of the term *autochtone* as indigenous. I illustrate the way in which this misreading has impacted local social relations between Gbaya and Mbororo residents in Mandjou. I also point out that Mbororo have managed to present themselves as indigenous in terms of international understandings while transforming themselves into local *autochthones*. This involves carefully shifting between these two identities. In this chapter I examine the role of international NGOs in the circulation of the international *autochtone* identity in Mandjou and their impact on the ways in which the Mbororo perceive themselves, as well as on the relationship between the Gbaya and Mbororo.

Articulating Belonging in Cameroon

"Belonging…is much more fluid and allows people to use all sorts of
languages and practices to articulate their claims"
(Mujere 2010:497)

I nodded and politely accepted the scalding cup of chai the young girl offered me and listened

intently as my research assistant Kadafi introduced me to Al Hadji Musa in Fulfulde.[29] Out of

deference to Al Hadji's position as a well-respected religious figure in Mandjou, Al Hadji Musa's

chief advisor translated Kadafi's introduction into Arabic.[30] A well-respected and wealthy Mbororo

businessman, Al Hadji Musa – like many of his Mbororo neighbours – was a recent transplant to

Mandjou. Settling in 2005, he had purchased a sprawling tract of land from the *chef du quartier*

(neighbourhood chief) and subsequently built the largest and most ornate compound in town.[31]

Al Hadji Musa was not shy about displaying his wealth. Photos of his multiple trips to Mecca

hung on the walls of his salon and the concrete floor – standard in the homes of wealthy in

Mbororo – was submerged under a plush hand-woven Turkish carpet. His business acumen and

generosity contributed to Al Hadji Musa's rising popularity within the Mbororo community in

Mandjou, and he was rarely alone. Usually his salon was teeming with Mbororo men seeking

business advice or soliciting financial support. Rarely did Al Hadji Musa rebuff any request for

assistance. He believed Mbororo needed to help one another and work together as a community.

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[29] Mbororo introductions are known for their attention to detail and duration. Additionally, introductions involve a third party, usually known to both parties, who facilitates the introduction. Once both parties have been introduced to one another, a conversation can be initiated.

[30] All parties with the exception of myself were fluent in Fulfulde, including Al Hadji Musa.

[31] Mandjou is composed of several neighborhoods or *quartiers*. The rapid demographic growth over the last thirty years has led to the appropriation of more land. Incorporating the new land into older neighbourhoods has become an onerous task and can lead to a power struggle, with older political leaders fighting one another to have political authority over the land. To avoid confrontations, there has been a push to create new neighbourhoods and consequently elect new leaders.

Careful to avoid direct eye contact, I took a few minutes to go through the few notes I had

jotted down during my introduction to him. "Al Hadji Musa, you mentioned arriving here in 2005,

why did you choose to settle in Mandjou?"

My opening question caught Al Hadji off guard. In lieu of a direct response, he conferred with

his advisor and prefaced his answer with a deep sigh, "There was very little when I came to

Mandjou…it was a wild and empty place…and there was no one to refuse Mbororo people".

"*And the Gbaya? Were they here in Mandjou when you arrived?*" [Me]

"Well, yes, they were here. But they had done nothing…[T]his place was like the bush."

"This seems like a very different Mandjou than the Mandjou of today". [Me]

Al Hadji chuckled at this comment and turned to me once again, "But of course!"

"Look around and see what there is now. Mosques, schools, clean water, businesses…all made

by Mbororo people…Gbaya did nothing with Mandjou. Now all [the objects and people] you see is

Mbororo".[32]

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Al Hadji beamed with pride as he spoke these words. He was neither the first nor the last

Mandjou resident I would encounter who associated the arrival of Mbororo with significant changes

to the physical landscape: the rapid clearing and replacement of dense foliage with built structures.

Gbaya, the ethnic group to which the first settlement of Mandjou is attributed, though hardly

reluctant to share their frustration at perceived Mbororo domination of the local economy, were also

keenly aware of the success of Mbororo-run projects in terms of garnering attention from the

outside world and did not hesitate to vocalize their thoughts on the subject.[33] These initiatives had

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[32] The original interview with Al Hadji Musa was on October 2, 2010. I transcribed sections of the interview that were most relevant to the themes of my dissertation.

[33] These Mbororo-run initiatives included the launching of a large-scale co-operative palm oil operation. Mbororo members of the co-operative actively pursued external investment and had succeeded in recruiting both national and international investors. One of the more popular building endeavours – one that I describe and analyze at length in

lifted Mandjou out of relative obscurity. No longer invisible, the Cameroonian government, international NGOs, and foreign governments all recognized the economic potential within Mandjou, as well as that of the greater East Region. They responded uncharacteristically by financially contributing to proposed projects. For decades, Gbaya residents had pleaded with the Cameroonian government to finance the paving of the only road linking the region to the national capital of Yaoundé. Government officials had remained quiet on the subject, and when pushed for a definitive response reluctantly offered a tentative "in the near future" for a possible starting date. In the 1980s, writes Peter Geschiere, civil servants viewed a transfer to the East Region as a "serious punishment" due to their belief that the region was backwards and resource poor (Geschiere 2009:70). Another factor contributing to civil servants' concern should they be transferred to the region was that it was "reputed to be a witchcraft-ridden area"[34] (Ibid.).

By the mid-2000s, everything had changed. Following yet another wave of Mbororo settlement in Mandjou, the Cameroonian government extended their political and financial support to paving the road. Mandjou's proximity to the edge of the Congo Basin would make it a suitable location for a logging depot, which was a factor in the government's decision to help to build the road. Today, both Mbororo and Gbaya inhabitants identify Mbororo presence as integral in motivating the national government to become involved in this particular local project. Moreover, Gbaya readily acknowledge that the Mandjou economy of today – thriving transport industry and regional hub for the sale of timber and cash crops – is a far cry from what it once was. Prior to the Mbororo arrival, subsistence agriculture was the primary economic activity in Mandjou.

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chapter three – was the construction of religious schools for Mbororo women and children. The Mbororo community solicited donations from governments (Turkey and Saudi Arabia were frequent donors) as well as international Islamic organizations to finance the construction of the schools and provide materials. It was not uncommon for Mbororo organizers to highlight their need for support based on their piousness. International Islamic organizations were hard-pressed to refuse economic support to pious Muslim brothers.

[34] The East Region is considered to be a place where witchcraft flourishes. From the 1970s onwards, State Courts were established in the East Region and cases of witchcraft were frequently brought before judges to be adjudicated (Fisiy and Geschiere 1990:138)

It is both the physical and economic transformation of Mandjou that has led many Mbororo to vocalize their discontent at having their rights to natural resources and political power challenged. Mbororo residents argue that their efforts to revitalize the town justify their claim that Mandjou is a Mbororo town. Mbororo residents acknowledge that Gbaya settlement predates that of their own, yet object to the Gbaya status of 'being first' as the single most important criteria in determining access to political rights and natural resources. For example, Gbaya repeatedly refused to accept Mbororo dossiers for local government positions. Additionally, there have been documented cases of Gbaya selling land to Mbororo and signing all of the appropriate documents. Yet months later, Gbaya would demand the land be returned; Gbaya justified their actions by invoking their local belonging. In other words, Gbaya settlement in Mandjou preceded that of Mbororo. Rather than determining belonging by primacy on the land, Mbororo inhabitants are advocating for an expansion of the concept, one that extends the parameters of belonging beyond that of being first. The shift in the belonging discourse, from one centering on historical continuity to economic growth and development, has the potential to create discord in the community where products of investments could become accessible to some and not to others.

Introduction

In the 21ˢᵗ century, rights to natural resources and political power in Cameroon are determined by the extent to which a person can demonstrate belonging, a "powerful analytical framework" anchoring people to place (Page et al. 2010:345). A long-standing pre-requisite in determining belonging – often contextualized using botanical metaphors – hinges on an individual's ability to demonstrate a point of origin (i.e. natal village, hamlet, region within Cameroon). Additionally, identifying as having arrived and settled in a region prior to other groups is imperative in order to substantiate claims of belonging. The absence of belonging drastically limits an individual's access to

political rights and natural resources. Over the last several decades, claims to "belong" to a particular place have led to the emergence of an increasingly binary identity model, which splits people between 'native' and 'stranger.' Individuals who are not the first to arrive and settle, i.e. not natives, are recognized as strangers. These identities are heavily politicized with individuals desperate to be recognized and identified with a particular place. Should their belonging be challenged, there is the fear that their political and economic rights will be gutted.

In this chapter I examine belonging as a concept linked to rights and resources. Authors like Ruth Marshall-Fratani conceptualize territorialized identities – specifically in the African context – as being part of the larger colonial project. Today, any expression or identification of belonging is surely a consequence of colonial manipulation. Though the origins of the concept of belonging in Cameroon are debatable, it does not change the fact that being recognized as belonging to a particular place is of great political and social importance. This is most evident when documenting the struggles of Mbororo residing in the Northwest (NW). Residents for over a century in the NW, Mbororo have consistently had their attempts to establish belonging thwarted. Native farmers accuse Mbororo of being 'strangers', whose settlement is more recent than their own. In the absence of being recognized as belonging, Mbororo have struggled with little success to establish permanent access to land vis-à-vis land titling. In terms of gaining a political foothold, their status as 'strangers' has proven to be challenging. In light of the Mbororo struggles in the NW, one might assume that a similar plight would befall Mbororo resettling in town of Mandjou (East Region), the location of my doctoral fieldwork. This would be a mistake. Mbororo residents in Mandjou, as with those inhabiting the NW, are unable demonstrate an arrival predating that of their neighbors. Nevertheless, Mbororo residents in Mandjou have leveraged their substantial impact on the growth of the local economy and the physical expansion of Mandjou to articulate their belonging and to bolster their claim to the rights of political representation and permanent access to natural resources.

Identifying the native in the British Cameroons

The NW Region contains the largest concentration of Mbororo in all of Cameroon. Mbororo inhabitants have had several generations born in the region who identify the NW as their home. Yet historically, their efforts to challenge their 'stranger' status have failed. Revisiting the history of Mbororo settlement in the NW illustrates the struggles and ultimate failures Mbororo encountered in their attempt to achieve the 'native' identity, and raises the question as to how Mbororo residing in the East have managed to avoid similar obstacles.

Michaela Pelican – a Swiss anthropologist whose dissertation explored inter-ethnic friendships in the NW Region of Cameroon – recounts that the first Mbororo families trickled into the Western Grassfields in 1910. According to Pelican, "[t]heir movements were informed by ecological and political considerations and geared towards sustaining a pastoral economy" (Pelican 2006:145). Favourable ecology, such as untapped pastures in high altitudes that provided cattle with a regular source of food and easy access to salt mines, enticed Mbororo to settle in the region with their cattle from the early 20th century onwards (Boutrais 1984; 1995/6). Nestled in the verdant highlands of the Northwest were Grassfielders – an ethnonym extended to linguistically diverse communities sharing a similar socio-political and economic organization.[35] With their cattle in tow, Mbororo forged small settlements, but not without first seeking and receiving approval from local (i.e. Grassfielder) political leaders.[36] During these formative settlement years, Mbororo "paid tributes and acknowledged their hosts' territorial and political primacy" (Pelican 2006:156). Though welcomed by locals and treated as guests, explains Pelican, the Mbororo were subject to the rules and authority of the 'natives'.[37] Indeed, Mbororo acknowledgement of the primacy of Grassfielders was critical in the

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[35] During the colonial period Grassfielders were predominantly engaged in shifting cultivation (Kaberry 1952 and Pelican 2006:156).

[36] The circulation of the Grassfields identity pre-dates both the German and British colonial administrations (Pelican 2006:28).

[37] I use 'native' and 'local' interchangeably.

decision by local authorities to permit Mbororo to settle in the region in the early 20th century (Pelican 2008:543).

The identity dynamic of 'natives' and 'strangers' that Pelican identified as existing a century ago remains salient today. Pelican treads carefully when attributing authorship of the classification scheme and suggests that the British colonial government was tasked with "matching western concepts, interests, and ideologies with African realities and practicalities" (Pelican 2006:103; cf. Chilver 1963). In this way, Pelican acknowledges the influence of the colonial administration on defining who was a stranger and who was a native, but hesitates to characterize these identities as merely a consequence of British colonial rule and attempts by authorities to regulate and control their subjects.

While the British may not be solely responsible for creating these categories, Pelican notes that colonial forces heavily influenced and shaped these political identities of native and stranger[38] (Pelican 2006:433). While not addressing belonging directly, Pelican (Ibid.:104) points out that historical narration of ancestry and place of birth are never neutral, but rather are "influenced by ideological, political, and economic goals of their narrators and advocates. They may respond in form and content to structures imposed by a superior authority, and may aim at adopting strategies that promise most success". In particular, when discussing the term 'native', Pelican (Ibid.:103) explains that it "refers to local population groups whose claims to pre-eminence were endorsed by the colonial administration". Sally Chilver and Phyllis Kaberry (1967:6), British anthropologists engaged in decades-long collaborative anthropological fieldwork in NW Cameroon from the 1940s to the mid-1960s, noted the political pre-eminence associated with the 'native' identity. Groups

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[38] Prior to the end of World War I, Germany controlled both territories. Following Germany's loss, Germany was stripped of its sovereignty over the territories and both became mandates within the League of Nations. France and Britain assumed control over the mandates. Having failed to prevent World War II, the League of Nations was disbanded, succeeded by The United Nations. In turn, the former mandates of France and Britain became United Nations Trust Territories (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:224).

would emphasize particular aspects of their personal histories if it were thought to further their political objectives or to suppress that of possible rivals. Grassfielders considered Mbororo to be rivals, and therefore were actively involved in disputing any colonial policy that would indicate even the slightest recognition of their belonging and possessing a 'native' identity.

British colonial edicts and policies shaped the belonging discourse in Cameroon. Though actual policies created what would appear to be indelible boundaries between 'stranger' and 'native', there was disagreement amongst ranking officers in the British colonial administration with regards to the implementation of identity policies. In 1927, for instance, the British authorities enacted the Land and Native Rights Ordinance. This particular ordinance endowed 'Native Authorities' with "extensive political and economic powers" (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:218). The British colonial administrators appointed local Grassfielders chiefs as 'Native Authorities' who were then "empowered to collect tax revenue within their jurisdictions for expenditure by the colonial administrators"[39] (Jua 1995:40).

Charles Kingsley Meek, a British government ethnographer, wrote that a 'native' was defined as "a person born to a parent who came from the area in which he/she inhabited"[40] (Meek 1957:371). Correspondingly, Mbororo were identified as 'aliens' since their parents had been born outside the region[41] (Meek 1957:371; cited in Njeuma and Awasom 1989:471, 1990:232; Boutrais 1995/6:114). Being labeled as 'alien' was particularly troubling for Mbororo residents, within the context of the 1927 ordinance, because it meant that they "were paralyzed politically" (Njeuma and Awasom

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[39] "Native Authorities" is a term that had two usages under the British colonial administration. It referred to appointed political leaders as well as to the territory over which said leaders governed (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:218; Jua 1995:40). Native Authorities, in the latter sense, were separated with gazettes (Jua 1995:40).

[40] In 1912, Charles Kingsley Meek joined the colonial service in northern Nigeria and assumed the post of Government Anthropologist. During his employment with the British colonial service, Meek authored two ethnographies, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria* and *A Sudanese Kingdom*. Following the end of his service, Meek returned to scholarly endeavours. Meek published *Land Tenure and Land Administration in Nigeria and the Cameroons* in 1958, a collection of Meek's reflections on land tenure policies during the British colonial period.

[41] The category of 'alien' is interchangeable with that of stranger.

1990:218). Unlike their 'native' counterparts, as 'aliens', Mbororo could not own land nor could they hope to hold the political position of a Native Authority. As strangers, Mbororo were under the authority of Grassfielders, who were unlikely to favour a 'stranger' over a 'native' in political and legal disputes. In the decades following the 1927 Land and Native Rights Ordinance, additional colonial legislation opened vast chasms of ambiguity and appeared, at times, to undermine both Grassfielders' stranglehold on the 'native' identity and their political authority. Many of these policies were temporary solutions aimed at diminishing violent eruptions between farmers and pastoralists (Njeuma and Awasom 1989:460).

Cattle production was the primary economic livelihood for Mbororo so *jangali*, a British colonial tax applied to cattle sales, quickly "superseded all forms of taxation in the region" (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:219). Despite the tax, the growth in the cattle industry during the mid-20th century put money in the hands of Mbororo, and thereby exacerbated tensions between Mbororo and Grassfielders, as the latter group was involved solely in agriculture. During particularly volatile periods of interaction between Grassfielders and Mbororo, the latter would offer high remuneration, i.e. bribes, to local Native Authorities in order to gain the upper hand. Escalating violence between farmers and pastoralists was of great concern to the British colonial authorities.[42] Desperate to assuage the Grassfielders' anger at the destruction of their crops by Mbororo-owned cattle, but wary of issuing a policy which would adversely affect the pastoral economy (which provided significant revenue to colonial coffers), colonial authorities opted to clearly demarcate pastoral and farming lands (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:218-9; Njeuma and Awasom 1989:460). Njeuma and Awasom

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[42] Phyllis Kaberry (1958), a well-known anthropologist working in the NW in the 1930s-1950s provides details of the various accusations launched against Mbororo herders by Grassfielders in her comprehensive report "Report on Farmer-Grazier Relations and the Changing Pattern of Agriculture in Nsaw, Southeastern Federation, Bamenda, Southern Cameroons".

(1990:219) write, "[t]he British administrators felt obliged to be directly involved in the interest of avoiding the collapse of law and order and of being 'fair' to cattle production".

M.D.W. Jeffreys – the British administrator overseeing the Bamenda Division from 1936-1945 – mounted a campaign in 1943 to allocate particular areas to the Mbororo[43] (Njeuma and Awasom 1989, 1990). Under the auspice of relieving fatigued pastures and alleviating the tensions between farmers and pastoralists, Jeffreys – in consultation with Native Authorities – demarcated pastoral and farming lands. It was a rather short-sighted plan that proved ineffective on account of the staggering growth of the cattle population in the 1950s.[44] Consequently, Mbororo began to extend the boundaries of their established pastures. Cattle incursions onto defined agricultural land fuelled the flames of conflict between farmers and pastoralists.

As the violence between farmers and pastoralists eclipsed the monitoring ability of the British authorities, yet another more extensive plan was put into place – Cattle Control Laws. Tasked with the responsibility of substantially reducing the violence without adversely impacting the pastoral economy, senior veterinary officer D. Clarke attempted to appease both parties by maintaining separate grazing and farming lands. However, unlike previous policies, Clarke applied a more comprehensive approach to demarcation that would improve the political and economic status of Mbororo pastoralists. Clarke also pushed for increased Mbororo political autonomy, which involved the establishment of a Mbororo-led Native Authority to speak about their specific needs and desires. Adamant in his support of Mbororo residents and weary of what he perceived to be the systematic marginalization and exploitation of Mbororo, Clarke suggested that Grassfielders lease land to the Mbororo Native Authority (Njeuma and Awasom 1989:462). Politically empowering Mbororo would ensure the carrying capacity of the land was not surpassed. Additionally, Clarke aimed to

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[43] Present-day NW Region was formerly referred to as the Bamenda Division by the British colonial administration.
[44] Drawing from 1953 census figures in Bamenda Province, Njeuma and Awasom (1990:219) conclude the cattle population grew by ten-fold (10,000 to 91,782) between 1919 and 1940.

provide medical, educational, and legal services to accommodate the distinctiveness of the Mbororo community. His policy ultimately failed, in part, due to Grassfielders' outrage at the possibility of ceding their authority over the land to 'strangers' (Ibid.). Once again, the perennial question that had long stymied colonial authorities – how to support the flourishing pastoral economy without compromising relations with Native Authorities – had re-emerged.

Along with D. Clark, a number of other British colonial officials saw how disadvantageous the 1927 Land Ordinance was for Mbororo, and sought to empower the pastoral community with replacement policies. In an appeal to his superiors, J.H.D. Stapleton – a British administrator in Bamenda (NW Region) – expressed concern with the depiction of Mbororo as 'strangers.' He writes

> …the Fulani [Mbororo] are not alien intruders but genuine, though late-coming members of the indigenous population. The indigenous population of Bamenda mostly reached here only about 150 years ago: the Fulani arrived 25-30 years ago…the Fulani are here to stay for the simple reason that there is nowhere else for them to go…they are going to be, if they are not already, part of the indigenous population of the Division.
> (Quote from 'The Status of Fulani Regarding Land Tenure in the Bamenda Division, cited by Hickey 2007:88).

By the late 1940s, British colonial administrators no longer viewed the demarcation of land as a viable solution to curtailing the violence between pastoralists and farmers (Boutrais 1995/6:776). Worried about further damaging an already tenuous relationship with Grassfielders, yet wary of engaging in any activities that could potentially reduce the taxes they reaped from the pastoral economy, British authorities re-oriented their policies. C.W. Mayne, replacing Jeffreys as the District Officer of Bamenda in 1947, was convinced that previous colonial officers had allowed their personal allegiances to Mbororo to unfairly influence land policies, and authorized sweeping reforms to counter earlier colonial resolutions[45] (Boutrais 1995/6:776). In 1946, a year before assuming the

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[45] In his extensive historical re-telling of British colonial rule in the Grassfields during the first half of the 20th century, Boutrais (1995/6:115) identifies M.D.W. Jeffreys and J.H.D. Stapleton as examples of colonial authorities who were unabashed supporters of Mbororo and whose sentiments had influenced colonial policies on land tenure, clearly favouring Mbororo over 'natives'. Boutrais (Ibid.:775) refers to these colonial administrators as "*les defenseurs des Mbororo*".

responsibilities of District Officer, Mayne proposed two significant changes in colonial policy: "a. the demarcation of grazing areas be discontinued, b: no land be leased to the Fulani [Mbororo]" (Mayne 1956, cited in Boutrais 1995/6:775). As Mayne writes, "the pendulum had swung too far to the side of the Fulani [Mbororo]" necessitating an altogether new policy centering on regulating cattle as opposed to demarcating land (Divisional Office, Bamenda, 30/3/1949, cited in Boutrais 1995/6:117). Exasperated with time expenditures and the extensive labour allocated to stemming conflicts, colonial administrators soon consented to these policy changes (Boutrais 1995/6:775).

In yet another scathing indictment of former colonial administrators' relations with Mbororo residents, M. N. H. Milne – a British colonial officer – wrote, "[h]ad there been no change of policy, the rights of the local inhabitants would have been overridden and a lasting wrong perpetrated"[46] (quoted in Boutrais 1995/6:776). The re-orientation of colonial policy was significant not only in terms of pursuing an alternative strategy to stem the escalating violence between Grassfielders and Mbororo, but also in substantiating Grassfielders' claims of being veritable 'natives'. Rescinding Mbororo land leases and returning governance over the land to Grassfielders corroborated this identification.

Phyllis Kaberry contributed to the considerable shift in colonial land policy to one that favoured 'natives' over 'strangers'. A social anthropologist with previous ethnographic experience in New Guinea and North-Western Australia, in 1945 Kaberry accepted a position from the Government of Nigeria (read: British colonial administration) to "make a survey of the economic and social position of women in the Cameroons Province and in Bamenda in particular" (Kaberry 1952:xix). Kaberry's fieldwork in the Grassfields culminated in the publication of *Women of the Grassfields* in 1952, one of

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[46] Critics from within the British colonial administration were vehemently opposed to policies that were deemed to unfairly support Mbororo and disadvantage 'natives'. In fact, colonial administrators were particularly critical of Clarke's policy of allocating land and creating a provisional Mbororo-led Native Authority, writing, "this [referencing Clarke's policy] is a somewhat utopian scheme for the exclusive benefit of the Bamenda Fulani [Mbororo]" (Boutrais 1995/6:115).

the seminal ethnographies emerging from the NW during the British colonial period. During her

research, Kaberry (Ibid.:98) illustrated the tenuous relations between female farmers and Mbororo

herders by way of offhanded remarks such as, "I [Kaberry] spent only a few days in Nsungli where,

owing to the insistence and persistence of the women, I had to discuss cattle problems most of the

time". There are similar moments in the text in which Kaberry expresses frustration at having to

listen to farming women recount stories of cattle destroying their crops since her primary concern

was to document women's economic livelihoods, not their on-going conflicts with Mbororo

neighbours. Yet five years later, conflicts between female farmers and Mbororo herders became the

central focus of Kaberry's policy writings. Following the publication of *Women of the Grassfields*,

Kaberry began a very public campaign deriding the British colonial administration for pursuing land

policies that, in her estimation, were both short-sighted and detrimental to female farmers.

According to Boutrais (1995/6:779), Kaberry accused the British colonial administration of

enforcing policies that were unfairly "pro-Fulani". Boutrais (1995/6:724) credits Kaberry's

"*plaidoirie*" (pleading) on behalf of female farmers with facilitating the aforementioned paradigmatic

shift in which Grassfielders reclaimed the distinctive rights to land and political power associated

with being 'native' from the 1950s onwards.[47]

Even with the substantial shift in policy – one in which the British authorities emphasized the

regulation of the cattle population rather than allocating pastoral/grazing land to Mbororo – the

colonial administration remained undeterred in its desire for Mbororo to settle. British authorities

hesitated to expand the cattle industry without settlement and the volatile relationship between

Grassfielder farmers and Mbororo continued to be a source of great anxiety. In 1952, after much

discussion, the British administration approved the Fulani Settlement Scheme. The plan provided

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[47] A pleading is a formal written document that outlines a party's claim and is often utilized in a judicial context. Kaberry addressed the "pleading" to the British colonial administration with the intention to problematize colonial policy and advocate for farming women's rights.

areas of permanent settlement for Mbororo and demarcated rotating grazing areas to avoid exceeding the carrying capacity of pastures (Njeuma and Awasom 1989:465; Njeuma and Awasom 1990:223). The Fulani Settlement Scheme did little to placate Grassfielders, who recoiled at the news that Mbororo would be granted permanent access to land. In response, Grassfielders set fire to Mbororo settlements, maimed cattle, and destroyed scattered Mbororo farms.[48] At the time, Grassfielders feared the possibility of "future generations of native children" being dispossessed of land and made to purchase land from Mbororo owners (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:224).

By the late 1950s, Mbororo leadership felt discouraged in their attempt to achieve equal footing with the Grassfielders in terms of access to natural resources and political representation. Grassfielders provided Mbororo with temporary land access only and could choose to refuse access at a moment's notice based on the latter's unequivocal 'stranger' status. Much aggrieved by the violence brought against them, and incensed at Grassfielders' indifference towards their undeniable fiscal contribution to the coffers of Native Authorities and the colonial administration, Mbororo turned to an unconventional resource, the United Nations. The fact that the British were in the process of completing their final withdrawal from the Southern Cameroons (of which the NW was a part) sparked Mbororo leaders to reach out to the international community in their battle to achieve 'native' status. Mbororo leaders articulated their concerns in a statement presented to the United Nations Visiting Mission in 1955:

1. We the 10,000 Fulani Bamenda, have been residing in Bamenda for nearly forty years and most of the present Fulani population have been born in Bamenda.
2. We are a simple, law-abiding people, whose interest is entirely confined to the welfare of our cattle. *The cattle tax we pay represents one half of the total revenue of Bamenda* [my italics].
3. In spite of this we are considered *strangers* [my italics], permitted to remain in Bamenda on suffrance. We have not security of tenure, not even in the compound we have lived in and the grasslands we have grazed on for nearly forty years. In parts of Bamenda the *native people* [my italics] are against even our building houses and planting crops.

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[48] Njeuma and Awasom refer to this outrage as "Fulaniphobia" (Njeuma and Awasom 1990:224).

4. *We ask that we may be treated as part of the community, as inhabitants of Bamenda who make a considerable contribution to the economy of Bamenda* [my italics]; and that we may be made to feel secure in the occupation of our grazing lands and dwelling places (10th November 1955, File No. B 280/75, Petition to the UN (PAB). Quoted in Njeuma and Awasom 1990:224).

In the text above, Mbororo petitioners identified their perceived short residency (approximately forty years) as the primary reason why Grassfielders refuted their attempt to identify as 'native' to Bamenda. Yet, in both the second and fourth points, the Mbororo authors substantiated their belonging to the region in terms of their financial contribution to the Bamenda economy. The statement illustrates awareness, on the part of Mbororo, of their significant role in the financial health of the colonial administration and a determination to expand the parameters of belonging. This was an onerous task considering that historical precedence was critical in both identifying and being recognized as a 'native'. Though the United Nation mission dismissed their petition and refrained from making any adjustments that would encourage a less restrictive understanding of 'native', the fact that Mbororo sought support from an international agency serves as an indication of the extent to which they would go to acquire the status of 'native'.

Colonial administrators were aware of the status of 'native' and the association between being first and having authority over land. Though most of the British administration's land policies favoured the rights of 'native' over 'stranger, the colonial authorities were wary of circumscribing Mbororo access to land based on their identification as 'stranger'. Nevertheless, the enactment of these policies, contrary to the intentions of the British colonial administration, hardened identity boundaries and accentuated the association between people and place, creating fixed and spatialized identities. Colonial policies that specifically sought to protect Mbororo cattle (as a source of British tax income) exacerbated

tensions between Mbororo and Grassfielders, with the latter identifying certain policies as

effectively undermining their rights and privileges as 'natives'.

Fifty years after Mbororo sought international recognition as 'native' from the United

Nations, Grassfielders continue to recognize their Mbororo neighbours as 'strangers'. Sam

Hickey, specializing in development studies, captured this particular identity dynamic in an

interview with a government official (Divisional Delegate for Livestock) in the Northwest

Province in 1998:

> "[t]he Mbororo'en will never be looked on as natives in the Northwest.
> With a Grassfielder who moves here from another part of the Province,
> we know that he is a native somewhere, that he came from somewhere.
> The Mbororo'en pay taxes and are permanent – they have corrugated iron
> roofs – but that idea of them as settlers will remain. The farmers define
> themselves against the Mbororo'en" (quoted in Hickey 2007:86).

The government official's statement is unremarkable in light of the fact that it

continues as the dominant local narrative circulating in the NW. Michaela Pelican's

characterization of Mbororo status in the same area echoes that of the government

official above. As Pelican notes, though Mbororo have challenged their status as

'strangers' on a national scale, within the NW, Mbororo remain 'strangers' in the eyes

of Grassfielders, even if both groups have now lived there for over a century[49] (See

Pelican 2006, 2008, 2009, 2015).

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[49] In the early 2000s, MBOSCUDA began to actively encourage Mbororo to submit applications for identity cards and to stipulate their place of birth as being the NW. Prior to 2000, Mbororo usually had their place of birth registered as northern Cameroon, even if he had been born and raised in the NW and had no connection to the north. Acquiring regional identity cards that indicted their place of birth to be the NW, would, in theory, allow Mbororo to make "claims and rights to natural resources and political representation" (Pelican 2008:549). Though these actions had a tremendous effect in terms of empowering Mbororo residents, permanent access to natural resources and political representation remains was not achieved. Though regional identity cards express the national government's recognition of Mbororo belonging to the NW, Grassfielders remain unconvinced and continue to oppose Mbororo claims to "property rights in natural resources" (Ibid.:555).

Recognizing the 'native' in French colonial Cameroon

The British were not the only colonial force active in Cameroon. From 1918-1960, French colonial authorities controlled what was commonly referred to as Cameroun, comprised of the present-day regions of the North, Extreme North, Adamaoua, West, Littoral, Centre, South, and East. In the following section I have drawn primarily from ethnographic material and colonial records depicting French colonial rule in Adamaoua. Though my decision to do so may appear counter-intuitive considering my primary field site was in Mandjou, a town located in the East Region, two important factors are involved in my decision. Firstly, it is in the Adamaoua Region that interactions between Gbaya and Mbororo are depicted in great details. Secondly, there are limited written historical accounts in which the East Region plays a central role.

French colonial administrators' actions and policies towards Africans inhabiting the greater Adamaoua Region, writes Philip Burnham, an anthropologist working in the multi-ethnic town of Meiganga, suggest recognition and subsequent employment of the 'native' identity as an instrument of political control.[50] For example, the selection of the canton chief – the political liaison between the French administration and their colonial subjects – illustrates the French distinction between 'native' and other colonial subjects.[51] Having identified Gbaya settlement as pre-dating that of Mbororo, the colonial administrators limited candidatures for the canton chief in Meiganga to the

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[50] 'Native' is the English equivalent of '*autochthone'*. Though British and French colonial administrations introduced '*autochthone'* and 'native', these terms continue to be utilized today.

[51] The French administrators grouped colonial subjects in terms of villages. Several villages comprised a *canton,* each with a canton chief. Colonial authorities tasked the canton chief with the collection of taxes, mobilizing labour, and adjudicating minor legal cases (Burnham 1996:36). Burnham argues (Ibid.:25) that "the arrival of the Fulbe, although posing a grave risk of death or enslavement, also offered important opportunities for Gbaya leader to enhance their political power within their own followings and even further afield". Thus, the threat of Fulbe domination provided Gbaya political leaders with an opportunity to strengthen their authority. Prior to the arrival of the Fulbe, writes Burnham, Gbaya leadership was fluid and unstable (Ibid.). Burnham bases this assessment, in part, on the work of Paul Charreau, a French colonial ethnographer working amongst Gbaya residing in Central African Republic in the early half of the 20th century. Charreau described the authority and longevity of a Gbaya political leader as mercurial. Frequent territorial shifts were often a consequence of Gbaya opting to turn their back on the current political leader. According to Charreau (1905:152), Gbaya leaders could easily be stripped of their authority. Burnham (1980:69), based on his work from the 1960s onwards, suggests that local Gbaya political leaders – namely village chiefs or *chef du village* – continued to have very little impact on the day to day lives of Gbaya and retained relatively little political authority.

Gbaya. Canton chiefs were often referred to as *chefs de terre*, yet another indication of the connection between longevity of settlement, political authority, and control of natural resources.

Though the French administration placed political authority over other ethnic groups in the hands of Gbaya cantons, their power was not absolute. Like the Mbororo residing in the NW, in Adamaoua Region, Mbororo retained a level of autonomy. Local Mbororo residents in Meiganga were an example of an ethnic group who presumably – in terms of geographical location – should have been under the political leadership of a canton chief. Yet the French administration opted to maintain a "de facto political separation" between Gbaya and Mbororo (Burnham 1980:65). Not only did the French prevent Gbaya cantons from interfering with Mbororo communities, they preferred to abstain from intervening in Mbororo politics. According to Burnham (1975:592), "[m]eddling in pastoral Fulani politics resulted in increased population mobility that was detrimental to the development of a cattle industry…This was achieved by keeping political intervention in Mbororo affairs to a minimum and by means of positive economic inducements including veterinary care, bulk milk-buying points, pasture improvement, and certain tax incentives". In other words, French administrators permitted Mbororo residents to ignore Gbaya political leadership in Meiganga and enact their own Mbororo-led political structure. Burnham (1980:65-6) points to a French colonial report from 1955 in which colonial authorities identified cattle husbandry as an essential component of the colonial economy, whose growth and development should in no be way impeded. In short, French authorities were wary of taking any action that threatened the economic vitality of cattle husbandry.

The distinctive attitude held by the French authorities towards Mbororo inhabitants of the Meiganga area extended beyond that of curtailing the political jurisdiction of 'native' rule. Burnham (1980:59-60) writes that colonial leaders excused Mbororo from partaking in the French colonial

policy of *corvée*.[52] Cantons were tasked with recruiting men to complete these tasks, but Mbororo were exempted from any projects demanding heavy labour, such as the building of Mbororo cattle vaccination parks and constructing roads (Burnham 1996:37). According to Burnham, the Gbaya viewed the French colonial administration as being in the corner of the Mbororo, which in turn exacerbated the antagonisms they felt towards Mbororo.

Like the British, the French authorities did not introduce the categories of 'native' and 'stranger'. And in another similarity with their British counterparts to the West, the French colonial administration employed these identities to facilitate their political rule over colonial subjects. For both administrations, colonial policies generally privileged – on paper – the 'native' or as I mentioned before, *'autochtones'*. Mbororo were recognized as 'strangers', an identity centered on having a later arrival than other local ethnic groups. Colonial authorities adjusted policies to accommodate Mbororo pastoralism because of the value cattle had as a source of tax revenue. Those communities recognized as 'native' expressed anger and resentment when Mbororo were seen as receiving external support that compromised or undermined their own status as 'native'. The ambiguous status of Mbororo would continue long after the colonial administration withdrew, with only a slight reprieve shortly after the unification of the British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon. During this period, building national unity and generating a feeling of belonging to the state was prioritized over older social divisions.

Revitalization and politicization of 'belonging': A post-colonial endeavour

Following the withdrawal of the French and British colonial administrations in the early 1960s, Cameroon's newly elected post-colonial government prioritized the formation of a strong nation-

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[52] Under French colonial rule, corvée was a form of unpaid labour imposed upon colonial subjects in order to repair public works, i.e. roads, bridges, etc. The duration of corvée varied but in the case of Cameroon, the French demanded colonial subjects work fifteen days a year.

state and the building of national unity.[53] As the first president of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo was determined to avoid any policy changes that would threaten his nation-building endeavours. Ethnic pluralism – there are over 250 ethnic groups in Cameroon – was a particularly challenging issue for Ahidjo and his administration.[54] Any indication of Ahidjo compromising on his heavily promoted agenda of ethnic neutrality would have threatened the Cameroonian nation-building process. Ahidjo was under pressure not only to refrain from any conspicuous ethnic favouritism, but also faced the challenge of building a national consciousness amongst a group of disparate ethnic groups and communities with different colonial memories and experiences (Joseph 1977:343-5). While under pressure to diminish the focus on ethnic identity, the Ahidjo administration enacted the policy of regional equilibrium (*équilibre régional*) – a comprehensive plan to reduce the disparities amongst ethnic groups in education and in the civil service. First, the Ahidjo administration increased civil servant positions to provide educated Cameroonians with greater employment opportunities. Second, a quota system was applied to particular technical and professional positions – teaching, engineering, health, journalism, agricultural services, etc. – to reduce regional (i.e. ethnic) disparities, thus ensuring fair and equitable representation of the major ethnic groups in civil service positions. Candidates hailing from 'disadvantaged' regions could pass their particular civil service exam with a lower score than candidates from 'advantaged' regions. "[T]he determination of just how many candidates from each ethnic group or region should pass a given national examination was made according to an ethnic alchemy aimed at achieving social justice" (Monga 2000:726).

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[53] Establishing national unity was by and large a response to the growing tensions amongst the Cameroonian population following the exit of the colonial powers. Existing ethnic and regional divisions were further exacerbated by two very distinctive colonial regimes (French and English) (Konings 1996:247).

[54] Ahidjo took the reins of the French-speaking Union of Cameroon in 1960. It was not until the following year that the British Southern Cameroons voted to join the Union of Cameroon. The nation-state was re-named the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Yvettte Monga, a Cameroonian political scientist highly critical of Ahidjo's policy, argues that the policy superficially addressed on-going ethnic disparities. According to Monga (Ibid.:727), only the majority ethnic groups of a region were able to capitalize on these "state-sponsored opportunities". Furthermore, writes Monga (Ibid.), these opportunities – gaining entry into colleges and qualifying for civil service positions – were dependent on "one's regional and ethnic affiliations" as opposed to an individual's competence. Ahidjo, though a staunch advocate of both nation-building and reducing ethnic, religious, and linguistic divisions, was unrelenting in his desire to retain political authority. In a bid to minimize the growth of any political opposition parties, Ahidjo forged relationships – vis-à-vis access to additional state resources – with the leaders of demographically powerful ethnic groups[55] (Monga 2000:725-6; Jua 1991:163). Piet Konings (1996:248), a Dutch political scientist, describes the post-colonial political landscape as one in which "the government's hand-picked élite or *barons* served as transmission belts between the President [Ahidjo] and the different ethnic groups". Though Ahidjo unabashedly solicited support from demographically and economically powerful ethnic groups, his efforts did not come at the expense of building a strong Cameroonian national identity. Ahidjo was steadfast in his resolve to obscure allegiances (particularly ethnic, religious, and linguistic) that could potentially challenge national unity.

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[55] Though Ahidjo was deeply committed to unifying Cameroonians as one, he needed the support of political allies. Since ethnicity was a factor in determining political allegiances, Ahidjo and his government built alliances with the political leaders of the majority ethnic groups in each region to reduce the growth of oppositional parties. These regional political figures swore oaths of fealty that came at a significant cost to Ahidjo and his administration, promising access to state resources (Bayart 1993). The two most heavily favoured ethnic groups – largely due to their population – were the Fulbe of the North and the Bamileke from the West.

From belonging to the state to belonging to the village

In 1982, Ahidjo handpicked his successor, Paul Biya, and stepped away from politics.[56] Initially,

the transition was smooth since Biya and Ahidjo shared a similar political agenda. Biya, however,

was not prepared for the economic crisis that befell Cameroon in the mid-1980s.[57] So fragile was the

Cameroonian economy that Biya reached out to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World

Bank (WB) for financial support. In 1986, representatives of these international agencies initiated a

tenuous and lengthy negotiation – largely due to Biya's reticence to embrace the austerity plan

outlined by the organizations – to reignite the struggling Cameroonian economy[58] (Konings

1996:252-3). By the early 1990s, Cameroon stood at the precipice of economic ruin.[59] Under

mounting pressure, Paul Biya acquiesced to the demands of the IMF and WB, including the most

controversial component of the intervention plan: the formation of political parties.[60] It should be

noted, explains Konings, that coinciding with external pressures were those coming from within.

Cameroonian citizens were vocal in their dissatisfaction with the Biya administration. Pressure

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[56] In 1984, Ahidjo loyalists, angered by Paul Biya's decision to dismiss and replace Ahdijo's elites with members from Biya's own ethnic group, staged a *coup d'état*. Had Ahidjo's supporters succeeded with the *coup d'etat,* Ahidjo would have resumed his role as the President of Cameroon (Monga 2000:741).

[57] By the mid-1980s, the Cameroonian economy was on the verge of collapse. In the years leading up to the crisis, commodity prices – significant component of the GDP – reached all-time lows and the value of the CFA against the U.S. dollar bottomed. As a result, Cameroon's terms of trade "decreased from US$ 350 million in 1985 to US$ 207 in 1988" (Konings 1996:252). Fearing confiscation of funds, many of Cameroon's elites transferred their capital from national banks to French banks and subsequently many government projects were either abandoned or suspended due to limited local funding. Konings (Ibid.) writes that many foreign companies, concerned about the economic crisis and the impact on their bottom line, pulled up their stakes, leaving behind large pockets of unemployed workers. The fledgling Cameroonian economy led many local farmers to transition "from cash-crop production to food-crop production". This switch came after many farmers complained of late payments for cash crops or no payment at all.

[58] This 'one size fits all' policy is better known as the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). During the early to late 1980s, the WB and IMF put forth a standard package to 'developing' nation-states that demanded governments adhere to rigid guidelines to meet the following objectives: stabilize the domestic economy, decrease state interventions in the economy, and allow the free market free reign in determining the allocation of resources. Additionally, writes Konings (1996:245), the measures included restructuring state institutions.

[59] Prior to 1991, Biya sought financial support from external donors who demanded no substantive changes to Biya's administration (Konings 1996:257).

[60] Biya identified himself "as an advocate of greater political freedom and democratic reforms" yet believed democracy could only be attained through the efforts of a single and unified party (Konings 1996:255). Biya's party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), remained the sole legal political party until the WB and IMF's demands for reforms could no longer be ignored.

mounted for Biya to reduce his political grip over Cameroon and allow for the formation of oppositional political parties. According to Konings (1996:255), "[t]he traditional propaganda, equating a single party with peace and harmony and a plural system with strife and discord, fell on increasingly deaf ears…Cameroonians…demand[ed] greater political reforms, including the introduction of multiparty democracy". In an effort to appease the international community, Biya's political party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), redistributed political power to villages (Jua 2001:41).

During a televised political roundtable in 1992, Roger Gabriel-Nlep, a law professor at the University of Yaoundé and vocal Biya supporter, outlined a new political policy, the electoral village. In his presentation, Nlep recounted the political history of Cameroon since the first years of unification. Since the era of Ahidjo, the Fulbe of the North, Beti of the South, and Bamileke of the West dominated Cameroon's political and economic life (Monga 2000:729, Monga 2001:216). The electoral village heralded a new day, one in which the political sway of these three ethnic groups would be limited to their particular regions, and by extension, reduce their activity on the national level. Ideally, the implementation of the electoral village would minimize the political reach of any one ethnic group and create a political environment that allowed for greater diversity. In terms of the mechanics of the electoral village policy, Nlep argued that political candidates should be limited to campaign and run for office in their village, i.e. village of origin (Monga 2000:729). Nlep's informal policy of the electoral village perpetuated the perception that even the remotest villager had a voice in the government vis-á-vis their political representative, designed to help assuage the "political alienation" many Cameroonians were beginning to feel in the 1990s (Monga 2000:729). Nevertheless, reveals Monga (Ibid.:728), it would be the concept of the electoral village that Biya would use "to undermine the advent of a real democratic society".

During his political reign, Ahidjo had strongly discouraged the formation of local and regional associations since membership undermined one's allegiance to the Cameroon nation-state (Ibid.). It was only under pressure to democratize that Biya realized that these types of associations had political potential and were "a more manageable alternative to party politics" (Geschiere and Gugler 1998:313). Biya's strategy, ostensibly, corresponded with Nlep's electoral village concept since it shifted the political discourse from the national to the local sphere.

Elite associations played an integral role in the Biya administration's attempt to re-center the political field from the national to the local/village[61] (See Fonchingong 2005; Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Nkwi 1997; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998). Though elite associations had been strongly discouraged under the Ahidjo administration, those few that did exist were focused on supporting development initiatives in their region.[62] Members of elite associations residing in urban centers would often send remittances to support development projects (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998:322-4). The Biya regime transformed ethnic associations from organizations with cultural and development objectives to political instruments that carried out the ruling party's mandate (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005:391). Moreover, Biya sought obliged civil servants on the government's payroll and residing in urban areas to return to their native villages and organize ethnic associations. When it was time for municipal, regional or presidential elections, Biya would order the civil servants, now leaders of ethnic associations, to return to their home and actively campaign in support of CPDM, Biya's political party. Consequently, these associations "offered a welcome channel by which to mobilize votes and neutralize the effects of multipartyism" (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005:391).

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[61] The term "elite association" is interchangeable with "ethnic association" (See Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998).
[62] Any form of association outside of Ahidjo's political party had the potential to be labeled "subversive" and consequently those involved could be banished to Ahidjo's "feared concentration camp in the north" (Geschiere 2009:44). Ahidjo subscribed to the idea that national unity could only be achieved if politicians swore their allegiance to one political party (Ibid.).

Elite or ethnic associations have become effective political tools "by which the effect of democratic innovations could be annulled" (Page et al. 2010:346). These associations cast themselves as representing the village. Consequently, villagers become convinced that membership to an ethnic association is the only means by which access to "scarce state resources" can be secured (Fonchingong 2005:369). The leaders, on the other hand, have utilized the associations as platforms to generate greater personal prosperity and ensure "approval of the ruling party bureaucracy" (Page et al. 2010:348). Part and parcel of Biya's political shift from the national to local sphere involved embracing his role as "the new champion of autochthony" (Geschiere 2009:49). This tactic of supporting 'natives' over 'strangers' was a political strategy that allowed Biya's administration to thwart any potential political rivals – depicted as 'strangers.'

Geschiere and Nyamnjoh describe political unrest in Douala, the economic capital and main shipping port of Cameroon, following local elections in 1996. In four of the six municipalities, a Bamileke candidate (ethnic group historically affiliated to the West Region and thus categorized as 'strangers') won the mayoral race.[63] The election of several Bamileke to local government posts triggered citywide protests in which the Sawa – recognized as 'natives' of Doula – vociferously contested the results of the vote. They expressed outrage at having 'strangers' voted in over 'natives', and demanded the Biya administration have the results of the election annulled. Much of the debate occurred in the media in which Bamileke were savagely attacked and depicted as wielding an "asphyxiating grip" over the Sawa (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000:429-30. Shortly after the published results of the election, and in response to the public outrage, the Biya administration created the post of "government delegate." It would be the government's responsibility, i.e. Biya's political party, to select the delegate and the individual would act "as a counterweight to the elected mayor" (Geschiere 2009:52). All of the government's appointees were 'natives' (Ibid.).

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[63] There are six municipalities in Douala and each has its own mayor.

Biya's decision to create a political position for 'natives' only, suggests Geschiere, came at a time when Douala's population was approximately two million and nearly seventy percent of the city's residents identified as Bamileke. Bamileke, notes Geschiere, overwhelmingly supported the Social Democratic Front (SDF), Biya's primary political opposition. Consequently, it was unsurprising when the SDF secured political victories in five of Douala's municipalities, of which four of the winners were Bamileke. According to Geschiere (2009:52), Biya publicly articulated the creation of the post of government delegate as a means to ensure the protection of the rights of the 'natives' of Douala. In reality, Biya's actions were effectively a counter-measure to negate the impact of the SDF mayors and a "useful tool in the politics of autochthony" (Geschiere 2009:52).

Movements towards belonging in Cameroon: The Eleventh Region of Cameroon

Elite associations represent members from a particular place. Should the attachment to place be denied, members may struggle to access natural resources and political representation. In the early 1990s, second and third generation residents of the South West Region (SW) made several unsuccessful bids to obtain membership to the South Western Elite Association (SWELA). When asked to provide the grounds for denying applicants entry to SWELA, current members cited their absence of historical ties – their great-grandparents had migrated to the region mere decades earlier – and the likelihood that their loyalties would be to their grandparents and great-grandparents natal villages (Monga 2000:735). As Professor Bejanga, a resident of the SW and a political activist whose entry to SWELA had been refused, pointed out during an interview with *The Herald* following the results of the vote:

> "We thought we belonged to where we were born….In one of their [SWELA] meetings some of us attended but were driven out and called strangers who had no right to take part in the meeting. So we concluded that we didn't belong to English-speaking Cameroon, nor are we accepted in French-speaking Cameroon...."(Geschiere and Gugler 1998:314).

Concern over extending access to a finite number of state resources and political power was arguably a contributing factor in SWELA's decision to limit admittance into the association (Geschiere and Gugler 1998). As the village or the region of origin is vital "as a crucial power base in politics," those residents rejected from SWELA opted to form their own elite association, the Association of the Elites of the Eleventh Province (Ibid.:313). With only ten provinces in Cameroon, the choice of monikers appeared illogical, yet it mirrored the members' belief that the nation-state's plan to base an individual's rights to natural resources and political representation on long-term association to place was irrational. Though recognized as Cameroonian citizens, members of the Eleventh Province were barred from running for office or retaining permanent access to natural resources due to their inability to demonstrate long-term historical continuity in the SW. Only through relocation to their grandparents' natal village (in other provinces) could members of the Eleventh Province access these rights.

Mboror struggle to belong in Mandjou

It was nearing 9:00 p.m. and Biri – my Mboror host – appeared lost in his thoughts as he anxiously tapped his foot against the small salon table. I sat quietly sipping the last of the sweet black tea and nervously smoothing out the invisible wrinkles on the overstuffed armchair. Not knowing what to say and desperate to escape the heaviness that clung to the room, I offered to make Biri more tea. Biri declined my offer and added that he was heading to a meeting and would not be home till late. There was an uncomfortable pause as if Biri was weighing carefully what he was planning to say next. He then asked if I would like to accompany him to a community meeting. This was not the first invitation Biri had extended to me. However, it was unusual for him to invite me to an event that was to begin well after sunset. When I pushed for details about the content of the community meeting, Biri would only provide the location, Al Hadji Isa's compound. The site of the

81

meeting was important considering Al Hadji Isa was a well-respected religious leader and one of the first Mbororo to settle in Mandjou in the late 1970s. It was Al Hadji Isa to whom Mbororo turned when they needed guidance.

At that time of night, there was generally little movement in Mandjou. Most boutiques had shuttered their doors for the night. A few makeshift food stalls remained open as Gbaya women tried to sell the last of their cooked fish to passers-by before making the long trek back to their compound. On occasion, Mbororo woman could be seen walking along the main road of Mandjou, flanked on either side with small children (either her own or possibly that of her neighbour), en route to visit a sick friend or returning to her compound. Yet this particular night was like none that I had ever encountered. The usual empty market was chock-full of small groups of Mbororo men, young and old, moving quickly along the main road and occasionally shining their mobile phones ahead to illuminate the way. All of the men appeared to be headed in the same direction. When I asked Biri where the men were headed, he responded, 'Al Hadji Isa's compound'.

As we approached the gate of Al Hadji Isa's residence, Biri voiced our presence with the usual greeting of "As-Salaam-Alaikum". Our greeting was acknowledged with a muffled response of "Alaikum-Sallam". Seconds later the cumbersome corrugated metal gates inched open, and we along with a small group of Mbororo men behind us were ushered into the compound. Al Hadji Isa, a wealthy Mbororo businessman, had a sprawling compound with private quarters and kitchens for each of his four wives. Like most Mbororo husbands, Al Hadji Isa had erected a wall around his home to ensure his privacy and evade the eyes of nosy neighbours and potential thieves. Yet unlike most other Mbororo men, Al Hadji Isa had the financial capital to invest in thick concrete walls topped with shards of glass rather than having to rely on the more typical type of enclosure, woven grass mats. It took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the bright spotlights lighting Al Hadji Isa's vast courtyard that was crowded with upwards of two hundred Mbororo men. I clung to Biri's side

as he pushed through the massive wall of discordant voices. Biri was in search of his friend Kareem. After several minutes of scanning the vast sea of people, Biri located Kareem and made what had to be the briefest of introductions. A mechanized buzzing suddenly filled the air as the loudspeaker system was turned on. A request was made from the podium for guests to 'quiet down' and 'take their seats'. With the noise generated from guests' conversations greatly reduced, I grew aware of the audible *swish* as Mbororo men gathered the layers of their starched and pressed *boubou* (kaftan) before taking a seat on the ground. The cool concrete floor offered refuge from the oppressive heat generated by the bodies crammed into Al Hadji Isa's courtyard. Biri, Kareem, and I waited anxiously for Al Hadji Isa to address the audience over the microphone.

As I would soon come to understand, tonight's community meeting was the culmination of several key events. Six months earlier, the Muslim leader of Mandjou (Ousmanou Mohammed), a Hausa businessman, had died.[64] Following his death and an extended period of mourning, his family announced his eldest son as successor. The Mbororo community reacted somewhat uncharacteristically. Self-restraint, self-control, and reserve are frequent ways in which *pulaaku* are expressed. Following the announcement that Ousmanou's son would be the new Muslim leader, Mbororo expressed their disappointment, and there was mounting pressure from within the community to publicly refuse to recognize his authority. These actions were a clear departure from the Mbororo code of *pulaaku.*

Prior to tonight's meeting, Mbororo elders in Mandjou had convened several roundtables to discuss the ramification of rejecting Ousmanou's son as leader. Over a period of several months, a

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[64] Ousmanou Mohammed was originally appointed as the leader of the Muslim community of Mandjou in the early 1980s. Though Hausa were a minority – less than 5% – within the Muslim community in Mandjou, Mbororo elders chose to place their support behind Mohammed rather than a Mbororo candidate. Mohammed's fluency in French and experience working alongside local government leaders were critical factors in obtaining support from Mbororo elders as well as the larger Mbororo community. Prior to the late 1990s, formal education was not considered a priority within the Mbororo community. Consequently, the literacy rate amongst Mbororo remained low and it was rare to encounter Mbororo conversant in either French or English. Mohammed, ostensibly, was the only viable candidate for the post of leader of the Muslim community of Mandjou.

list of possible Mbororo candidates for the position had been amassed. It was not difficult to reach a consensus on rejecting Ousmanou's son, which involved publicly renouncing him as leader and pushing the local government to issue an open call for candidates. Choosing a Mbororo candidate, however, proved difficult. After months of vetting, the name of Al Hadji Razzi – a Mbororo businessman and recent transplant to Mandjou – was put forward. Al Hadji Razzi quickly put together a dossier and submitted it to the sous-prefect's office. After weeks of stalling, the sous-prefect regretfully announced that Al Hadji Razzi's candidacy had been pulled due to his failure to present a complete application. Moreover, with the dossier submission deadline having passed, only Ousmanou's son's name would appear on the ballot. Mbororo residents decried the decision and accused the sous-prefect of colluding with the Hausa. Mbororo leaders threatened legal action unless the sous-prefect rescinded his decision. Within days, the sous-prefect's office announced that the deadline to declare one's candidacy and submit the necessary paperwork had been extended. This decision provided Al Hadji Razzi with the opportunity to re-submit his candidature for the post of Muslim leader of Mandjou.

One month later, elections were held. Al Hadji Razzi was declared the winner. Biri indicated to me that Al Hadji Razzi's win came as no surprise to members of the Mbororo community. Mbororo were the most populous Muslim group in Mandjou and were no longer willing to have a Hausa ruling over them. News of Al Hadji Razzi's victory spread like wild fire and there was talk of potentially putting forth a Mbororo candidate for the next mayoral election. Months later, when I asked Biri to describe the general mood within the Mbororo community following the news of the election; he smiled wistfully and said that at the time there was a sense of great accomplishment and achievement amongst Mbororo. Personally, Biri felt Al Hadji Razzi's victory was a critical step in Mbororo gaining a stronger political foothold in Mandjou. The euphoria and elation of Al Hadji Razzi's win, however, was short-lived. Several weeks after the election results were announced, the

evening programming on the local radio station was interrupted with a special announcement. Citing Mbororo status as non-native, the sous-prefect had decided to invalidate the results of the election. Ousmanou's son was declared the winner, and the date of his inauguration would be forthcoming.

Months after the sous-prefect's decision to invalidate Al Hadji Razzi's win, I sat cross-legged next to Kareem and Biri and watched as Al Hadji Isa strode across the makeshift platform that had been assembled for this meeting. He extended his right hand towards the audience, signalling them to quiet down, before grabbling the microphone. If Al Hadji Isa was nervous standing before a crowd of two hundred, it did not show. Calm yet indignant, he denounced the sous-prefect's decision and accused him of having been yet another corrupt politician willing to take bribes rather than fulfill his obligation as a government appointed official. Al Hadji Isa did not hold back on his feelings towards Ousmanou. He was a wicked man, immoral, and a poor reflection of a good Muslim (there was the implication that he drank alcohol and was rarely seen at the mosque). After hurling insults at both the sous-prefect and Ousmanou's son, Al Hadji Isa launched into a lengthy tirade against Gbaya elites, whom he accused of conspiring against Al Hadji Razzi. Al Hadji Isa went on to extend his verbal attack against the greater Gbaya community, arguing that Al Hadji Razzi's loss was yet another illustration of Gbaya attempting to marginalize Mbororo residents. Mbororo had opened businesses serving all of Mandjou and had contributed to the building of new public school where Gbaya were able to send their children for free. Yet, lamented Al Hadji Isa, Gbaya refused to acknowledge Mbororo contributions to building a better Mandjou. Instead of offering their hand in thanks, Gbaya used their hand to threaten the Mbororo. Judging by the murmurs of agreement, Al Hadji Isa's bitter tirade resonated with his Mbororo audience.

Al Hadji Isa, like most Mbororo I encountered, readily acknowledged the more recent arrival of Mbororo to Mandjou. Moreover, he conceded that historically, Mbororo had deferred to the Gbaya on questions of political representation and access to resources. Al Hadji Razzi's loss was somewhat

85

of a catalyst, I would argue, in leading Mbororo residents to begin to interrogate their categorization as 'strangers'. If political representation and permanent access to natural resources (without the threat of having access rescinded) was inextricably linked with being native, then the question emerges of how to become a native. Though Al Hadji's comments do not explicitly address the how, his emphasis on Mbororo efforts to contribute to the social and economic growth of Mandjou introduces a potential re-articulation of the parameters of belonging that is no longer contingent on longevity of residency. However, as I point out in subsequent chapters, extending belonging to Mbororo using new criteria simultaneously involves excluding Gbaya.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Geschiere and Nyamnjoh's depiction of political unrest in Douala, when juxtaposed with the unfolding political drama in Mandjou, illustrates not only the importance of belonging as an identity, but also the desire to invoke belonging as means to acquire rights. In both scenes, violence is present or threatened. Upon closer examination, the Mandjou narrative illustrates belonging in an altogether distinctive way. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh distinguish natives as individuals whose ancestors were the first to settle in Douala, that is, the stand-alone criteria if one is to express oneself as belonging. In the case of Mbororo residents in Mandjou contemplating the next steps after being denied political representation, the status of not being first is freely acknowledged. Quite particular to Mandjou, Mbororo community members continue to express themselves as belonging, but they base this claim on entirely different criteria. Their contribution to economic growth and the built environment, they hold, should be the primary indicators of who does and does not belong to a place. Mbororo arguments for belonging illustrate a significant departure from the temporal emphasis on belonging by grounding their reasoning in materiality.

Conclusion

Belonging is a powerful political instrument that French and British administrators used to categorize and subsequently regulate their colonial subjects. Since the 1990s, it has re-emerged in Cameroon as a tool to limit the formation of political parties that could potentially challenge the Biya administration. Though the pervasiveness of belonging as an identity discourse has shifted through the decades, the status of being first continues to be the main criteria in determining whether or not one belongs.

In the absence of demonstrable historical continuity to a particular place, and unable to clearly document that their arrival in a particular place had preceded that of other communities, Mbororo in Mandjou are consistently identified as strangers. Inhabiting various pockets of Cameroon – primarily the Northwest, Adamaoua, North, Extreme North and increasingly the East – farming communities have denounced Mbororo attempts to claim belonging as a means to obtain permanent access to land and political positions. The term "stranger" affixed by locals upon the Mbororo has re-affirmed nomadic pastoral Mbororo as being out of place and not belonging. Even when Mbororo strived to appropriate cultural components of the "locals" or "natives", their lack of historical priority/continuity made any attempts at contesting their conditions of belonging futile.[65] The strategies of multiple colonial administrations added yet another layer of complexity to the category of belonging and the way in which it was claimed and asserted. Both British and French colonial authorities were invested in controlling and regulating the behaviour of colonial subjects, both 'native' and 'stranger'. In an attempt to facilitate the process of colonial subject making, colonial authorities enacted several ordinances establishing spatial boundaries for natives and strangers (i.e. affixing individuals to particular places). These bureaucratic manoeuvres and tactics often led to

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[65] I am largely drawing from the more recent work of Michaela Pelican who has worked in and around Bamenda since the early 1990s.

emerging antagonisms between natives and strangers. Following the withdrawal of the colonial governments, the priority of the post-colonial project was that of nation-building, temporarily quelling contestations over belonging. Ironically, it was during the 1990s or the "era of political liberalization" that belonging not only re-emerged with force but triggered a re-imagining of Cameroon as comprised of distinctive places. The imagining of a unified Cameroon had been eclipsed by separate entities vying for their proverbial "piece of pie". Mbororo, a historically nomadic and mobile community, had their endeavours to attain the status of 'native' systematically rebuffed, not unlike the members of the Eleventh Province. In the 1950s, Mbororo leaders unsuccessfully argued for 'native' status based on their economic impact in the Northwest Region. Once again, their inability to demonstrate historical continuity to the region invalidated their claims.

In Mandjou, Mbororo residents have challenged their identification as 'strangers'. In lieu of historical continuity, Mbororo substantiate their claims of belonging based on their economic role in transforming their landscape. They are architects to a new kind of belonging, one in which the focus is on the economic transformation of the landscape as opposed to historical continuity. In the next chapter I piece together what these successes look like and make the argument that a new kind of belonging is underway.

The Quest to Belong: Mbororo Place Making in Mandjou

> No Mbororo can link himself either to a country or a flag that he would pass on from generation to generation. The Mbororo have no fatherland. So it isn't astonishing that everywhere they wander with their herds, the Mbororo are treated like people of no importance. They do not have the right to any consideration. The least of the farmer is not worried about saying to them, 'Why did you come here? You do not even have a country. And if you're chased from here, where will you go?' Because the Mbororo are without homeland, they are also without memories. None of them worry about knowing where their ancestors spend their lives[66] (Bocquené 2002:95-6).

Ndudi Umaru, the author of the above epigraph, is a nomadic Mbororo from northern Cameroon. Umaru depicts Mbororo mobility as being at odds with sedentary neighbours who rely on farming as their primary economic livelihood. The absence of a "homeland," or place to properly belong, in Umaru's own words, contributes to Mbororo being "treated like people of no importance," maligned and marginalized. Unlike farmers, Mbororo are unconcerned with remembering the lands of their ancestors.

Umaru's depiction of Mbororo life was remarkably dissimilar to depictions from Mbororo residing in Mandjou. Though Mbororo in Mandjou still self-identified as nomadic pastoralists, they were no longer mobile. Even the most recent Mbororo migrants were likely to refer to Mandjou as their home, and expressed little desire to relocate. Mandjou had become their town, a place to which Mbororo belonged.

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[66] *Memoirs of a Mbororo: The Life of Ndudi Umaru, Fulani Nomad of Cameroon* is Ndudi Umaru's autobiography, as told to Henri Bocquené, a French ethnographer. Bocquené's multiple interviews with Umaru over a two-year period in the early 1980s forms the basis of the memoir.

Introduction

In Cameroon, being recognized as one who belongs is critical to acquiring both political representation and permanent access to natural resources. History, or, more precisely, evidence of long-term identification with a physical place (i.e. natal village), is a criterion in determining this belonging. In the absence of an historical attachment to place, an individual's rights to political representation and natural resources are jeopardized. Local belonging trumps that of national belonging. Mbororo residing in the NW have struggled to acquire recognition as belonging to the NW for over a century. Citing their more recent arrival (early 20th century) to the region, NW farmers have continued to challenge Mbororo claims of belonging.

Not unlike in the NW, local belonging in the East Region holds considerable weight. In Mandjou, it is Gbaya who claim to belong to the land, and thus they claim to be recipients of the rights and privileges associated with such an identity. Mbororo are once again depicted as the strangers, those who do not belong. Gbaya have consistently and very publicly cited their ancestors' arrival pre-dating that of other ethnic groups as justification to claim the status of 'native' of Mandjou. As strangers, argue Gbaya, Mbororo should be precluded from running for office and acquiring permanent access to natural resources. Though Mbororo readily acknowledge Gbaya as the first to arrive, they are no longer willing to adhere to Gbaya restrictions and demands. Furthermore, Mbororo have begun to reject the imposed identity of 'stranger'.

In this chapter I compare the Mbororo struggle to acquire local belonging in the NW with their struggle to do the same in Mandjou. I argue that Mbororo settlers in Mandjou have radically altered the parameters of local belonging, thus allowing Mbororo to make claims to political power and natural resources. Mbororo efforts to shift the way in which local belonging is articulated include buying and titling land as well as developing land and making it productive. Gbaya have

90

inadvertently contributed to the changes to local belonging vis-à-vis the selling of their land to Mbororo settlers.

Though Gbaya settled Mandjou over a century ago, there is little left in Mandjou that suggests they were ever there. In a little over thirty years, the two ethnic groups residing within Mandjou have increased their distance from one another. Initially Mbororo settled in the center of town and Gbaya moved to Mandjou's periphery. However, as the influx of Mbororo continued, many Gbaya sold their land to recent Mbororo arrivals, vacated town and moved outside of Mandjou's limits. In the next section, I provide an extended narrative of one day in Mandjou to illustrate the extent to which Mbororo have claimed Mandjou and the increasing invisibility of Gbaya. As Gbaya relocate farther away from Mandjou, their ability to claim Mandjou as their place of belonging is threatened.

A day in the life of Mandjou in 2010

On a Friday morning, shortly after dawn in the dry season, I stood at the edge of the Mandjou market and watched as the town awoke. Gazing from the western edge of the main market and looking from north to south, Mbororo visibility was remarkable. With every passing hour, their physical presence became more acute. Having finished their morning prayers, a steady flow of Mbororo men – young and old – filled the streets. Those with small businesses located at the market deftly navigated the small groups of older Mbororo men that tended to congregate outside of mosques following morning prayer. It was still early, the first rays of sun peaking over the horizon, yet already young Mbororo children, gripping their small coins tightly, formed queues outside the storefronts that dotted the market. They awaited the arrival of the Mbororo owner to unlock and swing open the large metal doors of his shop. Children were frequently tasked with purchasing small food items – powdered milk and sugar for morning tea – since married Mbororo women rarely step foot outside their husband's compound (see chapter 3). School-aged children waited impatiently to

place their order with the butcher. The overpowering smell of decaying meat that clung to the wooden structure of his kiosk was in striking contrast to the freshly laundered school uniforms of the children. Black flies covered the siding of the kiosk only to scatter momentarily as the butcher struck the thick cuts of hallal beef with his sharpened cleaver. A child's request initiated the cycle of cutting, weighing and packaging beef. After pocketing payment, the butcher handed the child the plastic bag containing the animal protein and moved to the next customer. Children hurried home to deposit the purchase from the butcher before grabbing their school books and racing back to the market in order to catch a taxi to school.

It was almost 7:00 a.m. when the battered yellow taxis began to arrive, lining up alongside the main road. Drivers awaited the arrival of Mbororo students whose parents had given them the necessary 300 CFA to cover the round-trip fare. As the last taxi headed towards Bertoua, the market activity receded; children were at school and married women busied themselves with household chores and studying the Qur'an. Women's activities were obscured behind the high walls surrounding their homestead. Mbororo men, however, remained a constant physical presence in the town, selling goods from their stores, purchasing credit for their mobile phones, darting into Mbororo-owned restaurants for a quick meal, or chatting with Mbororo friends. Movement came to a halt shortly before noon as Mbororo men retreated to their homes to eat lunch and refuge from the blistering heat. But in the early afternoon, shortly after the call for afternoon prayer, the market came alive again. With their stomachs full, Mbororo men hurried to the west end of Mandjou to enter the mosque. Though spacious – it fit over a hundred and fifty men – the recently completed mosque could not accommodate a Mbororo population that continued to expand. In preparation for Friday afternoon prayer, younger men were instructed to sweep the courtyard (twice the dimensions of the mosque) directly facing the mosque. This was done to provide a clean environment for the hundreds of men who would converge outside of the mosque and pray together. The mosque was

the most prominent structure in Mandjou, and there was talk of building another even larger mosque on the other side of town.

As the men settled into prayer, I skirted the edge of the market and moved behind *Carrefour Batouri*. It was here that I entered a patchwork of crisscrossing paths; large enough at times to accommodate an all-terrain vehicle and in other spots so narrow as to only permit pedestrians to walk single-file. The roads in closest proximity to *Carrefour Batouri* were lined on both sides with tall fences that were nearly twice the height of a Mbororo man. These fences were usually made of woven grass mats, or scraps of tin and/or plywood. The more prosperous a head of household was, the more likely he was to seek a more permanent type of enclosure. Al Hadji Isa, for example, had built large cement walls around his home. Mbororo men and women were explicit in identifying the primary function of these barriers: to prevent outsiders – Gbaya and Mbororo both – from gazing into a Mbororo compound and invading a family's privacy. Additionally, the enclosures provided women with a sense of security. So long as a married woman remained behind the enclosure, there was little chance her moral integrity could be compromised.[67]

With every turn in the road, the fences continued on either side of me. Though the high walls prevented me from catching a glimpse of the daily activities occurring within Mbororo homes I passed, they could not prevent the sounds and smells of daily life to escape. I could make out the distinctive voices of young Mbororo children reciting passages from the Qur'an and the rhythmic 'crack' as Mbororo women repeatedly struck kernels of corn with their large wooden pestle. The acridity of heated palm oil, in preparation for frying beef, escaped the darkened walls of a smoke-filled kitchen and drifted past the enclosure circumscribing a Mbororo home.

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[67] In chapter three I discuss in greater detail the way in which these enclosures reinforce the social and physical division between Mbororo and non-Mbororo residents and serve as a material testament of the head of household's commitment to Islam.

As I continued walking east, away from *Carrefour Battouri,* enclosures gave way to more open terrain. Gone were the complex network of cables that provided electricity to many Mbororo residences in Mandjou. I marveled at the stillness that surrounded me after walking only ten minutes from the center of town. Outside of Mandjou, Gbaya homes and farms began to appear. They bore little resemblance to the Mbororo homesteads I encountered in Mandjou. Gbaya built their homes from mud bricks – a less expensive option but more likely to need replacement after the rainy season. Thick palm fronds, cut from palm trees, were woven together to make the roof. The palm fronds were surprisingly impermeable and performed quite well during the heaviest rains. Mbororo were more likely to use concrete to build their homes and select corrugated tin panels for the roof. Aside from choosing different materials in the construction of their residences, the most notable difference was the absence of an enclosure surrounding a Gbaya homestead. Unlike in Mbororo households, Gbaya activities such as washing clothing and preparing and cooking meals were visible to passersby.

With doors and windows often left ajar, a Gbaya residence could appear abandoned. The faint smell of burnt wood and piles of used dishes in close proximity to the outside fire pit were often the only indication of active residency.[68] As the sun began to recede across the horizon, Gbaya compounds on the outskirts of Mandjou steadily came to life. With farming tools (hoe and machete) in hand, Gbaya men and women slowly began the long trek home from their fields, often several kilometers away. Returning home after school, Gbaya children's arrival often preceded that of their parents. In their parents' absence, children gathered firewood to fuel the evening fire.

It was well past 6:00 p.m. when I reached the home of Jean Marie and his wife Berthe. Jean Marie was inside putting together the dinner table that he would then take apart once dinner was

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[68] Typically, a fire pit consists of three large and similarly shaped rocks with flattened tops. The rocks form the points of an equilateral triangle. The rocks allow for cooking pots to be elevated and reduce direct contact to the flames. Depending on the size of the cooking pot, the rocks are re-arranged but the shape remains that of an equilateral triangle.

finished. The dining room served as the makeshift bedroom for their four children. On this moonlit night, Berthe struggled to pour the contents of the black cauldron simmering on the fire into smaller dishes. Jean Marie was inside using the only gas lantern they had to arrange the table. I offered the torch on my mobile phone to illuminate the area and together we carried the dishes indoors. Their four children were already seated at the table and in the center of the salon (a makeshift bedroom for all four children) was the lantern. Jean Marie led us in a prayer before Berthe distributed an equal amount of boiled cassava with a tomato-based sauce along with a piece of bush meat. We talked at length about Jean Marie's plans to build an additional bedroom for the children and possibly a kitchen.

It was well past 9:00 p.m. as I made my way back slowly to Mandjou. Looking eastward, there was total blackness except for the occasional flame of a gas lantern signaling an occupied Gbaya home. Mandjou was to the west. As I drew closer to town, the dissonant noise of town life – the buzzing of electrical wires, booming loudspeakers, and continuous traffic – picked up. The brightness and visibility of Mandjou was in stark contrast to Gbaya residences I had left behind.

Many Gbaya residents now living on the outskirts of town formerly lived in, or close to, *Carrefour Battouri* – Mandjou's center. Over the years they had moved. Jean Marie and Berthe, along with their children, had relocated five times in the past two years. Gbaya had steadily begun to move farther from Mandjou into more remote locations with thicker and denser foliage. With every move, another piece of land and mud brick home was abandoned. New occupants would eventually inhabit these abandoned spaces and build new homes. Even the briefest visual sweep of *Carrefour Battouri* was sufficient to identify the majority of these new occupants as being Mbororo.

The depiction of the physical and human geography of Mandjou illustrates the extent to which Mbororo and Gbaya not only lead separate lives, but also how Mbororo have effectively displaced Gbaya from the town they had settled so many years ago. Since the late 1970s, Mbororo have been

settling in Mandjou and forging strong physical attachments to the place. Gbaya initially provided

Mbororo with access to land and demanded little in return. Gbaya, wanting to capitalize on the

booming land market, began to demand financial remuneration from Mbororo settlers prior to

granting them permanent rights to the land. Thus, a pattern emerged in which Gbaya residents sold

their land and relocated. With every resettlement, Gbaya have extended their physical distance from

Mandjou. In the physical absence of Gbaya, Mbororo have become the most visible population in

Mandjou. Mbororo physical attachment to Mandjou is striking when juxtaposed with Umaru's

depiction of Mbororo as having little to no ties to place. Mbororo have not only settled; they have

built a town in which only they reside.

From the NW to Mandjou: The story of Biri

Biri was a Mbororo man in his mid-50s who moved to Mandjou in late August 2009. Like his

father and father's father, Biri was born and raised in NW. As a newcomer to Mandjou, Biri was

often asked by older residents the name of his natal village. In response, Biri usually reached into the

deep pockets of his *boubou* to pull out his laminated national identity card. Invariably he would draw

the person's attention to the section marked as "Place of Birth" and then point to what was typed

immediately below, "Ashong".

Biri took great pride in identifying Ashong as his natal village. He spoke fondly of his youth

spent herding his father's cattle through the Bamenda highlands. At one point Biri had told me that

his happiest memories were those spent in Ashong. Considering Biri's strong attachment to Ashong

and the fact that he did little to conceal his frustration at the 'backwardness' (i.e. constant outbreaks

of water-borne illnesses, poor quality of health services, and the insufficient number of public

schools) of Mandjou life, I was surprised at his determination to make a life for himself and his

family in Mandjou. It had been more than three decades since Biri left his father's compound, and

96

though he clearly remained attached to his natal village, his intentions were to make Mandjou his permanent home. Biri's reasons for not returning to Ashong were complex.

I had grown close to Biri and his family after having lived with them for two months. It was Biri who facilitated introductions with Mbororo elders in the community and assured his friends and neighbours that I could be trusted. These actions were critical in establishing my connections with Mbororo residents; without Biri's vote of confidence and his support, completing my fieldwork would have been inconceivable. Biri was an open book on most subjects yet when I pressed him as to why he had left Ashong he resisted and tried to change the subject. It was only in the weeks and months following a near tragic accident suffered by Biri's first wife, Adama, that I learned about the events that had led Biri to leave Ashong.

In early February 2010, Adama convinced Biri to allow her to travel to Bamenda to visit her ailing father, with the caveat that her elder brother accompany her on the trip. En route, Adama was in a serious accident. A passing truck traveling at a high speed on a treacherous dirt road sideswiped her small passenger van. The high velocity with which the truck hit the van caused the smaller vehicle to roll twice before coming to a stop. Though lucky to have survived, Adama sustained severe injuries. Her brother escaped with a few cuts and bruises. For weeks Adama remained bedridden. Only with the physical support of a person to her right and left was she able to stand. The pain was unremitting and after several attempts to obtain a solid diagnosis and treatment plan from doctors at the hospital on the outskirts of Bertoua (referred to as Little Italy) Biri decided to travel with Adama to Bamenda to seek medical advice from physicians working at the Banso hospital. [69] After nearly two weeks of testing and many unanswered questions, Adama's primary physician identified two hairline fractures in Adama's left hip as the source of the pain. Though

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[69] The Italian government provided the funding to build the hospital. Consequently, residents of both Bertoua and Mandjou referred to the hospital as *Petite Italie* (Little Italy).

encouraged by her progress and confidant that Adama would regain full mobility, her doctor explained that her best chance at a full recovery would be to remain in close proximity to the hospital. It was decided that rather than return to Mandjou, Adama would travel to Ashong and remain under the care of Biri's mother and elder sister until she was fully recovered. Ashong was certainly closer to the hospital than Mandjou. The same day Adama was discharged, Biri returned to Mandjou.

It had been a rough two months with Adama gone. Maimouna, Biri's second wife, shouldered the bulk of the household responsibilities and struggled to cope. She was young and still adjusting to urban life in Mandjou. She had married Biri shortly before moving to Mandjou. Unlike Adama, Maimouna had spent almost her entire life as a pastoralist, living in small Mbororo settlements that would be erected temporarily and then abandoned. Her father had several herds of cattle and was always on the move in search of available pastures and watering holes. As a young child of five or six, Maimouna traveled with her elder sister to sell milk and yogurt at local markets. Maimouna was used to having independence, but with Adama now away she was rarely allowed to leave the compound.

Biri had grown increasingly anxious about Adama's health and was desperate to have the compound return to some state of normalcy. Biri was concerned that Adama and her caregivers – Biri's ailing mother and his widowed sister – were "making *pulaaku*" (i.e. avoiding direct questions about Adama's health and saying that all was okay when in fact it was not). Rather than depend on irregular phone calls, Biri asked that I travel to Ashong and check on Adama's health. Within a few days travel arrangements were made.

The day before I was to begin my journey to Ashong, Biri pulled out a worn cardboard box from under his bed and asked me to follow him to his large salon. As he sorted through personal photos, he passed them along to me. Many of the photos were of him – young and stoic – standing

98

beside his father's cattle. It was at that moment that I decided to once again ask about his departure from Ashong. Shifting a bit on his chair, he was quiet for a few moments. He sighed and then explained that his father had been one of the first Mbororo men in the community to understand the importance of western education. It was his father who had enrolled Biri in the local primary and secondary school.

From the beginning, Biri was an excellent student. But he gave little thought to the prospect of continuing his education beyond lower secondary school, since there was no local *lycée* for him to continue his studies.[70] To further his education would mean relocating to Bamenda, a prospect that filled Biri with anxiety. Biri's father had no qualms about Biri moving in order to obtain a high school degree and made it clear to Biri that this would be the next step following his graduation from secondary school. Biri tried to make the case that his father could make better use of him in Ashong working with the cattle. But his efforts fell on deaf ears.

In late spring of his graduating year, Biri was preparing for his comprehensive exams (*brevet*). He needed to pass the exams in order to secure a spot at the only *lycée* in Bamenda. Biri was still uncertain about the prospect of moving, but it would be impossible for him to refuse his father. That spring was particularly challenging in terms of time management. Most evenings Biri would force himself to stay awake and cram for the upcoming tests. Late nights were a challenge since Biri

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[70] Cameroon adopted two distinct educational systems that correspond with the two official languages of the country, French and English. The Anglo-Saxon educational system is pervasive in former British Cameroons. The Anglo-Saxon model is divided into primary (seven years, ages 5-11) and lower secondary (five years, ages 11-16) and upper secondary (two years, ages 16-18). Upon completion of lower secondary, students sit for the General Certificate of Secondary Education exams (GCSE or formerly O-levels). These exams are subject specific, i.e. Math, English, Physics, etc. Students must secure passable marks on these subject exams in order to enter upper secondary. At the end of upper secondary, students sit for the GCSE Advanced level exams (A-levels). As with the GCSE O-level, these exams are subject specific, and students choose which exams they will write. In French-speaking Cameroon, the prevalent model mirrors that of the French educational system in France. The system consists of four levels; *école maternelle* (3 years, ages 3-6), *école primaire* (five years, ages 6-11), *collège* (four years, ages 11-15) and *lycée* (three years, ages 15-18). After completing studies at a collège, students take a series of comprehensive subject exams referred to at the *brevet*. At the end of *lycée*, students sit for the *baccalauréat* exam. This academic qualification must be obtained if students plan to attend university. The *baccalauréat* is the equivalent to the British A-level exams. Though Bamenda was located within an Anglophone province, there were a few primary and secondary schools that followed the French educational model.

had to juggle school responsibilities with those of his father's herd (i.e. securing the enclosure, checking on the new calves, etc.). In the weeks leading up to the beginning of exams, Biri was only managing to sleep two to three hours a night. The lack of sleep took a toll.

After a particularly gruelling night monitoring a sickly calf, Biri was desperate to catch a few hours of sleep. Before calling it a night, a physically and mentally exhausted Biri checked the cattle enclosure to ensure that it was latched. Hours later, as the sun was peaking above the horizon, Biri awoke to loud and angry shouts. A Grassfielder swinging a machete from side to side, was approaching. He was not alone: a group of perhaps five to six adult men, each brandishing a machete, were bringing up the rear.

Unbeknownst to Biri, an older female cow had escaped the enclosure and trampled the farmer's field. Biri was frightened but slowly managed to get to his feet. Conflicts between farmers and Mbororo were nothing new, but usually the farmers could be appeased with a payment of cash or offering a small animal to compensate for any damage caused. It was rare to have a large group menacing a Mbororo and threatening bodily harm. The farmer's bloodied trousers and shirt were concerning and Biri was terrified that he would be killed. As the shouts from the group had died down, the farmer just stared at Biri before telling him to leave immediately with his cattle and to never return. He added that he would be taking two cows to teach Biri and other Mbororo a lesson; Mbororo needed to remember that they were guests here. Biri turned his back as the farmer continued to hurl insults and slowly made his way back to his father's compound. When Biri finally arrived home, and told his father of what had happened, his father shrugged his shoulders and said that there was not much to do. Mbororo *were* guests on the land that was in fact not theirs and could ill afford to retaliate.

Biri's confrontation with the farmer was unusual in terms of its intensity and the way in which the threat of violence was made explicit. However, as I explained in chapter one, conflicts of this

100

type between farmers and Mbororo in the NW were frequent. Biri's narrative illustrates the struggles facing Mbororo residents in that region and serves as yet another example of how Grassfielders used Mbororo status as 'stranger' to delegitimize their rights, in this case the right to graze.

Shortly after the conflict, Biri left Ashong and moved to Bamenda to attend high school. After graduation, Biri worked as an urban motorbike taxi driver. Eventually he found a job as a long-distance lorry driver, traveling between Bamenda and larger cities. By the early 1990s, Biri was no longer struggling to make ends meet. As a lorry driver with a regular long-distance route, his income was steady and covered his expenses as well as those of his family. As the years passed, more Mbororo began to resettle in Bamenda in search of work. Many came with woeful tales of both land and cattle theft and Biri would listen, offering bits of legal advice that he had picked up over the years. Frustration at the marginalization and abuse suffered by Mbororo led Biri and several of his educated Mbororo friends to form the Mbororo Social Cultural and Development Association, or MBOSCUDA, in 1993. Over the next two decades MBOSCUDA worked tirelessly to push for Mbororo to be recognized as regional citizens of the NW. MBOSCUDA would ultimately be responsible for securing national identity cards for Mbororo that allowed for a village or town in the NW to be listed as their birthplace. Formerly, any Mbororo born in the NW was automatically identified as a resident of one of the northern regions, thereby preventing him from accessing rights to political representation and natural resources in the NW. Achieving national recognition did not, however, contribute to local recognition.

MBOSCUDA and the effort to belong in the NW

The 1990s were a decade of great political upheaval in the NW and throughout the rest of Cameroon. For the first time since the unification of British and French Cameroons in 1961, political opposition was permitted; seemingly overnight, Cameroon went from a one-party to multi-

party political system. Along with the expansion of the political arena, local ethnic groups were

beginning to form associations based on their ethnicity and village or region of birth. It was during

this period that a small cadre of educated Mbororo founded MBOSCUDA.

Initially MBOSCUDA was eager to permanently disconnect from the Fulbe in order to

strengthen their claim of belonging to the NW.[71] MBOSCUDA argued that Mbororo settled in the

NW nearly a century ago and no longer had any attachment – economic, political, or social – to any

region but the NW.[72] Therefore, political rights and access to natural resources needed to be tied to

their current residence rather than a geographic region with which they had no contact (Pelican

2008:548).

MBOSCUDA encouraged Mbororo to embrace the slogan "Don't Make *Pulaaku*" (in Fulfulde

taa wadda pulaaku) in an effort to forge Mbororo solidarity and to lessen the cultural and social

distance between Mbororo and non-Mbororo.[73] *Pulaaku*, as discussed in the introduction of this

dissertation, is the Mbororo way of being that incorporates elements such as self-possession,

restraint, modesty, and individualism (Pelican 2008:554). Lucy Davis, an anthropologist working

with Mbororo communities in the NW during the early 1990s, writes that Mbororo have

traditionally avoided residing in close geographic proximity to one another due, in part, to the

demands of pastoralism. *Pulaaku*, writes Davis (1995:219), would therefore appear to be well suited

for "the rather isolated, individualistic nature of semi-nomadic life". In terms of building unity with

the Mbororo community, however, *pulaaku* was divisive. Lucy Davis (Ibid.) concludes that "[m]any

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[71] Fulbe is the broader ethnic category under which Mbororo are often subsumed. Mbororo are depicted as nomadic
pastoralists and 'town Fulbe' are characterized as settled and residing in villages and towns. It is a shared language
(Fulfulde) and the practice of *pulaaku* that work to unite both sub-groups under the Fulbe ethnonym.
[72] As I have discussed in other parts of the dissertation, Mbororo arrived in the NW in the early 20th century.
[73] Aku and Jafun Mbororo'en (plural of Mbororo) are two Mbororo sub-groups that migrated to the NW at different
times from the Kano region in present-day Nigeria. In search of new pastures, Jafun first traveled to the Adamaoua
Plateau (north of the NW) before moving into the NW in the early 20th century. Aku, on the other hand, only began to
relocate to the NW in the 1940s. Interactions between the Aku and the Jafun have remained limited. MBOSCUDA
encouraged collaboration between the two groups in order to serve the greater objective, which was to end the historical
marginalization of Mbororo (Pelican 2008:549).

Mbororo seem to distrust each other as much as they distrust the 'Natives'". Davis's commentary echoed MBOSCUDA's overriding concern that *pulaaku* was an impediment to forging Mbororo unity. Hence, MBOSCUDA pursued their campaign of "Don't Make *Pulaaku.*"

In a small vignette from her fieldwork in Bamenda, Davis illustrates the way in which *pulaaku* was perceived as a hindrance to building Mbororo solidarity. Following a meeting with members of a small dairy cooperative, the Mbororo president of the cooperative expressed his frustration:

> We ask at the meeting if there is a problem with what we want to do and
> they all say 'Halawala – no problem'. We ask again if
> there are problems and they say 'Halawala – no problem'. We then make
> resolutions. Later we find that nothing happens because of some big
> problem that nobody wants to talk about." (quote cited in Davis
> 1995:219).

Rather than express their concerns openly, Mbororo members of the cooperative responded with '*Halawala*' (no problem). Mbororo reluctance to provide an opinion in the afore-mentioned scenario resonates with Davis's elaboration on aspects of *pulaaku*. According to Davis (1995:218-9), "revealing one's real desires" and "showing others what one has in mind" were strongly discouraged behaviours amongst Mbororo since they did not adhere to the proper expression of *pulaaku*.

Embedded within *pulaaku*, was the belief of Mbororo racial and cultural superiority. As an example, Davis (1995:218) provides a brief aside in which she characterizes Mbororo affect as that of "silent disdain" as they watch their neighbours labour in their agricultural fields. Such actions had alienated Mbororo from other ethnic groups. Thus, the campaign to reduce the expression of *pulaaku* served yet another purpose, to improve relations between Mbororo and their non-Mbororo neighbours.

MBOSCUDA leadership decided that *pulaaku* was "an outdated strategy and no longer compatible with the requirement of their [Mbororo] current economic and political situation" (Pelican 2008:548). MBOSCUDA's campaign was met with strong disapproval from some members of the Mbororo community who argued that *pulaaku* was part and parcel of Mbororo identity.

Pulaaku, however, was not the only source of conflict that challenged MBOSCUDA's efforts to

broker unity amongst Mbororo. "[D]iffering attitudes to Islam" exposed fractures within the NW

Mbororo community (Davis 1995:222). There were Mbororo Islamic leaders who advocated for

Mbororo to demonstrate a stronger adherence to the tenets of Islam. Though these leaders had

devoted followers, there was a "new western-schooled generation" that had "different ideas about

the social consequences of Koranic interpretations" (Davis 1995:222). According to Davis (Ibid.),

religious leaders had a difficult time imposing their strict religious guidelines upon the younger

generation of Mbororo. Towards the late 1990s, however, MBOSCUDA had successfully brokered

unity amongst the voices of dissent, allowing them to prioritize the recognition of Mbororo as

regional citizens in the NW.

Mbororo, like Biri and his father, though they had been born in the NW and considered the

NW their home, were denied the rights and privileges allocated to the region's recognized citizens,

the Grassfielders. Michaela Pelican describes Mbororo frustration at being labeled as strangers when

in fact they had invested a great deal of effort towards integrating into the multi-ethnic tapestry that

comprised the Grassfields:

> Their [Mbororo] children have grown up with Grassfields children, have
> learnt their neighbours' language, have adopted a number of Grassfields
> customs, and don't know any other home. Furthermore, they have integrated
> themselves into local Grassfields communities, participating in communal
> activities and supporting the local Grassfields chief. They thus see themselves
> as able members of Grassfields chiefdoms, and claim rights and belonging in
> the same way as their Grassfields neighbours" (Pelican 2008:550).

MBOSCUDA worked tirelessly to channel Mbororo frustrations. Since its formation over

twenty years ago, MBOSCUDA has become "the most vocal and effective organ of Mbororo self-

representation both to the Cameroonian state and to international development organizations"

(Pelican 2008:547). The actions of MBOSCUDA were instrumental in helping to transform the way

in which Mbororo saw themselves – no longer simply as 'strangers,' but NW residents deserving the

same rights as Grassfielders. Rather than depending on the generosity of neighbours for access to land, and thereby acquiescing to Grassfielders' terms, MBOSCUDA organized legal workshops to educate Mbororo about their rights as national citizens and to outline the formal land titling process (discussed below). Yet MBOSCUDA's efforts, emphasizes Pelican, did little to dissuade Grassfielders from continuing to perceive Mbororo as 'strangers'. Moreover, Grassfielders refused to acknowledge land titling and continued to enforce customary land practices in which Mbororo were denied formal land ownership and depended on the "goodwill" of Grassfielders[74] (Ibid.:550).

MBOSCUDA's efforts to redefine the parameters of belonging did lead to national recognition of Mbororo as regional citizens of the NW. Biri's laminated national identity card corroborates the 'success' of their efforts in this regard. However, local recognition has yet to be achieved. In the case of Biri, he felt a strong emotional attachment to Ashong based, in part, on his family's long history of residence there. The national government recognized this attachment and publically identified him as a native of the region, yet locally he remained a stranger. It would be Biri's status as a stranger in Ashong that would ultimately set the wheels in motion to choose Mandjou as his new home.

In the spring of 2009 Biri received a phone call from Al Hadji Alim – an old friend from his days as a lorry driver. Stating that he needed Biri's assistance to sort out a few land transactions, Al Hadji Alim requested Biri travel to Mandjou as soon as possible. Less than a week later, Biri was in Mandjou. Only six months after receiving Al Hadji Alim's phone call, Biri and his family were renting a large residence about five minutes from both *Carrefour Battouri* and Al Hadji Alim's sprawling residence.

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[74] Historically Mbororo were involved in patron-client relationships with Grassfielders and depended on Grassfielders when "defending their economic and political interests" (Pelican 2008:45). Though exploitation was often involved in these associations, Pelican (2006; 2008) argues that the relationships between Mbororo and Grassfielders were couched in terms of friendship. Nevertheless, MBOSCUDA was vocal in moving away from this kind of relationship and forging a direct connection between Mbororo and the state rather than working through Grassfielders as intermediaries (Pelican 2008).

How a stranger to Mandjou becomes a native: land transactions in East Cameroon

Early one morning in March 2010, Biri awakened me with a heavy knock on the door: 'Fadi [my Mbororo name] it is time to leave, Al Hadji Alim is waiting'. Half asleep, I gathered my recorder and writing tools and met Biri in his salon. Maimouna, Biri's second wife, was in the kitchen preparing black tea and waiting for Hawaou (Biri's youngest daughter) to return from the market. Maimouna had sent Hawaou off with a few hundred CFA to purchase fresh bread and two small sachets of milk power. Hawaou rushed through the front gates and headed for the kitchen to deposit the items with her mother. Maimouna was carefully pouring the last of the hot tea into her best thermos. After wiping down the thermos, Maimouna secured the lid and handed it to me along with the hot bread.

A loud honk signalled Al Hadji Alim's arrival and Hawaou ran out from the kitchen to swing open the gates. Al Hadji Ali stepped out from the driver's side and greeted Biri. Noting my presence, he gave Biri a quizzical look. Judging by the brief exchange that followed, Al Hadji Alim was none too pleased that I would be accompanying them. Biri explained to Al Hadji Alim in Fulfulde that my presence would not interfere with his agenda.[75] With a slight nod, Al Hadji Alim signaled his consent. Biri took the wheel of the 2004 all-terrain Jeep Cherokee and Al Hadji Alim slid into the front passenger's seat. I sat directly behind Biri with the steaming tea and bread and made myself comfortable. Before turning the key in the ignition Biri turned to me and reminded me that today's journey would be long. We were going to Nguelebok, a small village over one hundred kilometers southeast of Mandjou.

The journey was unlike others I had made with Biri. On previous excursions Biri had always made an effort to include me in conversations with larger groups. Yet today Biri was strangely subdued and offered curt answers to the few questions I dared to ask. Al Hadji Alim, not known for being chatty, was even more somber than usual. For the next few hours only the ping of small rocks

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[75] I would only learn the contents of conversation between Biri and Al Hadji Alim later that evening.

hitting the sides of the vehicle disrupted the silence in the car. Biri's affect, however, grew notably more positive and as we drew closer to Nguelebok he was eager to engage in conversation. He began by laying out the events that precipitated today's journey.

Al Hadji Alim was a prominent Mbororo landowner in the East Region, and by far one of the wealthiest Mbororo living in Mandjou. Well-known throughout the region for his business acumen, Al Hadji Alim had arrived in Mandjou in the mid-2000s. His desire to buy land was his primary motivation for choosing Mandjou. And buy land he did. Over the next several years, Al Hadj Alim purchased several plots in Mandjou that he now managed as rental units. Since 2008, Al Hadji Alim had purchased over thirty hectares in more remote locations. Ten hectares in Nguelebok had been his most recent investment. Considering Al Hadji Alim's reputation as a skilled businessman, I was uncertain as to why Biri's presence was needed. Biri explained that Al Hadji Alim's spoken French – like that of many Mbororo residing in Mandjou – was rudimentary. Al Hadji Alim's ability to negotiate a fair price for the farm in Nguelebok hinged on Biri's translation skills. The seller was Gbaya, and though there was a high probability that he spoke Fulfulde, he would likely have felt insulted and under Mbororo domination were the negotiations conducted in Fulfulde. With few Mbororo proficient in Gbaya, French was the best option in terms of communication.

Biri was notably anxious as he explained the objectives of the day's meeting. It was when he prefaced his explanation with 'there will likely be strong words exchanged', that I began to reconsider my decision to accompany Biri and Al Hadji Alim to Nguelebok. Over the next half hour, Biri narrated a rather complicated series of events that had led to a serious falling out between Al Hadji Alim, the chief of Nguelebok, and the Gbaya community at large. The last skirmish of which had occurred only a few weeks before today's meeting. Hence the strong possibility of a heated exchange. Nevertheless, Biri was hopeful that today's meeting would bring about some form of resolution.

In September 2009, Al Hadji purchased several hectares of grazing land from a Mbororo man who had decided to return north after more than a decade of living in the East Region. A week after concluding the financial transaction, Al Hadji Alim filed a dossier with the *Ministère des Domaines du Cadastre et des Affaires Foncières* (MINDAF).[76] Shortly thereafter, explained Biri, the real problems began. Al Hadji Alim was more than familiar with the procedures for obtaining a land title, having been through the process many times before. A land sale is not simply a transaction between buyer and seller but must have the authorization of the village chief – usually in the form of a signature on the document in which the terms of the transaction are explicitly stated. Al Hadji Alim, however, failed to secure the signature of Nguelebok's chief before depositing the dossier with MINDAF. Biri claimed that there was no malice in Al Hadji Alim actions. Al Hadji Alim's chaotic travel schedule had prevented him from returning to Nguelebok to secure the chief's signature. Biri was adamant that Al Hadji Alim's actions were in no way meant to disrespect the chief's authority. What was never fully explained, either before or after, was how Al Hadji Alim managed to submit his land titling application to the Bertoua office of MINDAF without securing the signature of Nguelebok's chief. This did not go unnoticed in the Gbaya community and raised concern over Mbororo using corrupt means to get what they wanted.

Only days after submitting his application to MINDAF, Al Hadji Alim moved nearly fifty cattle to the ten hectares and sent two Mbororo youths to care for the small herd. Two weeks later, Al Hadji received multiple beeps to his mobile phone from the two youths.[77] When he finally managed

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[76] English translation: Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure.

[77] Mobile phone companies working in Cameroon have fixed rates for placing a call (per minute) and sending a text message. Receiving a text or a call has no associated cost. Monthly phone plans are rare in Cameroon. Instead, Cameroonians buy phone credit as needed from makeshift kiosks. For example, when I am in need of minutes to place a call or send a text message, I find a kiosk selling phone credit. In exchange for cash, the seller places credit on my phone and I am now able to place calls and send texts. In Cameroon "beeping" has become a common practice amongst mobile phone users. Beeping allows an individual to place a call yet avoid using any of their phone credit. The receiver receives one ring on their phone before the line goes dead. Primus Mbeanwoah Tazanu (2012:69-70), an anthropologist studying transnational communication in Cameroon, suggests that beeping is increasingly identified as a "poor man's practice" since the individuals who initiate the beeps often consider themselves to be in financially precarious situations.

to get one of the teens on the phone, he was told that a theft had occurred. Someone had entered the newly built enclosure unnoticed, and taken three of Al Hadji Alim's most valuable cows. Rumors began to circulate shortly thereafter; alleging the chief of Nguelebok's complicity and possible active involvement in the cattle theft. When I expressed surprise at the chief's engagement in a potentially criminal act, Biri responded with a shrug of his shoulders. Whether or not the chief of Nguelebok was involved was of little importance at this this point. A resolution to the violence was what mattered. Biri was hopeful that today's face-to-face meeting would allow the aggrieved parties to come to an agreement and reduce tensions on both sides.

Nguelebok is a small Gbaya village comprised of scattered mud huts that were visible from the road. It was a little past one in the afternoon when we arrived. Biri slowed down the vehicle to avoid hitting a portly sow and her piglets. Biri stopped to ask a young man for directions to the village chief's compound and we were directed to a circular hut in the distance, perhaps two hundred meters from our current location. We parked the vehicle and made our way towards a small group of Gbaya men. They were seated beneath an open structure with a roof made of overlapping woven grass mats atop vertical wooden posts. The men, audible from a distance, ended their conversation abruptly as the three of us approached. Biri was the first to break the silence. He greeted the men and explained that he was here with Al Hadji Alim to conduct business with the chief. One of the Gbaya men nodded and asked us to wait. He put down his bottle of beer and made his way to the chief's compound.

We waited in silence for the next twenty minutes, keenly aware of the suspicious glances thrown our way from the group of Gbaya men. The man returned and asked us to follow him. We were led through the narrow doorway of the mud hut. It took a moment for my eyes to adjust to both the

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Though beeping is a simple form of communication, Tazanu (Ibid.) argues that it "has deeper implication on relationships in that they might be ambiguous—they do not reveal what the person intends to say, they might create suspense and provide no immediate answers…".

darkness and dampness of the hut. Several individuals were already seated as we entered. The man who had led us to the chief's hut signaled for us to take a seat. The group of Gbaya men we had encountered upon our arrival in Nguelebok entered behind us and filled the few remaining seats. Once everyone was in place, a Gbaya man rose and formally introduced the village chief. Biri followed with his introduction of Al Hadji Alim. There was some confusion because my presence had not been explained. Biri again took the floor and very briefly stated that I was a PhD student studying land transactions in the East Region. With introductions complete, a Gbaya man took the floor and voiced concerns over Al Hadji's purchase of the land and argued that Al Hadji Alim had compromised the possibility of a solid friendship between Gbaya and Mbororo with the decision to deposit his dossier with MINDAP without obtaining the village chief's signature. Judging by the applause that followed, his comments resonated with the Gbaya audience. Biri asked for a few minutes to translate. Never for a moment did Al Hadji Alim offer any indication of how he felt while hearing these sharp words. Al Hadji Alim was unflappable. With the translation complete, Al Hadji Alim shifted in his seat before rising to his feet.

Addressing the chief and the other Gbaya present, Al Hadji Alim expressed regret for not having met with the chief sooner and apologized if his actions were perceived as disrespectful. His apology complete, Al Hadji Alim then took his discourse in an unexpected direction. After expressing his desire to collaborate on future business endeavours with Nguelebok residents, Al Hadji Alim made it clear that he would not be proceeding with projects in the manner to which Gbaya were likely accustomed. The bush, explained Al Hadji Alim, had been his place of birth. He had left that life behind and had no intention of returning. Even at the time, I felt the power of his words. Al Hadji Alim was unequivocally stating that the status quo was no longer in effect. Associating an individual with the 'bush is a means of denigrating the person. In Cameroon, the 'bush' is a location where development has yet to arrive and is considered 'backwards.' Despite the

fact that many Mbororo have settled, are educated and are economically successful, they continue to be referred to as being from the bush. Al Hadji Alim's remarks to the chief and his advisors made it very clear that he was aware of his rights and would not allow himself to be bullied.

Al Hadji Alim's words tumbled out in excitement as he talked about his plans to bring development to Nguelebok. He was already in discussion with an international NGO to donate materials to build a health center for the village. Al Hadji Alim re-took his seat and signalled Biri to begin the translation. I observed several Gbaya nodding their heads in agreement as they listened attentively to Biri's translation. As Biri progressed through the translation, the earlier tensions appeared to have subsided. I began to think that Biri had overstated his concerns about today's meeting. Only minutes later my hope was dashed.

After finishing the translation, Biri re-took his seat. Seconds later, Al Hadji rose from his seat and once again addressed the audience in Fulfulde. I took the murmuring from other Gbaya present as a sign that his decision to speak again was unexpected. His earnestness was gone, replaced with a sharp edge. Even though I had only a rudimentary knowledge of Fulfulde, Al Hadji's tone and affect were enough to make it clear that he was angry. Al Hadji Alim reiterated his earlier point of wanting to be involved in Nguelebok's development but this time he added a caveat. He fumbled in the pocket of his light blue *boubou* for a few moments before pulling out his national identity card. With his card in hand he stated that like the villagers of Nguelebok he was from the East Region. Though Nguelebok was not his natal village he planned to invest his time, money, and resources into making Nguelebok great. And rather than expressing gratitude for Al Hadji Alim's efforts, someone had stolen three of his cows. Al Hadji Alim knew his rights as a Cameroonian, and this crime was unacceptable. He was not a stranger and this kind of abuse would not be tolerated. Pausing for a few seconds, Al Hadji Alim gathered the folds of his *boubou* and sat down. Biri was clearly uncomfortable as he stood up and prepared to translate. While Biri had the floor, there was total silence and

111

occasionally there were glances exchanged amongst the men present. Biri's attempts to water down Al Hadji Alim's language was ineffective since most of the Gbaya present were conversant in Fulfulde.

Audible grumbling was heard throughout Biri's translation. Right after Biri took his seat the village chief turned to the man on his right (Biri informed me later that this was the chief's main advisor). They spoke in Gbaya for several minutes. With the chief looking on, his advisor stood up, cleared his throat and offered a measured response to Al Hadji Alim:

> 'The village of Nguelebok is grateful for Al Hadji Alim's dedication to support the development of the village. There was a concern expressed by a few of the Gbaya women that Al Hadji's pastures had limited their access to fishing spots and there was a fear that he would ultimately attempt to take over their subsistence farms to which they were almost entirely economically dependent.'[78]

At the time, I thought it remarkable that the advisor never directly responded to Al Hadji Alim's indignation at having his cattle stolen. Instead, I felt the commentary was a veiled justification as to why his cattle had been stolen. Though I believed Al Hadji Alim would re-visit the subject of his stolen cattle further and perhaps demand compensation, the topic remained closed. When Al Hadji Alim once again took the floor, he assured everyone that it was not his intention to threaten the livelihoods of villagers. Moreover, he was concerned with the wellbeing of the community and expanding the local economy. His final words elicited a short round of applause. And perhaps more importantly, the chief nodded in approval. Thinking the meeting over, Biri leaned over and whispered that I should gather my belongings. As I rose from my wooden chair, the chief's advisor stated that there was one last topic needing to be discussed. The chief appeared surprised and turned to his advisor for a few minutes to confer. The chief looked on as his advisor rose to address the

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[78] This response not a direct quote but rather a recollection of the advisor's commentary based on my notes from the meeting held on March 25, 2010.

112

group. The chief's advisor commended Al Hadji Alim for working to support the village of Nguelebok and its people.

But it was the next bit of his discourse that was not quite as complimentary. According to the chief's advisor, Gbaya residents living within or in close proximity to Nguelebok had voiced their concerns about Al Hadji Alim acquiring permanent access to land that rightfully belonged to Gbaya. As a sign of good faith and to prevent future complications (read: cattle thefts), the advisor proposed that Al Hadji Alim gift the community with two cows. It took a few minutes for Biri to translate the advisor's words into Fulfulde. Visibly incensed, Al Hadji Alim wasted no time in rejecting the advisor's not so subtle attempt at extortion. Once again addressing the Gbaya audience, Al Hadji Alim reiterated his earlier point that he was unlike the Mbororo they had previously encountered – moving from place to place, uneducated, and ignorant of their rights. Al Hadji Alim planned to contribute to the development of Nguelebok by hiring Gbaya to work on his fields, building a health center, and providing clean wells. His support, however, would not include gifting cows to either the community or the chief. Perhaps Mbororo would have done this in the past, in a time when they did not have equal footing with other Cameroonians. But this was no longer the case. In somewhat of a chastising voice, Al Hadji Alim pointed out that were it not for his efforts, it was likely that the land he had purchased would have stood empty and turned into a forest. Al Hadji Alim's direct refusal to gift two cows upset the chief's advisor, but ultimately the chief signed the documents that Al Hadji Alim had driven most of the day to obtain. Shortly thereafter, we made our way back to Mandjou. Days later, Al Hadji Alim amended his land-titling dossier to include the chief's signature.

Al Hadji Alim's outright rejection of the advisor's request was a strong departure from how land negotiations between Mbororo and Gbaya had been transacted only a few decades earlier. In the early 1980s the first wave of Mbororo began to arrive in Mandjou. Prior to settling, it was

113

necessary to greet the village chief and request access to land to build compounds and farms. Typically, a Mbororo settler would butcher a cow and gift the village chief with the meat. Such an action was a symbol of fealty to the Gbaya chief. As strangers to the East – as in the NW – Mbororo had limited opportunities to gain permanent access to land and were dependent on establishing and maintaining relationships with the local Gbaya chief and their Gbaya neighbors. Al Hadji Alim's dismissal of the advisor's request illustrated a significant shift in Gbaya-Mbororo relations.

Over the last several decades, in Mandjou and the greater East, land has become a highly-valued commodity. Gbaya have proven willing to sell and Mbororo have proven eager to buy. Though Mbororo acknowledge Gbaya as natives, they are increasingly unwilling to concede to additional demands a Gbaya seller may make that extend fealty beyond the financial transaction. Mbororo men like Biri and Al Hadji Alim are no longer willing to accept that their rights are abridged based on their status as strangers. This is a markedly different position from that of their fathers and their fathers' fathers. MBOSCUDA's efforts to establish Mbororo as regional citizens in the NW have been effective in the sense that the national government has allowed Mbororo to identify the NW as their place of birth. The Mbororo-led organization has broadened the scope of its original mandate, that of securing regional citizenship, and now boasts programs geared to educate Mbororo about land titling and to provide legal support and advice for Mbororo interested in acquiring a land title.

Judging from the number of Mbororo I interviewed in Mandjou who had recently filed for land titles or had already secured a title, MBOSCUDA's efforts to encourage Mbororo to title land have been successful. Several factors that are unique to Mandjou and the greater East Region facilitated the move from theory to practice, including educational workshops about how to title land. In contrast to Gbaya, who are aware of land titling but consider it to be unnecessary, Mbororo are assiduous in their titling. Gbaya tend to treat land as something easily sold and easily gained, as they quickly relocate to an unoccupied area after every sale. Most Gbaya cite the high cost of obtaining a

114

title and a mistrust of government officials as contributing to their hesitation in pursuing formalized claims to ownership.

Mbororo settlers in Mandjou do not share these fears and apprehensions. Having struggled for so long to acquire land titles in the NW, Mbororo newcomers to Mandjou waste little time initiating the land titling process once they have secured a parcel of land. The title (or even simply the act of depositing a dossier with MINDAP) is the first step in welding themselves to Mandjou. The land title, to some extent, substantiates the claims by Mbororo landowners that Mandjou is their town, the place to which they belong. Mbororo pursuit of obtaining land titles suggests that acquiring legal ownership over land has become an effective first step in substantially reducing historical continuity (which Gbaya rightly claim in the East) as the premise for the establishment of belonging.

Land titling in Cameroon

In 1974 the Cameroonian government enacted the Land Ordinance, "the first national endeavour to provide an integrated normative and institutional framework for land tenure" (Fisiy 1992:21). The ratification of the ordinance was an attempt to address what international development organizations identified as impediments[79] to economic development. Officials publicly argued that transitioning to a formalized land tenure system would alleviate the tensions that competing local tenure systems produced and would "encourage Cameroonians to settle in any part of the country of their choice" (Ibid.:283). Yet until today, few Cameroonians have made the transition and continue to rely on customary land tenure. Liz Alden Wiley (2010), a specialist on land tenure, identifies several factors preventing Cameroonians from titling their land through

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[79] Following the end of the colonial era, both the World Bank and the United Nations prioritized privatization and commoditization of land in Cameroon in an effort to support the development of commercial agriculture. The hope was that commercial agriculture would develop into an important industry. From the World Bank's perspective, contends Wiley (2010:12), the communal land-holding system was "unsatisfactory" and in need of discontinuation if modernization was to be achieved.

government channels. "[I]n practice," writes Wiley (2010:24), "the procedure [land titling] is available only to elites because it is centrally controlled, paper-bound, expensive, time-consuming, and demands levels of literacy and institutional empowerment which most people do not have".

In the NW, the strength of customary tenure prevented Mbororo residents from gaining permanent access to land. In contrast, in the East Region, including Mandjou, customary land tenure exists but is not applied consistently. Unlike the NW, traditional leaders in the East have limited political authority. Consequently, their role in the process of land distribution is negligible. Armed with both the knowledge of how to title land and with the financial resources to submit an application, many Mbororo inhabitants in the East are opting to acquire formal titles. Titling provides an individual with greater land security. It has also emerged as a critical component in the Mbororo process of fusing themselves to Mandjou.

Cyprian Fisiy, an anthropologist who wrote the definitive text on the implications of the 1974 Land Ordinance in the NW, argues that the ordinance was by and large a composite of colonial administrators' – German, French, and British – multiple decrees and edicts articulating how land would be distributed and regulated. Colonial land legislation, writes Fisiy (1992:27), centered on underscoring "the pre-eminent rights of the State over the land". Much of the power over land in colonial times involved the colonial powers parceling land, drawing up boundaries. and creating documents that clearly defined individual plots. The first major land sale occurred in 1914 when the Germans claimed 300,000 acres of land which they then sub-divided into smaller plantations to be given to recent German settlers desiring to create large-scale plantations (Ibid.:27-8).

As Fisiy points out, the Germans wanted to make the land as productive as possible, as well as ensure their permanent access to the land. Consequently, the German colonial administration enacted the German Crown Lands Act on July 15, 1896. With the passing of this law, all land fell under the jurisdiction of the German colonial authorities. The German administration, argues Fisiy

116

(Ibid.:28-9), was determined to retain total control over areas it perceived to be "agriculturally rich." Local inhabitants and their agricultural practices threatened the productivity of these highly-valued lands. German colonial authorities opted to resettle locals in order to limit their physical proximity to these highly prized agricultural areas (Ibid.). Buried within the edict was a small caveat stating that "[l]ands occupied by the chiefs and their communities" would remain under the jurisdiction of local chiefs (Ibid.:28). This stipulation was misleading since "occupied" was limited to actual physical structures being in place and visible signs of cultivation. All other land fell under the dominion of the German colonial rulers (Ibid.).

Following the withdrawal of the German administration in 1919, the British and French divided Cameroon into British Cameroons and French Cameroon. British and French colonial authorities had distinctive methods of allocating land. British colonial rulers allowed locals, or "natives," to determine how their land and natural resources would be used, going so far as to prohibit any land or natural resource from being transferred from a native to a non-native unless a "competent authority" – colonial administrator – had given prior consent (Ibid.:30-1). This was an example of colonial authorities underscoring the difference between native and stranger, a distinction that maintains relevant until today. By 1927 the British colonial administration had put in place the Land and Native Rights Ordinance which stipulated that "the whole of the Lands in (West) Cameroon, whether occupied or unoccupied are hereby declared to be native lands" (Ibid.:31). Land that German settlers had claimed in the late nineteenth century was excluded from the ordinance. The language of the ordinance, argues Fisiy (Ibid.:33), provided a false security for natives. Namely, the ordinance clearly stipulated that only natives with a "Certificate of Occupancy" could sell, lease, or mortgage the land. Few natives had the financial means to obtain this document. Effectively, the British acknowledged most land as belonging to natives, but prohibited natives from making decisions about how to use that land.

French colonial administrators took a decidedly different approach to land management and governance. Drawing from their experience in their other African colonies, the French adopted a land policy that restricted them from acquiring parcels of land larger than 1,000 hectares. The self-imposed constraint on the size of concessions, comments H. Labouret, a noted ethnographer and French colonial administrator in the early 20th century, was the colonial government's attempt at reducing potential conflicts with natives who were wary of too much land being placed under French administration. Prohibiting large-scale land alienation (i.e. concessions larger than 1,000 hectares) would be a testament to how the French supported native rights (H. Labouret cited in Fisiy 1992:34). Indeed, H. Labouret's commentary alone would lead one to believe that the French colonial government was concerned primarily with the impact of large-scale land acquisitions on the native population. Fisiy, however, strongly disagrees, and cites several ordinances and edicts to make his point.

One such law that Fisiy analyzes is the Decree of 1932 in which he argues the French radically altered their position on land tenure. The overarching aim of the decree was to get natives to initiate the process of titling their land. French colonial authorities promoted written documents as evidence of land rights. The 1932 Decree had several components. Firstly, it indirectly acknowledged the collective rights of a community and introduced procedures that would allow a community to record their rights. The second component established a protocol to deal with "registered individual interests" (Fisiy 1992:35). Though the French promoted these methods as a means by which to establish "certainty of title" and to clearly document the rights of the native, Fisiy argues that their long-term objective was to facilitate land colonization.

Six years after the passing of the first decree, the duplicitous nature of the French colonial government's political manoeuvring emerged. With the Decree of 12 January 1938, the French claimed all land that had yet to be registered and was unoccupied to be under their authority. Local

118

chiefs expressed outrage and pointed out that a community's claim to land could not be measured in terms of their visible occupation of the land. For the colonial administrators to categorize land as being occupied, it was necessary to observe some form of human alteration to the area. This could include farming the land, building a homestead, setting up a fence, etc. To use colonial logic would severely reduce the size of their ancestral land. According to Fisiy (1992:35), the 1938 decree not only wrested control over land management from the hands of traditional authorities, but also facilitated the colonial government's efforts to regulate the movements of the local population.

As the colonial era came to a close in the late 1950s, British and French administrators once again shifted their positions with regards to issues concerning land tenure. In a surprising turn of events, after decades of delegitimizing the rights of customary rulers over land, in 1959 both French and British administrators "re-established the paramountcy of customary rights over land tenure" (Fisiy 1992:36-7). Moreover, land registration, while still an option, was no longer a requirement for customary rights to be recognized (Javelle 2013:2). The newly elected Cameroonian government was less than supportive of the decision to return control and decision-making power over land to customary authorities. Consequently, soon after independence, the newly elected government made substantial changes to land tenure to ensure their power remained immutable (Javelle 2013).

It was in 1963 that Ahmadou Ahidjo took the first steps toward 'modernizing' the land tenure system by stripping traditional authorities of their decision-making power over land. Adhidjo's newly elected government blamed the stagnation of Cameroon's development on traditional leaders' inefficient land tenure management. Land tenure reform, they argued, was imperative if Cameroon were to achieve the status of a modern nation-state. Under the new administration, traditional leaders were no longer owners of the land but rather "in possession" of land. The government chose to use "in possession" on account of the term's ambiguity (Fisiy 1992:37). Over a decade after reducing the authority of traditional leaders over land, Ahidjo introduced three ordinances – referred

119

to as the 1974 Land Ordinances – that would transform land tenure management. It would take an

additional two years for the 1974 Land Ordinances to be rendered operational[80] (Ibid.).

One of the primary objectives in enacting the ordinances was to parcel Cameroonian territory

into three definitive categories:

1. Public land – land set aside for public use such as roads and waterways.
2. Private land – referring to land that had been registered under a previous (i.e. colonial) administration or would be registered. Only titled land could be considered private land[81].
3. National land – land that was neither public nor private. (Fisiy 1992:41-48).

With the 1974 Land Ordinances, the state assumed the role of "guardian of all the lands" and

gave itself the authority "to intervene to ensure rational use of land in the imperative interest of

defence or the economic policies of the nation" (Ordinance 74-1).[82] Though there were three

categories, the majority of Cameroonians were without documents of title. Consequently, after the

1974 Land Ordinances came into effect, most land was subsumed under the category of 'National

land', i.e. government-owned. According to Fisiy (1992:41), in order to ensure "effective"

guardianship over 'National lands', the state added a caveat within the Land Ordinance that allowed

occupied land to be "incorporated into a collective pool of 'National Lands'" if it remained

unregistered.

Stripping local communities of their rights to land under the auspice of 'guardianship' did not

go unnoticed. Local communities enraged and felt the Ahidjo regime was unjustly expropriating

their land (Fisiy 1992:41). In what could be read as an attempt to assuage the concerns of

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[80] The 1974 Land Ordinances: Ordinance No 74-1 of 6 July 1974 establishing rules governing land tenure; Ordinance No. 74-2 of 6 July 1974 establishing rules governing State lands; Ordinance No. 74-3 of 6 July 1974 concerning the expropriation procedure (Fisiy 1992:38).

[81] Individuals with documented titles to land were not automatically grandfathered into the new land tenure system. Starting from August 5, 1974, the state gave titleholders ten years to convert their previous land deeds to meet the requirements of the new titling system. Failure to make the transition within the ten-year period was tantamount to forfeiting their land to the state (Fisiy 1992:41).

[82] Original text in French is as follows: "*L'Etat est le gardien de toutes les terres. Il peut, à ce titre, intervenir en vue d'en assurer un usage rationnel ou pour tenir compte des impératifs de la défense ou des options économiques de la nation*" (Section 1(2) of Ordinance 74-1).

Cameroonians, the state adjusted their unilateral policy of expropriating all unregistered land. Individuals offering evidence to the state that their occupation of unregistered land was initiated prior to August 5, 1974 were allotted a ten-year window to register their land. However, should individuals fail to title the land during that period, the land would be incorporated into 'National land'[83] (Fisiy 1992:41-2).

Forty years after the Cameroonian government enacted the 1974 Land Ordinances, less than 2% of land in Cameroon has been titled. Effectively, the state retains control over the vast majority of the land. The complexity and costs associated with the land titling process have contributed to this low percentage.[84] It is in the urban centers where land titling has become pervasive (See African Development Bank 2009; World Bank 2014; Hobbs 1998; Nguiffo and Djeukam 2008; Kazianga and Masters 2006).

Though the 1974 Land Ordinances remain in effect, they have not entirely supplanted customary land tenure regimes. For Mbororo residing in the NW, customary land tenure has proven to be quite challenging. Customary land tenure is "sustained by the community, not by the national state or national law" (Wiley 2010:42). 'Community', in terms of customary land tenure, "has a *linked social and spatial basis*" (Ibid., author's italics). A community may refer to an ethnic group and its territory or even one particular settlement. Yet more often than not, it is at the level of the village that community is operationalized. And it is the community that "exercises jurisdiction, determines right to land and resources" over a particular area (Wiley 2010:42). Customary land tenure continues

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[83] Local inhabitants and communities struggled to meet the requirement of prior occupation (construction of homes, buildings) or evidence of land exploitation (i.e. farming and animal rearing) in order to initiate the land titling process. The state refuted any claims of customary ownership unless they could spot visible signs of exploitation and declared that unexploited land under customary ownership prior to 1974 could not be titled (Nguiffo et al 2009:10). Such a distinction barred communities from titling unoccupied land that was nonetheless instrumental to the community (U.S. AID n.d.). An entire different procedure was set up for titling land that was deemed occupied after 1974. Individuals and communities desiring to title such land could do so only if they provided a detailed development project.
[84] The 1974 Land Ordinance is perceived as largely unsuccessful on account of the duration of the process (average 6.3 years) and the cost (Firmin-Sellers and Sellers 1999; Fisiy 1992). As of 2008, only 125,000 land certificates demonstrating legal ownership – as outlined in the 1974 Land Ordinance – had been issued (U.S. AID n.d.:3).

to flourish in the NW. Considered outsiders and not members of any Grassfielder 'community', Mbororo have virtually no possibility of gaining possession of land or other resources (i.e. water). In the case of the NW, customary land tenure trumps the 1974 Land Ordinances.

Part of what has motivated Mbororo migration from the NW to the east is the absence in the latter region of any customary land tenure regime prohibiting strangers (i.e. Mbororo) from possessing land. With cash in hand, Mbororo are purchasing land and almost immediately utilizing the land in very visible and recognizable ways, constructing either farms, businesses, or residential dwellings. Wealthier Mbororo ensure their ownership by registering their property with MIDNAP. As Wiley (2010:25) has noted, "legal security of ownership exists only for the rural minority who have secured registration of their houses and farms". However, legal security can be obtained to some extent if occupancy – the building on and clearing of land – can be demonstrated (Ibid.). It is only since the mid 2000s that Gbaya residents have begun to question the buying and selling of land to Mbororo residents. And only recently have they begun to invoke their status as natives in an attempt to take back land they had sold. This has become a very difficult task.

The Occupation and Production of Land in Mandjou: Biri and his Terrain

In the weeks following Adama's horrifying accident in February 2010, Biri turned down Al Hadji Alim's frequent requests to chauffeur him to and from Douala for business. With Adama gone, Biri worried about leaving Maimouna in charge of the household. Following Adama's departure, Maimouna became increasingly volatile. On more than one occasion Maimouna threatened to leave Biri and return to her father's compound. Adama's absence severely impacted Maimouna since the household responsibilities now fell squarely on her shoulders. Previously she and Adama had shared household tasks.

It was late one evening, well past 10:00 p.m., in mid-April 2010 when Biri invited me into his parlour to chat. Over two steaming cups of chai Biri provided me with an update on Adama's prognosis and the new timetable for Adama's return to Mandjou. I thanked Biri for the update and then excused myself. I was halfway across the room when Biri asked me if I would be interested in accompanying him to his small farm the following morning. His question took me by surprise since, until that very moment, I had no idea Biri was involved in agriculture. I assured Biri that I would be available to travel with him in the morning but asked if he could tell me a bit more about the events that had led to tomorrow's proposed visit. I remember telling him, "I had no idea you were interested in becoming a farmer." He laughed and then invited me to re-take my seat on the couch. For the next hour and half, he provided me with the backstory that had led to his involvement in agriculture.

Biri arrived in Mandjou in August 2009 with his family in tow. After only one week, Al Hadji Alim was taking Biri to meet Gbaya farmers who were eager to sell off parcels of their land to Mbororo. Al Hadji Alim encouraged Biri to purchase land as soon as possible. He was fond of telling Biri, "the price will only go up…if you stay silent another Mbororo will speak". Having spent much of his life being chased off land, Biri was hesitant, and to some extent even fearful, to engage in land negotiations with Gbaya farmers. Al Hadji Alim's encouragement helped to assuage Biri's anxieties and within a few weeks he had located potential farmland. Biri was still a relative newcomer to Mandjou at that point. During our discussion, he acknowledged that his status as a 'stranger' could potentially jeopardize the land transaction. It was with this thought in mind that Biri chose to have Al Hadji Alim facilitate the land transaction.

Thus, began a protracted negotiation between Paul – a retired Gbaya carpenter, self-identified native son of Mandjou, and fluent Fulfulde speaker – and Al Hadji Alim. After nearly four months of discussion, Al Hadji Alim had managed to secure what he believed to be a 'very good price' for

123

farmland. Biri was left almost entirely out of the negotiation process. In fact, Biri's first interaction with Paul was virtual, via a text message. In that first message Paul acknowledged his acceptance of Biri's counter offer of 100,000 CFA. Within minutes after receiving the text, Biri placed a call to Al Hadji Alim and informed him of the great news. Al Hadji Alim's immediate reaction was to gather funds and complete the transaction.

One month later, Al Hadji Alim drove Biri on his motorbike to Paul's compound, located along the perimeter of Mandjou. After exchanging the requisite greetings, Biri handed Paul the bill of sale to sign. Obtaining Paul's signature was critical since it signaled his approval of the land transaction and transferred possession of the property to Biri. Paul signed the bill of sale and handed it back to Biri. Al Hadji Alim then withdrew the cash and handed it to Paul, who took a few minutes to verify the amount. Less than an hour after arriving at Paul's compound, Biri and Al Hadji Alim were en route to the MINDAP office in Bertoua. It was not yet noon and Biri was eager to file his paperwork as soon as possible.

With the land transaction behind him and his land registration application filed (for another 30,000 CFA), Biri was impatient to move ahead with his plans to transform his terrain into a highly productive farm. There was much work to be done before the planting of crops could even be considered. To access his property was, in itself, an arduous task. More than once Biri had to cut a small path through dense plant matter in order to reach the edge of his land. Left unattended, the foliage grew back. It did not take Biri long to realize that while the investment in land was a wise decision, finding time to organize the terrain was impossible. If Biri wanted to ensure a plentiful corn harvest by next season, he would need to enlist the aid of local Gbaya who could clear the wild vegetation and set up a physical perimeter (plant fruit-bearing trees). The final step would be to select a good strain of corn and plant the seeds.

After eliciting recommendations, Biri hired Jean Pierre, a local Gbaya farmer who supplemented his income with farming jobs. Biri was explicit in his instructions to Jean Pierre. The land would first need to be cleared with a machete. In order to enrich the soil, Jean Pierre would need to orchestrate the burning of the land.[85] Biri proposed that the work be accomplished over a one month period. Nearly two months later, Jean Pierre 'beeped' Biri. The job was finished and the field was ready to be planted.

It was nearly midnight before Biri finished recounting the events leading up to tomorrow morning's visit to his farm. From our late-night conversation, I suspected that Biri was anxious about what he would encounter during tomorrow's morning visit. Several weeks had passed since Jean Pierre had informed Biri that he had finished with the preparation of the land. It was unlike Biri to have waited for nearly a month to verify Jean Pierre's update. However, Jean Pierre's news coincided with Adama's accident and consequently, Biri prioritized Adama's recovery over that of his farm.

Shortly after 7:00 a.m. the next morning, Biri, his son Kadafi and I left home and headed to Biri's farm. My conversation with Biri the night before had led me to believe that his terrain was located less than a kilometer outside of the edge of Mandjou. As I would soon learn, though the farm was in close proximity to town it was fairly inaccessible. Even with Al Hadji Alim's sturdy jeep, Biri was careful to avoid the deep crevices in the road. We headed east, on the main road bisecting Mandjou, for a few kilometers before Biri made a sharp right and continued down a very narrow dirt path. Within a matter of minutes the jeep was engulfed in a sea of greenery. Biri was left with no choice but to cut the engine. Slightly annoyed at the inconvenience of having to continue on foot, he threw open the jeep door and told me to grab my camera. He motioned to Kadafi, his

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[85] My description of the land prior to the burning is based almost entirely on Biri's memories. However, I encountered similar conditions while traveling outside of Mandjou, in areas that were often near areas with heavier vegetation.

second oldest son who was on a break from his university studies, to grab a machete from the trunk. For the next twenty minutes Kadafi led the way, cutting a wide footpath for us with the machete.

The faint smell of scorched earth mixed with decaying plant life was the only indication that we were approaching Biri's territory. With one final slash of the machete, we had arrived. If the forest behind us was considered to be 'full', then Biri's farm was surely empty. There were a few blackened clumps of vegetable matter. The one-month delay, between Jean Pierre's 'beep' and Biri's visit, had been enough for some greenery to push through the blackened soil. For the next half hour, we walked along the darkened edges of the plot and discussed Biri's next steps in terms of selecting crops to farm and finding a Gbaya farmer willing to manage the field. Biri was already contemplating the expansion of the terrain. Imagine for a moment one lone empty square surrounded on all sides by squares that remained obscured by dense vegetation. Biri's farm was the empty square and the surrounding territory belonged to Paul. With some prodding and strategic negotiation, Biri was hopeful that he could convince Paul to sell additional parcels of his land.

Encouraged by Jean Pierre's progress, Biri offered him additional work. Over the next few weeks Biri would need the soil to be turned in preparation for planting corn. Biri also requested that Jean Pierre find a local farmer willing to offer Biri a good deal on corn seeds. A few days later Biri traveled to Douala, confident that Jean Pierre would take care of his territory in his absence.

One early evening nearly two weeks later, I heard the distinctive honking of Al Hadji Alim's jeep. Biri had returned to Mandjou after spending nearly ten days chauffeuring Al Hadji Alim in Douala from one business appointment to the next. I was the only one home at the time, as Maimouna was at madrasa, the children were at school and Adama was still recovering from her injuries in Ashong. I ran to open the gates. Biri drove into the courtyard and exited the vehicle. Offering a slight nod as I closed the gates, he made his way towards his sitting room. Knowing that

126

Biri was likely worn out from the long journey I brought him a thermos of tea from earlier in the day along with a few lumps of sugar. Biri, deep in thought, took little notice of my presence when I entered the sitting room and placed the tea on his small coffee table. I was about to return to my room when I noticed his soiled blue tunic. From below the knee to the hemline of the tunic there were large splashes of mud. I asked Biri what had happened. My question startled him and he glanced downwards. He stared at the tunic for a few moments before returning my gaze. Biri was seething with rage but retained his composure as he explained the series of events that had led to his dishevelled state.

The evening before, Biri picked up Al Hadji Alim from the Doula International Airport.[86] He drove through the night and made it to Mandjou shortly after 8:00 a.m. With time to spare, Biri asked Al Hadji Alim if it would be possible for them to take a slight detour and check on Biri's terrain. While narrating the story, Biri interjected that during his ten-day absence he could not shake this general feeling of uneasiness. Jean Pierre's silence, not even one 'beep', contributed to his anxiety. Biri's concerns were warranted. With the sun well past the horizon, it was evident that Jean Pierre had done nothing in his absence. Unwanted vegetation was pushing through the darkened soil.

For the next few hours Biri tried to reach Jean Pierre but to no avail. The automatic message 'the number you are trying to reach is not available, please try again later' was the only response. Biri slumped further into his chair as he recounted the last few hours. 'Perhaps Jean Pierre fell sick…maybe someone in his family…maybe he is traveling on your behalf to locate corn seed…' I felt compelled to propose these potential justifications in an attempt to steer Biri from assuming the

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[86] Biri drove Al Hadji Alim to the Doula International Airport every month. Wealthy businessmen like Al Hadji Alim preferred private over public transportation since it reduced their travel time.

worst. When I finished generating rationales, Biri shook his head in disbelief at my naivety. 'Fadi, Jean Pierre has taken my money and returned to the bush…this is what Gbaya do.'

Jean Pierre's disappearance was only the start of Biri's troubles with his land. Only a few weeks later he learned that Paul had filed a complaint with the Mandjou's *chef du village* alleging Biri had participated in an illegal land transaction. Biri, argued Paul, had submitted an incomplete dossier to MINDAP. Compulsory documents in the dossier, including attestations from the village chief and witnesses to the land transaction, were missing. Additionally, in his complaint, Paul identified himself as a native of Mandjou who was therefore justified in having his terrain returned. Strangers had no right to Gbaya land. Biri did not take the news well.

I listened quietly as Biri complained bitterly about Paul's decision to lodge a complaint against him. Though Paul's actions angered Biri, there was also a general disbelief that Paul would have chosen to proceed with a fraudulent claim in the first place. It had not always been like this, Biri explained to me. "Mbele Simon [Mandjou chief in the late 1970s] welcomed Mbororo". [87] According to Biri, Mbele Simon had no qualms about giving away land to Mbororo migrants because he was confident their settlement would encourage development in Mandjou. Biri recounted how Mandjou had been uninhabitable when the first Mbororo settlers arrived. [88] There was nothing but forest and wild animals. Now there were shops and running water, and many compounds in Mandjou – including his own – had electricity. Mbororo presence and their efforts to physically transform the town had created the Mandjou of today.

As angry as Biri was, he was relieved to be dealing with the dispute in Mandjou as opposed to the NW. Had a Grassfielder lodged a complaint against Biri, there was little chance that Biri would

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[87] Mbororo and Gbaya frequently repeated this statement to me when the conversation veered towards the history of Mandjou.

[88] To clarify, Biri was a recent settler to Mandjou and could thus not testify to these physical changes. His characterization of Mandjou as 'wild' prior to the arrival of Mbororo settlers is based on the stories older Mbororo residents had told him.

receive a favorable result. Strong political leadership within Grassfielder chieftaincies, combined with the demographic strength of the Grassfielders, has proven a continual challenge for Mbororo residents in terms of negotiating any permanent access to natural resources or political representation. The absence of these obstacles has been a factor in why Mbororo from the NW moved to the East Region and specifically to the town of Mandjou. First, traditional Gbaya leaders carry little authority amongst other Gbaya. Second, much of the land in the East Region is unoccupied (i.e. devoid of visible human exploitation, though Gbaya often live there). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the selling of land has become a lucrative source of income for Gbaya – an ethnic group whose primary economic livelihood is subsistence farming.

Lucrative as the selling of land might be, Biri's narrative exposed the palpable tension that I witnessed between Mbororo and Gbaya during my fieldwork in Mandjou. Many of Mbororo residing in Mandjou were former NW inhabitants who had left that region because of their exclusion from the status of 'native' and the rights of ownership that came with it. By contrast, Mandjou and the surrounding area offered Mbororo like Biri a simplified process to establish permanent possession of land. As Mbororo presence has grown, Gbaya have begun to invoke their status as 'native' in an attempt to take back land previously sold to Mbororo. Challenges to the land titling process, as the chief of Nguelebok did with Al Hadji Alim, and Paul did with Biri, have taxed Mbororo. Grassfielders also used strategies that engaged the national bureaucracy in an attempt to prevent Mbororo from gaining permanent access to land. It is thus all the more surprising that such techniques have done little to slow down Mbororo settlement in and attachment to Mandjou.

Conclusion

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the concept of belonging in the Cameroonian context is entangled with the idea of being first, i.e. first-comer or native to the land. Invoking the first-comer

narrative to assert one's claim to land, contends Lentz (2005:157), is a "widespread strategy to legitimate land rights in West Africa". Nevertheless, argues Lentz (2013:18-9), the appeal of the such a narrative is that it is "extremely malleable". Kopytoff argues that the privileged status attributed to first-comers can be obtained for those without historical links to place if they are able to establish social and political order (Kopytoff 1987:56 and See Murphy and Bledsoe 1987). It is exactly this transition from a notion of belonging premised upon historical claims to one grounded in creating order, in the form of building and developing land, that I believe has happened in Mandjou. What is perhaps most interesting is that this transition challenges the current framing of belonging in Cameroon.

Thus far I have presented ways in which Mbororo have begun to articulate a kind of belonging based on a series of physical actions: buying and titling land and clearing and farming land. In the next chapter, I continue to explore the ways in which Mbororo are attaching themselves to Mandjou and establishing their belonging based on an entirely new set of conditions, all of which minimize the importance of first settlement/occupation. I describe several built structures that I argue have been critical in redefining Mandjou as a Mbororo town. These same structures have dramatically altered the way in which Gbaya and Mbororo move through space and have led to Gbaya being physically displaced from the center of Mandjou. Moving through the town of Mandjou, it is apparent that Gbaya are not invisible: they are simply no longer there. Though Gbaya exclusion is a seemingly innocuous by-product of Mbororo building, the process of disembedding Gbaya works to substantiate Mbororo claims that Mandjou belongs to them.

Fences, Madrasas and Milk bars: The Building of a Mbororo Town

> Places and spaces shape our actions, interactions and sense of meaning, emotions and identity. The built world we inhabit tells us narratives, stories about ourselves and the societies that we live in, and it simultaneously influences what we do or do not do through structures that can be described by the most mundane of terms: 'walls', 'doors', 'windows', 'corridors' and 'steps' (Dale and Burrell 2008:43).

Tired after spending the afternoon circulating through the Bamenda market in search of African textiles, Madiya, a Mbororo woman in her 40s, started dinner preparations later than usual. While sitting around the wood fire adding kindling, Madiya presented me with her afternoon purchase. From her small bag, she withdrew six yards of light pink fabric with patterned beadwork sewn on and thin gauze overlay. "It's beautiful", I exclaimed. A client had commissioned Madiya to design and sew an outfit for an upcoming Mbororo wedding. After carefully re-folding the material and placing it back in the bag, Madiya called out to her youngest to carry the bag to the living room before focusing her energies on dinner preparation.

The mixture of water and corn flour – ten minutes earlier Madiya had added several cups of sifted flour to the pot – had reached a boil. Madiya reached for her large wooden pestle and used it to 'turn' the mixture.[89] Having reached the right consistency, Madiya scraped off the bits and pieces of corn fufu that clung to the wooden stick before taking the pot off the fire. With dinner almost ready, Madiya turned to me asked about my recent trip to Mandjou.

I struggled to articulate the differences between Mandjou and Bamenda. Six weeks could not possibly be enough time to formulate any concrete ideas. I also worried that any small observation I presented would offend Madiya. I offered a rather vague response of 'it was not what I

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[89] The process of 'turning' involves pushing the wooden pestle into the thick porridge and making continuous circular motions to prevent the contents on the bottom of the pot from burning.

expected…very different….". Madiya pressed and I wracked my brain to think of something more

concrete that would meet with her approval. 'Many Mbororo women were enrolled in

madrasa…more than I expected…and Mbororo women stay in the home…They don't move

around like the Mbororo women here [Bamenda]'. Madiya chuckled softly to herself before

returning to the task of removing the steaming corn fufu from the blackened pot and placing it into

to smaller serving dishes. Taking a moment to wipe the sweat off her brow, she turned to me and

commented, "in the East, Mbororo are strong Muslims, not like here". Uncertain of how to

respond, I nodded my head in agreement and followed Madiya out of the kitchen. Dinner was about

to be served and Madiya was focused on getting her children fed so that she could start work on the

wedding ensemble she had been commissioned to design.

It was nearing the end of March 2010 when I waved goodbye to Madiya and her children and

headed back to Mandjou. While most of the passengers of the night bus were fast asleep I was

replaying my conversation with Madiya and her characterization of Mbororo residents in Mandjou as

"strong Muslims". Unbeknownst to me at the time, Madiya's description of Mbororo residents in

Mandjou was a far better fit in terms of describing Mandjou; a conclusion that I formulated only

after several months of fieldwork. In her powerful and evocative ethnography, *An Enchanted Modern:*

Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon, Laura Deeb (2006:101-2) acknowledges feeling "unprepared"

in terms of the extent to which "[r]eligion simply permeated everything. It was a palpable, yet

unobtrusive, presence in streets, on balconies, in cafés, kitchens and *jam'iyyas*, at women's morning

visits and men's evening conversations, and with families sitting around the television at night. It

was visible in the way people spoke, in their greetings, negotiations, and farewells". Deeb's

assessment of religion being embedded within the aural and visual landscape resonated with my

experience in Mandjou; Islam was everywhere. With every step walked through Mandjou, religion

was palpable. My initial surprise stemmed from having previously read multiple ethnographies in

which Mbororo were portrayed as having weak ties to Islam. There was an incongruence between how Mbororo depicted in the written form and my observations during fieldwork in Mandjou.

Introduction:

Neither pious nor religious are adjectives utilized in ethnographic descriptions of Mbororo. Mbororo themselves were often the first to suggest that their religious convictions were lax. Yet Mbororo residents in Mandjou found little difficulty in achieving recognition from Mbororo in other parts of Cameroon as pious or "good Muslims". I begin this chapter with an exploration of Mbororo efforts to alter the physical landscape of Mandjou vis-à-vis the inclusion of madrasas, fences and milk bars. It is the visibility of these structures, I argue, that has strengthened Mbororo credibility as belonging to Mandjou. For Mbororo, the types of structures being built throughout Mandjou have the added benefit of encouraging their piety. It is through my illustration of the spatial reorganization of the town of Mandjou that I explore how these modifications have impacted Gbaya. Mandjou is a transformed town that bears little resemblance to the Gbaya village it once was; scattered mud huts with a population dependent almost entirely on subsistence farming. The exploration of the "how" lends itself to uncovering "systems of exclusion that are hidden or naturalized" (Low 2011:391).

Part 1: Enclosures, barriers and fences: public expressions of Mbororo piety

Early one morning in April 2010, I stopped by to check on the progress of Al Hadji Kareem's home renovations. A close friend of Biri's and fellow native of Bamenda, Al Hadji Kareem had moved his entire family to Mandjou in early 2009. The relocation to Mandjou had been costly and had left Al Hadji Kareem with little in savings. Consequently, his first residence was a rental and located well outside of the center of town. Six months later, with the financial backing of Biri and

133

several other Mbororo friends, Al Hadji Kareem purchased a house closer to the center of town. Eager to relocate his family into their new home, Al Hadji Kareem rushed to install a barrier separating his homestead from that of his neighbors. It was a decision he had come to regret in the months that followed. After a particularly heavy rainfall, one entire section of the fence – woven palm fronds reaching a height of seven feet – collapsed. Only a few weeks later a young Gbaya inadvertently crashed his motorbike into the fence and nearly ran over Al Hadji Kareem's youngest child. On multiple occasions, Al Hadji Kareem caught young men peering through the small gaps in the fence. It was the latter action that Al Hadji Kareem found most alarming and provided him with the impetus to move forward with his plan – previously only tentative – to install a more permanent wall that would provide greater security for his family and enhance his family's privacy.[90]

When I arrived early that April morning, Al Hadji Kareem stood on the edge of his covered veranda watching silently as a Gbaya worker unloaded mud bricks from the back of a pick-up truck into a large wheelbarrow. Once full, he pushed the wheelbarrow to the other side of the compound, emptied it and returned to the truck to begin the process again. In the meantime, another Gbaya worker was laying the brick. Seeing me at the front gates, Al Hadji Kareem hurried over to greet me. He then took one final look at the progress of the workers before inviting me to have tea in his salon. Al Hadji Kareem was unusually chatty and eager to discuss the on-going modifications to his home. Beaming, Al Hadji Kareem informed me that the wall would likely be completed in the next week. When I offered my congratulations, Al Hadji Kareem asked me if I had ever traveled to Bertoua to visit Al Hadji Razzi's compound. Nodding my head, Al Hadji Kareem explained that it was his intention to replicate wall surrounding Al Hadji Razzi's massive two-story compound. Not a wealthy businessman like Al Hadji Razzi, Al Hadji Kareem had substituted cement for mud bricks.

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[90] Many of the Mbororo men I interviewed, when asked to identify justifications for investing in the construction of an enclosure, provided responses that echoed those of Al Hadji Kareem: ensuring the safety of women during their absence, protecting their home from potential thieves, and limiting the visibility of household activities to the public.

When I left nearly an hour later, Al Hadji Kareem was still mulling over whether to install razor wiring or shards of glass on the top of the wall and had yet to decide whether to install a metal or wooden gate.

At the time of my conversation with Al Hadji Kareem, I had grown accustomed to the high fences that circumscribed every Mbororo residence. The period of adjustment was not without a few hiccups. In the first weeks of fieldwork the unending barriers were intimidating, and as I made my way through narrow alleys, I grappled with claustrophobia. When I got lost – a regular occurrence during my first month in Mandjou – enclosures prevented me from getting "un-lost". Yet an unexpected visit to the home of Aliou, Biri's 'farm hand', was the first indication that fences were not a feature of all Mbororo homes in Mandjou.

With the legal dispute over the 2.5 acres of land behind him, by late July 2010 Biri was ready to move forward with his plans to develop a thriving farm that would provide an additional source of income. With neither the skillset nor the time to work the land, Biri was in desperate need for someone with farming experience. Biri was adamant, however, that he would not work with any Gbaya since he felt as though they could not be trusted. Fortunately for Biri, he met Aliou.

Having fled the conflict in the Central African Republic in mid 2007, Aliou was a recent arrival to Mandjou. He and his young family – two co-wives and four children under five – had settled in Mandjou with little more than the clothes on their back. Aliou, explained Biri, was a Mbororo from the "bush". A series of unfortunate events had decimated his once thriving herd. Firstly, Aliou had lost cattle to highway bandits on more than one occasion. Additionally, a severe bout of malaria had ravaged three of his children. Aliou had been forced to sell several cattle to pay for the medical care needed in their recovery. With his herd in ruin and few alternatives in terms of economic livelihoods, Aliou relocated his family to Mandjou. It was only a few months after arriving in Mandjou that Aliou received his first short-term contract from a Mbororo landowner to clear the

vegetation from a recently purchased plot.[91] Over the next two years, Aliou's short term contracts with Mbororo landowners provided him with a steady income – enough to cover his children's school fees and buy a small plot of land on the edge of Mandjou. Biri's offer of employment was the first long-term contract Aliou had received and it would be to both clear the land and manage the development of the farm in Biri's absence.

Late in the summer of 2010, Biri and I were driving to Biri's farm to check on Aliou's progress. Along the way, we passed his residence and I was surprised to see that his home was without a barrier or fence. In fact, from the passenger side of the jeep I could see one of Aliou's wives washing clothes in the courtyard. I asked Biri if there was a particular reason for Aliou's residence to be without an enclosure. Biri speculated that Aliou may not have yet acquired the financial means to build a fence. Pausing for a moment, Biri dismissed his previous justification. The most likely scenario, conceded Biri, was that Aliou was unaware of the importance of constructing a fence; a result of his limited Islamic knowledge. Had Aliou received religious instruction, explained Biri, he would have understood that fences protected Mbororo women's modesty and ensured a safe distance between men and women.

In a recent literature review exploring the application of Islamic principles in the spatial organization of the Muslim home, Zulkeplee Othman, Rosemary Aird, and Laurie Buys (2015:12) identified modesty, hospitality and privacy as religious values that had a "significant effect on the design of Muslim homes". Privacy, according to Othman et al. (Ibid.:15), remains the primary factor that influences how Muslims will spatially organize their living spaces. Citing the work of Al-Kodamy in their review, Othman et al. (Ibid.) argue that ensuring visual privacy "is a predominant design objective to ensure the safety and privacy of female family members within Muslim homes".

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[91] Aliou was somewhat of an anomaly in terms of his skill set since, unlike most nomadic Mbororo, he had extensive farming experience.

136

Several "design interventions" (i.e. position and location of the entrance door, controlling the height of buildings, etc.) help to achieve a greater sense of privacy. Yet the most prominent feature of any Islamic home and one that best protects the privacy of its residents is the high wall surrounding the home (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997:185). So too for most Mbororo settlers in Mandjou, fences were the most visible component of their home. Yet for these same Mbororo, I argue, circumscribing their homes with large barriers had the added benefit of serving as a testament to their religious convictions and to publicly disavow their association with a past in which they were decried as "un-Islamic".

Section I: Islamicization and Mbororo

Once hired, Aliou's first task was to build a six-foot fence that would surround Biri's plot and delineate the land from that of his neighbors. Knowing that the work would be difficult for Aliou to complete on his own, Biri asked his son Kadafi to assist. Unfortunately for both Aliou and Kadafi, their work on the fence coincided with the start of Ramadan (the evening of August 10th 2010). For the next three weeks, Kadafi trekked daily to the farm and worked for several hours alongside Aliou. Though Kadafi never complained, the intensity of the physical labor coupled with the month long fast took a toll on his health. Kadafi's former thin frame was now bordering on skeletal.

On a particularly humid afternoon in early September 2010, only a few days before the end of Ramadan, Kadafi returned home early. Biri's home was chaotic since the women of the household (Biri's second wife Maimouna, his two teenaged daughters and myself) were busy preparing food for the celebration that would follow the close of Ramadan. Thus no one took notice when Kadafi slipped through the front gate and headed for Biri's parlor. It was only by chance – I passed through the parlor to collect a notebook – that I saw Kadafi's slight figure prostrate on the couch. When I called out to Kadafi it took several minutes for him to rouse; he looked terrible. Without thinking I

137

hurried to the kitchen and quickly heated breakfast leftovers.[92] Minutes later I placed the tray of food

and drink in front of Kadafi and waited for him to take the first bite. Looking up at me, Kadafi

politely declined and reminded me that he needed to wait until the sun set before he could break the

fast. It was hard for me to shake Kadafi's refusal to break the fast even when his health appeared to

be in danger. Kadafi's determination to not break the fast was in striking contrast to the way in

which Mbororo were often characterized; limited in their Islamic knowledge and lacking in piety.

Fasting is not a requirement of Ramadan. Moreover, an individual in poor health is under no

obligation to participate in the fast. Though Kadafi was well aware of the fact that his illness would

have been a sufficient justification to break the fast, he refused. Having conducted fieldwork in

Mandjou for the month of Ramadan in 2010 and 2011, I observed situations similar to that of

Kadafi. Mbororo men and women, who were under no obligation to participate in the fast due to

on-going illnesses or medical conditions, were vocal in their participation and could not be

persuaded to reduce their participation. I was left with the impression that the visibility of one's

suffering communicated one's devotion to being a pious Muslim.

Weeks later and several kilos heavier, Kadafi and I talked at length about Mbororo and their

engagement with Islam. Having lived in the north of Cameroon during his university studies, Kadafi

was aware of the stereotype that Mbororo were Muslim in name only. He stated:

> Tous les Mbororo on recu l'Islam comme un héritage. C'est à dire, les Mbororos sont
> nés dans l'Islam. Ils ont vu leurs parents, grands parents et même leurs ancêtres
> pratiqués l'Islam…Les Mbororos ont toujours priés, jeunes, font la zakat sans avoir
> reçu l'enseignement.

Though Kadafi spoke these words with great confidence, his characterization of Mbororo was

in stark contrast with the way in which ethnographers have often depicted Mbororo. Charles Frantz

(1993:23), distinguishing between the town and settled Fulbe and their pastoral counterpart, the

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[92] During Ramadan, Mbororo ate breakfast around 4:00 a.m., approximately two hours before dawn.

Mbororo, noted that the Fulbe were perceived to have a stronger "commitment to Islam". Moreover, writes Frantz (Ibid.:22), Fulbe were critical of Mbororo and perceived them to be "noisy, thieving, shameless, dirty, distrustful, ignorant, illiterate, unstable, inefficient, superstitious". According to Burnham (1996:105), Fulbe described Mbororo as "immoral" due to "the great freedom of movement and association enjoyed by Mbororo women, both married and unmarried". Schultz (1984:51) suggests that "[u]rban Muslim Fulbe appear to regard Mbororo'en as a kind of rural 'Pagan' counterpart to themselves". Derrick Stenning (1959:25), an anthropologist working in northern Nigeria during the early 1950s, describes Mbororo as evasive in the expression of religious convictions. Stenning (Ibid.) argues that Mbororo subscribe to "only those forms of Islamic canon law which suited them".[93] Nearly fifty years later, Lucy Davis (1995:220) observed "the influence of Islamic social doctrine upon Mbororo daily life and internal social mechanisms is still rather erratic…there does not appear to be a set of accepted Islamic norms governing Mbororo society".

Kadafi's commentary above not only downplayed depictions of Mbororo as having limited knowledge of Islam, but also characterized Mbororo involvement with Islam as being far more than a recent endeavor. Nevertheless, Kadafi was, admittedly, critical of recent Mbororo arrivals from the Central African Republic and their mistakes when engaged in the genuflection and prostration of prayers. It was usually Mbororo from the "bush" who had no idea of how to pray. According to Kadafi, access to Islamic education was irregular for those Mbororo who continued a mobile way of life. Only through sedentarization would Mbororo deepen their Islamic knowledge and begin to reduce their involvement in everyday practices that did not contribute to their piety.

Several anthropologists employed a similar argument to that of Kadafi; mobility posed a significant challenge to Mbororo access to Islam. Town Fulbe, on the other hand, retained a greater

knowledge of the Qur'an and were more likely to utilize "Islamic rituals, law, and courts" (Frantz 1993:21). Based on his ethnographic research in Meiganga, Philip Burnham (1996:106) writes that sedentarization offered Mbororo men "the opportunity to conduct their lives in a more orthodox Islamic manner. With reduced mobility and increased contact with town Fulbe, Mbororo men were more likely to adopt "Fulbe models of a proper mode of Muslim life" (Ibid.). Town Fulbe, suggests Burnham, encouraged the practice of gender segregation since it was associated with being a religious Muslim. Mbororo were believed to be in direct violation of this practice since their wives sold milk – a female-driven economic activity within Mbororo communities – at local markets. Mbororo female visibility outside of the home, writes Burnham (Ibid.), was "anathema to orthodox Fulbe Muslims". Under pressure from town Fulbe, Mbororo men began to discourage wives from selling milk at local market and install fences as a means of circumscribing women's movements.

Town Fulbe were not the only actors to have influenced the ways in which Mbororo expressed piety. Working with Mbororo communities in the Adamaoua Region from the early 1990s onwards, Virtanen (2013:7) utilizes the example of Mbororo 'traditional dance' to illustrate the sizeable efforts involved in the prohibition of cultural practices deemed to fall "outside the tenets of Islam". *Wamarde* was often a component of Islamic festivities (i.e. the end of Ramadan, an individual's completion of the Hajj, etc.) and national celebrations (i.e. Cameroonian National Day).[94] Present at every *wamarde*, observes Virtanen, were young Mbororo men engaged in drumming and singing. Though the spatial formation of the dancers varied, the dance style of *wamarde*, writes Virtanen (2013:5), was "particularly Mbororo…moving one's upper body jerkily forth and back, as well as spinning quickly round".

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[94] National Day in Cameroon commemorates the May 1972 referendum in which Cameroonians voted for Cameroon to become a unitary state. Prior to the referendum, Cameroon was a federal state.

Since the early 1990s, writes Virtanen (2013:5), *wamarde* became "the target of continuous criticism" from within the Mbororo community. Several of Virtanen's older female Mbororo interlocutors disapproved of the overt sexual nature of the movements and referred to the dance as "*wamarde bordel*" (Ibid.). Aside from community concerns over the provocative dance movements, Mbororo worried about the increase in violence at *wamarde*. The dance was an event in which young male suitors were encouraged to attend and meet their future wives. Verbal exchanges between suitors vying for the hand of the same young Mbororo woman were expected. However, with the consumption of illicit drugs and alcohol on the rise, formerly heated arguments had devolved into violent altercations. "[T]he social problems plaguing the Mbororo dance, as well as the idea shared by many that all phenomena related to it are deeply un-Islamic", argues Virtanen (2013:6), resulted in a reduction of *wamarde* in Adamaoua.

To Virtanen's surprise, Islamic leaders – adamant about eradicating un-Islamic components from Mbororo culture – were not responsible for the reduction of *wamarde*. It was MBOSCUDA, the Mbororo ethnic association, which campaigned to eliminate *wamarde* in an effort to shift "towards a modern Muslim identity" (Virtanen 2013:2). Based on interviews with several MBOSCUDA staff, Virtanen (Ibid.:7) learned that MBOSCUDA approached the practice of *wamarde* as an example of "negative cultures or practices…resulting from an unsuccessful mixing of people's 'limited knowledge' of Islam with their own indigenous culture". MBOSCUDA was thus a critical source in shaping Mbororo religious practices. For members of the MBOSCUDA staff, suggests Virtanen (Ibid.:18), it was "through the eradication of heathen practices" that Mbororo could gain credibility as Muslims.

MBOSCUDA's reach extended to Mandjou. During my fieldwork in Mandjou, I was invited to attend a ceremony in which PLAN International formally donated sewing machines to the Mbororo

141

community.[95] The sewing machines, ear-marked for Mbororo young women, were intended to support a MBOSCUDA initiative to in which young Mbororo women would apprentice with a local tailor and learn to sew. Towards the end of the ceremony, Bouba, the president of AJEMBO (*Association Jeunesse du Est de Mbororo)*, gathered a handful of Mbororo youth (men and women) to dance *wamarde.* Though Bouba succeed in bringing together a few Mbororo youth to showcase *wamarde,* the performance was short-lived. Minutes after the music began; Bouba interjected himself amongst the dancers and signalled the musician to stop playing. Bouba's unexplained actions brought *wamarde* to an abrupt end. Confused about the way in which Bouba halted the performance, I questioned Djamila on the way back to Biri's. Djamila's insight into the situation was illuminating. Unbeknownst to me, a representative from the Mandjou MBOSCUDA office had pulled Bouba aside almost immediately after the Mbororo youth began to dance. The MBOSCUDA employee chastised Bouba for his decision to allow young Mbororo to perform such a highly sexual dance and demanded that he stop it immediately. Djamila concurred with the decision to stop the performance and had, herself refused to participate due to her strong religious convictions.

In addition to MBOSCUDA and town Fulbe, religious education played a role in shaping Mbororo religious beliefs. Oustas Sali, founder and director of the *Madrasa du Mandjou,* was adamant that Islamic education "*a contribué à l'éradication de l'ignorance au sein de la communauté dans la region de l'Est*". For centuries, nomadism prevented Mbororo from regular access to Islamic education. As Mbororo settled, explained Oustas Sali, their engagement with Islam and their knowledge of the faith expanded. Oustas Sali's commentary did not discount Kadafi's claim that Mbororo had always had Islam in their lives. Nevertheless, Oustas Sali associated the everyday practices of newly arrived Mbororo from the "bush" as a reflection of limited access to religious education. Oustas Sali was confident in his distinction between settled Mbororo and those still active as nomadic pastoralists. In

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[95] In chapter five I discuss the events of the "gifting ceremony" in greater detail.

142

terms of adhering to Islamic principles, the latter struggled due to the absence of a strong religious education.

Oustas Sali articulated his concerns about nomadic Mbororo having a limited religious education. According to Oustas Sali, consequently, nomadic Mbororo were far less likely to engage in pious practices, i.e. female seclusion. It is here that I want to tread carefully and point out that my inclusion of Oustas Sali's commentary is in no way an attempt to advocate for a rigid dichotomy in which Mbororo residents in Mandjou are pious and nomadic or "bush" Mbororo as heretics. Talal Asad's powerful essay, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,* is critical of previous anthropological approaches in which Islam is framed as being comprised of "many Islams." If there is to be an "Anthropology of Islam", argues Asad (2009:3), it will not suffice to adopt an approach in which "Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is". However, Asad is wary of the approach taken by other academics in which Islam is characterized as a monolithic unit. In the latter argumentation, any practices falling outside of parameters of Islam are identified as being un-Islamic. Asad (Ibid.:20) asserts that an approach to an anthropology of Islam must neither conceptualize Islam as a "distinctive social structure" nor "a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs and morals". Instead argues Asad (Ibid.,) anthropologists entertaining the idea of writing "an anthropology of Islam" must start from the position that Islam "is a tradition". Yet Asad's concept of "tradition" demands that one think outside of the box and not impede the potential for these "traditions" to be changed over time. As Asad (2009:21) notes, "[a] tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding correct form and purpose of a given practice that has a history and these discourses are related to a past through a future through a present". Asad does not discount practitioners' efforts to achieve coherence in their beliefs which is then expressed in orthodoxy. Yet as appealing as orthodoxy might be, Asad (Ibid.:22) writes that "orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power to

truth". In other words, orthodoxy is not a set of clear cut rules to which Muslims adhere. Orthodoxy emerges in sites where Muslims are responsible for maintaining and adjusting practices and deciding which ones are no longer acceptable (Ibid.:22).

Section II. Building piety through fences: The story of Maimouna

Maimouna was in her early twenties when I first met her on the morning of January 2010. It was shortly after 5:00 a.m. when I stumbled through the doors of Biri's enclosure. Exhausted after the two-day journey from Bamenda I desperately tried to retain the names of Biri's family members as he introduced them to me one by one. Maimouna was the last person to greet me that morning. Biri had to call out her name several times before she peeked her head around a cement pillar and slowly made her way over to where we stood. Biri apologized for her behavior and explained to me that she was not used to *nasara*, i.e. white person. I extended my hand to Maimouna, which she only gingerly accepted after receiving a reprimand – so I learned later – from Biri in Fulfulde.

Maimouna, unbeknownst to me at the time of our introduction, was Biri's distant cousin and his second wife.[96] Like the other members of Biri's family – Adama (first wife), Madina and Djamila (teenage daughters), and Hawou (youngest daughter) – Maimouna was a recent transplant to Mandjou. Unlike Biri, Adama and their children, however, Mandjou was Maimouna's first urban experience. Maimouna had spent the better part of twenty years moving from one temporary settlement to the next along the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. Her marriage to Biri brought many changes to Maimouna's life.

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[96] For the first few months of my research, my verbal communication with Maimouna was limited. I struggled to make myself understood in Fulfulde and she stumbled over vowels in French. Biri's children often facilitated conversations between Maimouna and I. However, as the weeks turned into months, we grew more independent and confident in speaking to one another without the aid of an interpreter. Much of the background information on Maimouna's life before Biri is a composite of conversations and asides that we shared during my fieldwork.

Maimouna's father had a small herd of cattle. His formerly large herd had been dramatically reduced after weathering a catastrophic drought and periodic attacks from bandits. Yet even during the hardest of times, Maimouna's father managed to set aside several liters of milk for his daughters to transform into *pendi* – soured mile with a thinner consistency than yogurt – and later sell at the market. During the rainy season, the most productive period for milk production, Maimouna and her older sister regularly trekked two hours (one way) to the weekly market to sell *pendi*.[97] Market day was the single most exciting day of the week for Maimouna. Prior to departing for the market, Maimouna spent several hours in preparation, i.e. plaiting her hair, selecting and ironing her best outfit, etc. Hours after waving goodbye to their mother, Maimouna and her older sister arrived at the market.

Distance between Mbororo families on the move impinged on daily interactions amongst friends. The market was thus an opportunity for young women to catch up and exchange bits of gossip. Maimouna's father was not particularly keen on allowing his daughters to travel to and from the market Nevertheless, Maimouna's father permitted his daughters to sell *pendi* at the market since the revenue contributed to household purchases and allowed for his daughters to save a bit of money for their own personal items. According to Maimouna, her first big purchase after more than one year of savings had been a second-hand mobile phone. Shortly after purchasing her new phone her father told her that she would be married to Biri.

Days after her marriage to Biri, Maimouna stepped inside Biri's borrowed Jeep Cherokee and began the long and winding journey to Mandjou.[98] Marriage to Biri was not difficult, harder was the struggle for Maimouna to acclimate to life in Mandjou. To be fair, I met Maimouna several months

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[97] *Pendi* was more popular at the market. Fresh milk was brought to the market upon request rather than on a regular basis since the *pendi* sales exceeded than that of fresh milk or *biridam*.

[98] Adama and Biri's children departed Bamenda several days prior to the marriage between Biri and Maimouna. Accompanied by Adama's eldest brother, Adama and her children traveled to Mandjou by public transport. It was Al Hadji Alim who greeted and housed them until the arrival of Biri and his new bride.

after her arrival and she appeared content or at least I was unable to discern any signs of unhappiness. Maimouna was reticent to discuss her adaptation of Mandjou. Rather than directly reject my questions about that period of her life, Maimouna spoke of her childhood and adolescence along the border of Nigeria and Cameroon. After several clever attempts at dodging my questions, I gave up trying to learn more about Maimouna's first weeks and months in Mandjou.[99]

Subsequent conversations with Madina and Djamila, Maimouna's stepdaughters, provided an unflattering depiction of Maimouna during her first months in Mandjou, a possible reason for Maimouna's reticence to talk about that period of her life. According to Djamila and Madina, Maimouna had made everyone's life miserable during her first few months living under Biri's roof. She would often fly into rages and demand Biri let her return to her father's compound. When Biri was not home, Maimouna would hurl insults at Madina and Djamila and refuse to prepare any meals. On several occasions, recalled Madina and Djamila, Maimouna had gone as far as to lock the kitchen door and had refused to divulge the location of the key. It was only with the assistance of a Mbororo neighbor that Madina and Djamila were able to fill their bellies.[100]

The Maimouna I met and with whom I lived for more than year bore little resemblance to the 'crazy' Maimouna that had, for a brief period, terrorized Biri's teenage daughters. Maimouna's mercurial mood swings though legendary, only surfaced occasionally and now were usually her response to what Maimouna associated with 'shameful behavior'. Unfortunately for Djamila and Madina, they were often the target of her vitriol. Biri's daughters were enrolled in secondary school and on weekdays they left home around 7:00 a.m. only to return home in the late afternoon. School

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[99] Due to my limited access to other married Mbororo women, Maimouna became my primary informant within the sub-group of married Mbororo women in Mandjou. Though she initially spoke no French, we communicated in Fulfulde and when necessary I sought out Biri's children to interpret. It was only through my association with Maimouna that I managed to develop contact, though limited, with other married Mbororo women in Mandjou.
[100] Though much of what Djamila and Madina described to me could be easily dismissed as the bitter words of angry teenagers, conversations with neighbors corroborated nearly everything that was said. Biri's walls were high and prevented visual access but did not prevent neighbors from hearing angry shouts being exchanged.

projects and other extracurricular activities provided both daughters with justifications for not returning home directly after school. Maimouna accused Biri's teenage daughters of using schoolwork as a ruse to engage in illicit behavior, i.e. sexual liaisons with male schoolmates. In pursuit of "evidence" to prove that Biri's daughters were participating in shameful activities Maimouna had gone as far as to spy on Madina and Djamila. Since Maimouna rarely left Biri's home, she instructed Hawaou – Biri's youngest daughter aged eight – to accompany Madina and Djamila and report her observations to Maimouna.

Maimouna's efforts to "catch" Madina and Djamila engaging in less than pious acts were sources of great irritation to them. Both confided in me that Maimouna should be the last to hurl accusations of impropriety against anyone considering her limited knowledgeable about Islam. Admittedly, Maimouna's access to religious education during her formative years had been limited. Once settled in Mandjou, however, Biri enrolled Maimouna at a local madrasa. Thus, Maimouna's criticisms of her stepdaughters' behavior were, in part, a reflection of the religious education she received as a student at the local madrasa. Maimouna did not shy away from applying her religious knowledge to assess her own life. Her involvement with milk selling, though an important part of her childhood and adolescence, was not an activity she would now be comfortable pursuing. For Maimouna, participating in milk selling would place her modesty in jeopardy since it involved leaving the home and circulating freely amongst men.

For Maimouna, fences were an extension of the religious education she received at madrasa for they were built structures that encouraged the physical separation of men and women. Gender segregation was an important component of expressing piety for Mbororo residents. As noted above, town Fulbe cited the absence of fences from Mbororo homes as evidence of Mbororo being less than pious. Thus, fences built in Mandjou, like those of Al Hadji Kareem and Biri, contributed

to Mbororo being recognized as having embraced religious ideals and encouraged modifications in the everyday practices of Mbororo – reducing physical interactions with the opposite sex.

Purdah, writes Hanna Papanek (1973:289), "is the word most commonly used for the system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty in much of South Asia". The two most important tools of seclusion are "the physical segregation of living space and the covering of the female face and body (Ibid.:294). The burqua, writes Abu-Lughod (2002:785), is a form of veiling "that has developed as a convention for symbolizing women's modesty or respectability" for communities in South and Central Asia as well as the Indian subcontinent. Veiling, in whichever form it takes, provides a "symbolic separation" between men and women; thus, a woman's modesty remains unimpeachable. Nevertheless, veiling has the capacity to communicate far more than a woman's reserve.

Based on her extensive fieldwork within a Bedouin tribe (Awlad 'Ali') from the late 1970s onwards, Abu-Lughod (1986:161) argues that "veiling communicates deference, but its vocabulary is that of sexuality or chastity". According to Abu-Lughod, women from the community veil to distance themselves from sexual shame. The act of veiling, writes Abu Lughod (Ibid.:162), indicates "a woman's recognition of sexuality's place in the social system and her wish to distance herself from it". Women, suggests Abu-Lughod (Ibid.), are in possession of "the social sense to conform to the system's ideals". This possession is important because it is part of a larger argument in which Abu-Lughod (Ibid.:165) dismisses the characterization of veiling as an indication of women's subordination to men. Citing several village studies in the Pubjab (Pakistan), Papanek (1973:297) acknowledges that the "observation of purdah [wearing of burqua and female seclusion] is a symbol of prestige and fashion".

More than fifteen years after publishing *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society,* Abu-Lughod returns to the subject of veiling in, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?

Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others". Abu-Lughod (2002:786)

charges western academics and the public at large with subscribing to a "reductive interpretation of

veiling of as the quintessential sign of women's unfreedom". Rather than unilaterally condemning

veiling as evidence of the absence of woman's agency, Abu-Lughod (Ibid.:787) reiterates the need

for a greater acknowledgement that cultural differences not only run deep but are also "products of

different histories". In light of Abu-Lughod's 2002, Papanek's discussion on veiling – published

thirty years prior to that of Abu-Lughod – is all the more prescient. Rather than admonishing

cultures in which women wear the burqua, Papanek (1973:295) depicts the burqua as a "liberating

invention" for women. According to Papanek (Ibid,) the burqua acts as "a kind of portable

seclusion", allowing women to move beyond "enclosed living spaces".

Saba Mahmood chooses to circumvent the debate on whether veiling is oppressive when

examining the women's Islamic piety movement in Egypt in an effort interrogate the premise from

which questions of oppression emerge. Mahmood (2005:10) problematizes "the universality of the

desire – central for liberal and progressive thought, and presupposed by the concept of resistance it

authorizes – to be free from relations of subordination and, for women from structures of male

domination". Mahmood (Ibid.:8) argues that ethnographers are complicit in 'locating' or 'finding'

acts of resistance when they may not exist. All women do not necessarily strive for liberation in the

sense of unshackling selves from male oppression.[101] Rather than centering her analysis on the

supposition that veiling is inherently oppressive, Mahmood's examines the ways in which Egyptian

Muslim women depict veiling as a means of encouraging the incorporation of Islamic principles into

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[101] Janice Boddy's 1989 ethnography, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zär Cult in Northern Sudan*, provides a detailed analysis of the zär movement – a predominantly female healing cult in northern Sudan that incorporated Islamic idioms into their practices. Boddy argues that the women's zär cult is a female-driven response to exorcise themselves from the dominant Islamic discourse, dominated entirely by men. "[P]ossession cults provide a foil for mainstream Islam and thereby help to define it" (Boddy 1989:6). Mahmood (2005:8), though complementary of "[t]he ethnographic richnesss" of Boddy's work, challenges the underlying assumption within Boddy's work; seeking out "expressions and moments of resistance that may suggest a challenge to male domination".

149

everyday life. One of Mahmood's informants notes that in their daily activities, Muslim women show "little indication of their religious commitments" (2005:45). Veiling, explains the informant, is an example of a necessary act that will allow for "the cultivation of those bodily aptitudes, virtues, habits, and desires that serve to ground Islamic principles within the practices of everyday living" (Ibid.). It is through veiling, "one learns to cultivate the virtue of modesty in all aspects of one's life" (Ibid.:51).

Lara Deeb's (2006:34) fieldwork during the late 1990s in al-Dahiyya – a community located in southern Beirut – explores the visibility of religious life and illustrates the means by which women engage in particular embodied practices as a means of publicly expressing their personal piety and the spiritual progress of the community.[102] "Bodies form a canvas on which personal piety can be transformed into a subtle public demonstration of faith and/or a louder demonstration of collective identity" (Deeb 2006:103). Veiling is an example of an embodied practice that "carried meaning outside the circles of the devout in the national and international political arenas as well" (Ibid.:128).[103] Women's dress, writes Deeb (2006:111), is arguably "the most visible embodied expression of piety in al-Dahihha, as well as in the Muslim world more generally".

Thus far I have centered my *purdah* discussion on veiling. Yet as Papanek wrote in 1973, the physical segregation of the sexes is the other instrument of *purdah*. With the use of several examples, Papanek illustrates the ways in which spatial organization can reinforce the physical separation of men and women. Public buildings may have separate entrances for women to reduce physical

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[102] Deeb is careful to point out that public expressions of piety are not necessarily an indication of privately being pious. Deeb (2006:221) writes that "[u]ndoubtedly, there were some [residents of al-Dahiyya] who practiced perfect public piety that was not mirrored in their public lives". Some of Deeb's informants bemoaned the normalization of public piety and were concerned that acts of public piety no longer necessitated "the same strength of conviction" (Ibid.:227).
[103] Yet these same personal practices of piety that are expressed publicly can lead to contestations over "details, definitions and delimitations of both personal and public religiosities (Deeb 2006:103). Deeb (Ibid.:102) asserts that her informants believed that religious acts that were "done as part of one's heritage did not 'count' as truly pious acts; instead piety was to stem from an understanding of the 'correct' interpretation of Islam". Thus, it was not enough for an individual to perform public acts of piety, it was necessary to seek out a level of understanding about the practices.

contact with men. Public transportation, i.e. buses and trains, may be equipped with compartments in which only women are permitted to travel. Separate entrances, compartments, curtains, are all materials that limit physical proximity between men and women. In Mandjou, built structures, not veiling, are the most prominent "spatializing device" amongst Mbororo residents in terms of re-enforcing the separation of gender. Fences both encourage pious acts and provide Mbororo men and women with a means of acquiring greater recognition (vis-à-vis visibility) as pious Muslims. Yet the question emerges as to how these built structures impact Gbaya residents.

Section III: The spatial re-organization of Mandjou and the 'problem with fences'

Mayo, a Gbaya woman, was nearing sixty when I first met her. A relative newcomer to Mandjou, Mayo had moved from her husband's home in Kribi (a coastal city with a thriving tourist industry) to Mandjou following his death. Mayo was initially reluctant to resettle in Mandjou but she eventually acquiesced after several months of unrelenting pressure from her eldest daughter, Solange. When I asked Mayo about the source of her hesitation to move to Mandjou, she explained that it was not because Mandjou was unfamiliar to her. She was born and raised in a neighboring village, as were her parents and her grandparents. Additionally, explained Mayo, she was Gbaya and Mandjou was a Gbaya town. What had led to her being quite reluctant to leave Kribi was the possibility of finding herself in a financially insecure position after moving to Mandjou. In Kribi she had relied on selling fried fish at the market to make ends meet. Tourists were willing to pay double and triple what locals paid elsewhere. Mandjou's location in the interior made it unlikely that she would be able to set up shop selling fish.

When Mayo finally did move to Mandjou in 2005, her daughter's husband offered her a small parcel of land to farm that was near the small compound she rented on the outskirts of town. At first, Mayo was happy with her location. The walk between her compound and the farm, less than a

151

kilometer, was manageable and did not aggravate her arthritis (in both knees). Her happiness, however, was short-lived. In a little over a year, several Mbororo families had moved on either side of Mayo's home. It was not their presence that was a source of irritation but rather the fences they constructed. These large enclosures had compromised Mayo's access to her small plot of land.

Getting to her feet slowly, Mayo beckoned me to follow her.[104] Like most Gbaya homes I had visited, the structure itself was built of sun baked mud bricks and had a thatched roof comprised of woven palm leaves. With limited financial resources, Mayo's son-in-law had built a simple one room dwelling. Space was tight, yet Mayo managed to make it work. Every morning Mayo slid her mattress upright against the cool clay wall. Then she moved her sole pieces of furniture – two wooden chairs and table – from the outside veranda to the interior of her home. Mayo's kitchen, three large stones with flattened tops were set in the shape of an equilateral triangle, was located several meters from her front door. When in use, a pot would be balanced atop the stones with a fire ablaze below.

As we stood on the edge of her land, Mayo gingerly pointed out several residences and noted that every home housed a Mbororo family. When I asked her how she knew, Mayo chuckled and stated that the presence of the tall fences was a sure sign that the home belonged to Mbororo. We stood in silence for a few minutes before Mayo indicated the path she used to take to her farm. I understood the problem. Her former route was no longer accessible since it was located within several Mbororo courtyards. With the building of the fences, Mayo had been forced to lengthen the route to her farm by twenty minutes.

For Mayo, fences were an inconvenience, obstacles that forced her to choose an alternative path to her farm. Far more troubling was the proliferation of these structures. Gbaya and Mbororo alike associated fences with pious Mbororo. Therefore, the increase in fences throughout Mandjou was an

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[104] At the start of the interview, Mayo and I were seated inside of her home.

indication that the pious Mboror population was increasing. The presence of these highly visible structures strengthened Mboror physical attachment to Mandjou as well as their claim of "belonging" to Mandjou. With no fences encircling their homes, Christian Gbaya were rendered invisible.

Part II: The building of pious Mboror through Islamic Education

Koranic schools are "[t]he most prevalent provision of Islamic schooling in the West African context" (Anzar 2003:7). Few students enrolled in koranic schools are exposed to a curriculum beyond that of memorizing and transcribing the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the Islamic instruction is critical to "socialize them [Muslim pupils] into the faith, and to teach them their essential duties" (Easton and Peach 1997:10). Koranic schools, though pervasive in Mandjou, provided most students – aged 4-12 – with only a supplemental education. Only on Saturdays did students attend koranic school. Under the watchful eye of a *marabout* (Muslim religious teacher), students spent their Saturday mornings carefully rewriting passages from the Qur'an onto their wooden hand-held tablets. From time to time the marabout circulated to verify students' progress. Once the copying was complete, students read aloud their copy and waited for the marabout's approval before washing the tablet and recopying another koranic passage.

Madrasas are another type of Islamic schooling that provide students with a deeper understanding of the Qur'an, jurisprudence (*fiqu*), the sayings (*hadith)* of the Prophet Muhammad, and the law. Historically madrasas were "institutions of higher learning" but more recently western observers have begun to identify any school – primary, secondary, and advanced – with an Islamic-based curriculum as a madrasa (Blanchard 2006:2). When I first arrived in Mandjou in early 2010, there were two madrasas in operation. Oustas Sali, Biri's close friend and neighbor, founded

Mandjou's first madrasa (*Madrasa du Mandjou*) in 1999.[105] Originally from the village of Mobé (located approximately fifty kilometers northwest of Mandjou), Oustas Sali moved to Garoua (capital of North Region) in his early twenties to begin formal instruction in Islamic studies.[106] Oustas Sali remained in Garoua for fifteen years before returning to his natal village of Mobé in 1991. Having amassed a strong reputation as an Islamic scholar, Oustas Sali had little trouble in securing the financial backing from the Mbororo community to open Mobé's first madrasa.[107]

Three years later, at the urging of distant relatives, Oustas Sali accepted the position of madrasa director in Bawouro, a village in the Central African Republic. According to Oustas Sali, the founder of the Bawouro madrasa had accepted a fellowship to continue his religious studies in Saudi Arabia. Though the founder's departure had been a severe blow to the Mbororo community in Bawouro, Oustas Sali managed to expand enrollment and secure funding to pay the instructors, who had previously worked only as volunteers. Four years after taking over as director of the Bawouro madrasa, Oustas Sali submitted his resignation and moved his entire family to Mandjou.

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[105] There were two madrasas operating in Mandjou when I began fieldwork. After several attempts to set up an interview with Cheik Abakar, founder of *Gabasoul Faida* in 2008, I finally sat down with him in September 2010. The interview provided me with basic information about the school and his thoughts about the building of madrasas in Mandjou (discussed later in this chapter). However, Cheik Abakar was not willing to answer biographical questions (i.e. Where were you born?, How long have you lived in Mandjou?, Where did you received your Islamic education? Etc.). Cheik Abakar also politely turned down my requests to visit his madrasa and sit in on classes. It is likely that Oustas Sali would have also refused to speak with me but I had the benefit of being the guest of Biri, one of Oustas Sali's closest friends in Mandjou. Early on in my fieldwork, Biri spoke to Oustas Sali on my behalf and explained the purpose of my research. Biri made it clear that I had no intention to use my role as a researcher from the West to speak out against Islam. Though I formally interviewed Oustas Sali on two separate occasions, most of the biographical details I have included in this chapter are drawn from multiple conversations with Oustas Sali and Biri during the last six months of fieldwork. Most of these conversations were over dinner in Biri's parlor.

[106] Oustas Sali spent the better part of his childhood and adolescence on the move with his father and his father's herd. Though aware of his father's desire to have his eldest son follow in his footsteps, Oustas Sali had other plans. From an early age Oustas Sali had been drawn to the religious teachings of Islam, yet the continuous shifts in residence had made formalized instruction, i.e. koranic school and madrasa, next to impossible. Oustas Sali's formal Islamic training included the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, the Fiqhou and the Tafsir.

[107] Local fundraising from within the Mbororo community supported the construction of Oustas Sali's *madrasa* in Mobe. It would be Mbororo community members that would once again finance Oustas Sali's *madrasa* in Mandjou. On occasion, however, international funding was directed to support Oustas Sali's *madrasa* in Mandjou. During my fieldwork, I was invited to celebrate a book donation from the Turkish embassy. Over two hundred copies of the same book – an educational book about the Qur'an geared for children aged 7 to 12 – were distributed to Mbororo women, most of whom were illiterate.

Once when I had asked Oustas Sali what had prompted his decision to leave the post of madrasa director, he explained that he had dedicated his life to providing Mbororo with access to religious instruction to develop their "*connaissance du Islam*". According to Oustas Sali, Mbororo residents in Bawouro had a thriving madrasa and would do fine without him as director. With no madrasa and a growing Mbororo population, a town like Mandjou, stated Oustas Sali, was in far greater need of his services.

When Biri first introduced me to Oustas Sali in January 2010, *Madrasa du Mandjou* had been open for a decade and was thriving. Most of the enrolled students were Mbororo women, ranging from late teens to graying grandmothers. The focus on Mbororo women was intentional. Oustas Sali, an active member of MBOSCUDA, was an ardent supporter of the organization's education platform advocating gender parity. Since the 1990s, MBOSCUDA had mounted a public campaign urging Mbororo parents to send their daughters to school (MBOSCUDA 2017).[108] It had taken decades, admitted Oustas Sali, but Mbororo parents had begun to listen and were no longer refusing to send their daughters to school. However, for adult Mbororo women – likely married with children – there was little chance that they could benefit from the dramatic shift in cultural norms. With the opening of his *Madrasa du Mandjou*, Oustas Sali sought to provide an underserved population – adult Mbororo women – with an education.[109]

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[108] Mbororo men justified their reticence to provide their daughters with the financial means to obtain an education by explaining that mothers needed their daughters' labor to assist with domestic activities (MBOSCUDA 2017).
[109] During her fieldwork in Misaje (NW village, east of Bamenda), Michaela Pelican noted an increase in student enrollment at madrasas. When interviewing several Mbororo elders about the growth of madrasas, Pelican (2015:93) was informed that there was a growing concern that Mbororo youth were losing their religious footing and succumbing to the dominant non-Muslim lifestyle. Consequently, Mbororo elders encouraged parents to enroll their children in madrasa rather than a western school.

Section 1: Maimouna's Islamic education

Maimouna was one of nearly one hundred students enrolled in Oustas Sali's *Madrasa du Mandjou*. Every Saturday morning, a group of 3-4 Mbororo wives passed by Biri's front gate and waited for Maimouna to join them. Ten minutes later the women veered off the main road and followed a narrow and winding path with tall fences on either side. The path narrowed before ending abruptly with a metal gate, the entrance to Oustas Sali's madrasa. There was a flurry of activity on the other side as Mbororo women hurried to their assigned classroom – four classrooms in total and each furnished with long wooden desks and benches (see Figure 1).

Maimouna was a student of Fadimatou, a much beloved instructor as well as a graduate of Oustas Sali's madrasa. Having herself received much of her religious education as an adult woman rather than as a child, Fadimatou empathized with her students. Fadimatou knew their struggles because they had once been her own. Every Saturday afternoon, Fadimatou arrived an hour before the start of class to prepare the room and copy pre-selected Quranic verses onto the board. Once her students – approximately fifty Mbororo women – were sitting quietly in their seats, Fadimatou reviewed material from last Saturday's class.[110] Occasionally the review elicited questions from the students and Fadimatou did her best to provide answers. After completing the review session, Fadimatou asked her students to turn their attention to the board. Fadimatou read the verses aloud in Arabic, and then provide a translation in Fulfulde.[111] Due to her students' limited knowledge of spoken Arabic, Fadimatou provided translations. Though her lectures were always conducted in Fulfulde, Fadimatou expected students' written work to be in Arabic.

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[110] From late January to June 2010 I regularly (twice a month for the duration of my fieldwork) accompanied Maimouna to Oustas Sali's madrasa and sat in on Fadimatou's lectures.

[111] Though the interaction between Fadimatou and her students was conducted entirely in Fulfulde, their written work was completed in Arabic.

Aside from the occasional rustling of notebook paper as pages were being turned, for the next forty-five minutes students worked in silence as they copied the Qur'anic verses. Fadimatou circulated from student to student to check for orthographic errors. Any errors were identified before Fadimatou moved to the next student. Following the completion of the writing assignment, Fadimatou selected students to once again read the Qur'anic verses but this time they were to read from their notebooks.

The last hour of class focused on women developing "*une bonne comportement*". Topics included guiding students through the corporeal movements that comprised Islamic prayers, providing students with examples of proper attire to where in public spaces, illustrating proper etiquette with members of the opposite sex, etc. Adjusting to urban life, explained Fadimatou, was difficult for a people like the Mbororo who had a history of being mobile. Yet Mbororo women, noted Fadimatou, faced the additional hardship of transitioning from a life in which they were free to circulate outside of the home to a life of virtual seclusion.

Throughout 2010, I watched Maimouna's educational progress. Her weekly attendance at *Madrasa du Mandjou* coupled with the hours she dedicated to writing and reciting Qur'anic verses after her evening domestic duties were complete had improved her literacy. Though Arabic was still foreign, Maimouna was using Arabic script to write in Fulfulde, i.e. transliteration. I witnessed firsthand Maimouna's progress late one evening in September 2010. I was preparing for bed when Maimouna asked if she could place a call from my mobile phone since she had no more credit on hers. When I told her okay, Maimouna skirted off towards her bedroom and returned a few minutes later with a small black address book in hand. Maimouna showed me a list of names, all in Arabic script, followed by mobile phone numbers. She then proceeded to read each name aloud.[112]

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[112] As early as the fifteenth century, Arabic script was used semi-phonetically to transcribe several African languages (Easton and Peach 1997:12).

Under Mbororo husbands' pressure, most of the married Mbororo women with whom I had contact were enrolled in either *Madrasa du Mandjou* or *Gabasoul Faida*. Only in Mbororo households with one wife were husbands less likely to demand their wife's weekly participation at madrasa since domestic activities (i.e. washing and drying clothes, preparing meals, cleaning the home, etc.) were difficult to complete in combination with madrasa. Biri was a Mbororo husband who had insisted on Maimouna's matriculation and that of his two teenage daughters. In Bamenda, Biri had sought to enroll Madina and Djamila in madrasa but nixed the idea after calculating the transportation costs that would be incurred on a weekly basis. According to Biri, there were not enough madrasas in Bamenda to support the Mbororo population eager to matriculate. While Mbororo had the financial means as well as the community support to build madrasas, asserted Biri, Grassfielders were unwilling to sell their land to Mbororo. As with all modifications to the physical landscape, Grassfielders' approval was necessary prior to building, and few were willing to concede to land transactions involving Mbororo buyers. In Mandjou, Gbaya were far more amenable to entering land sales with Mbororo buyers. And in Mandjou the building projects were not limited to residences and farms but included sites of religious education, i.e. madrasas.

In a conversation with Oustas Sali late one evening in Biri's parlor, he noted the ease with which Mbororo bought and titled land in Mandjou. Few constraints stood in the way of Mbororo efforts to build and for Oustas Sali that was a good thing because it was his hope to expand the area of *Madrasa du Mandjou* and build a smaller madrasa on the other side of town to accommodate Mbororo students residing closer to the town's perimeter. Developing a deeper understanding of Islam was Oustas Sali's response when I asked him to reflect on his madrasas' impact on the Mbororo community of Mandjou. Oustas Sali, somewhat surprisingly, commented that the madrasas – here he referred to his own and that of Cheik Abakar – had generated discussion amongst Muslims living outside of Mandjou's town limits. Oustas Sali claimed that the impetus for

158

the reduction in abuses hurled against Mbororo by their fellow non-Mbororo Muslims was the increased enrollment in madrasas. According to Oustas Sali, it was far more difficult to accuse Mbororo of religious ignorance when school enrollment continued to rise.

By Fall 2016, *Madrasa du Mandjou* bore little resemblance to the madrasa I encountered during fieldwork. No longer did *Madrasa du Mandjou* cater primarily to uneducated married Mbororo women. Students of all ages were now enrolled. Additionally, Oustas Sali succeeded in developing a full-time Islamic-centered curriculum for Mbororo parents eager to eliminate their children's engagement with secular educational institutions. Oustas Sali offered two educational tracks, primary and secondary. For children enrolled in the primary track, the madrasa remained a supplemental source of their formal education; requiring attendance for three hours on both Saturday and Sunday. Classes for students aged five to twelve were held on Saturday and Sunday mornings while adolescents participated in afternoon classes during the weekend. Married Mbororo women with little to no previous formal education, i.e. low literacy, attended separate classes in the afternoon.

The most significant change to *Madrasa du Mandjou* was the development of the secondary track, a full-time program in which students were required to attend class from Monday to Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. The religious curriculum of secondary track students mirrored that of students registered in the primary track; Qur'an, Hadiths, Arabic (written and spoken), Fiqhou, Tawidi, and Sirra. Secondary track students were required to take an additional course which focused on the political, economic, social and cultural organization of Cameroon. A handful of married Mbororo women who had successfully completed the primary track were enrolled in the secondary track at Oustas Sali's madrasa. It was far more difficult for married Mbororo women to shift to the secondary track since it necessitated a far larger time commitment. Those women who were most successful in making the transition were involved in polygynous households and could rely on the support of their co-wives to take on some of their domestic responsibilities.

As of last 2016, *Madrasa du Mandjou* boasted a student body of three hundred Mbororo women (either married or widowed) and two hundred children and adolescents; a sizeable increase considering that in 2010 Oustas Sali estimated enrollment at *Madrasa du Mandjou* to be at one hundred Mbororo women. The growth of student enrollment led to Oustas Sali hiring additional instructors. By late Fall 2016, Oustas Sali employed eighteen part-time teachers at *Madrasa du Mandjou*, twelve women and six men. Male instructors received their Islamic education outside of Cameroon (one in Niger, two in Chad and three in Sudan) while every female instructor was a former student and graduate of *Madrasa du Mandjou*. As of 2016, all instructors employed at *Madrasa du Mandjou* were volunteers and received no monetary remuneration. Oustas Sali was working to solicit funding from the Mbororo community in order to financially compensate Mbororo instructors for their time.

Oustas Sali was vocal in his support of education for Mbororo women. His two eldest daughters had attended and graduated *Lycee*. Nevertheless, Oustas Sali expressed concerns over the possibility of a western education potentially corrupting Mbororo youth. Consequently, once the *Madrasa du Mandjou's* secondary track was operational, Oustas Sali withdrew his younger children from the local primary school and enrolled them in the secondary track of his madrasa. Oustas Sali's actions were in response to his desire that his children acquired a comprehensive Islamic education and minimized their engagement with potential negative influences.

The surge in Mbororo enrollment at local madrasas, coupled with the expansion of Islamic education from that of rote memorization to a comprehensive curriculum, has increased Mbororo access to religious instruction. Yet madrasas are more than sites of learning for Mbororo residents. The physical presence and visibility of madrasas communicates a message to both residents within and outside of Mandjou; Mbororo are religious. Ostensibly, it is now far more difficult to accuse Mbororo as being less than pious. Deeb (2006:111), reflecting on public acts of piety, concludes that

160

"women's dress is perhaps the most visible embodied expression of piety in al-Dahiyya, as well as in the Muslim world generally". In Mandjou, women's dress as "the most visible embodied expression of piety" has been replaced with Mbororo structures. Madrasas, an example of a Mbororo structure, have no only brought greater visibility to Mbororo piety but have contributed to Mbororo strengthening their physical attachment to Mandjou.

The Mbororo women pictured were students at *Mandjou du Madrasa* and were gathered to hear an important announcement from Oustas Sali. The Turkish embassy had donated religious reading materials to the madrasa. Photo by author.

Section II: Drinking milk and being pious: the making of Mandjou's first milk bar

I first met Bouba – a college student enrolled at the University of Yaoundé – in late June 2010. He was one of a handful of Mbororo university students who had returned home for the summer in search of temporary employment. Shortly after Biri's son introduced me to Bouba I offered him a job as a research assistant. His fluency in French and Fulfulde were assets but more importantly,

Bouba was related to one of the oldest Mbororo families in Mandjou. Prior to Bouba's arrival, my connection to the Mbororo community was dependent on Biri and his willingness to introduce me to his extended social network. Biri was eager to facilitate my research but as a recent arrival to Mandjou and frequent traveler the opportunities to do so were few and far between. Bouba, on the other hand, readily accepted me as his full-time shadow.

Over the next several weeks I spent most mornings in the company of Bouba, interviewing Mbororo men in their compounds. Bouba and I were returning from one such interview on a muggy day in late July 2010. We were approaching *Carrefour Batouri* from the east and I could make out the faint yet distinctive beats of *bikutsi* – a popular form of dance music in Cameroon that has its roots in traditional Ewondo. On most days following an interview, Bouba and I parted ways at the fork in the road. I would turn off the main road and head north to Biri's compound and Bouba would continue west towards his uncle's home (Bouba's father was deceased). Today was different. As I was about to say goodbye, Bouba turned to me and with a sheepish grin asked if I would like to visit his friend's newly opened bar. There were a few moments of silence that passed before I could register what Bouba was asking. It was not the invitation that had surprised me but rather the fact a seemingly devout Muslim was inviting me to go to a bar. Sensing my confusion, Bouba smiled and clarified that it was not *that* kind of bar, only milk was on the menu.

Intrigued at the idea of a milk bar I immediately said yes. Within minutes we stood on the porch of a small one-story rectangular building. Though the door was ajar, there were no visible signs of life. Bouba explained that due to unforeseen renovation costs, the bar's grand opening had been postponed and was still a few weeks away. Taking one step beyond the doorframe, Bouba called out *"Salaam Alaikum"*. Moments later a voice from within responded with "*Alaikum Salaam*". Bouba signaled for me to follow him.

The darkened sky above coupled with the absence of functional light fixtures – the bar owner was waiting for his neighbor to grant permission to utilize his power supply – made it difficult to see more than few steps ahead. I moved gingerly across the room towards a table with a seated figure. Squinting I could make out a small wooden counter located directly behind the table. As Bouba and I approached, the figure rose and greeted Bouba warmly. After a few minutes of friendly banter, Bouba turned to me and introduced me to Amadou, his childhood friend and owner of the milk bar. Once the introductions were completed, Amadou excused himself. Minutes later he returned with a kerosene lamp, providing much needed illumination to the darkened bar. I could see that there was still much to do before the grand opening. With the exception of two wall hangings – one with several verses from the Qur'an and the other an aerial photo of the Kaaba surrounded by genuflecting religious pilgrims – the walls were unadorned. The bar was unlike anything I had previously encountered.

Born and raised in Mandjou, Amadou had spent the last four years in Garoua-Mboulaï under the tutelage of a highly respected Islamic scholar. After completing his religious studies six months earlier, Amadou had struggled to find a paid instructor's position with a madrasa. With no success in Garoua-Mboulaï and the surrounding area, Amadou returned to Mandjou. Yet in Mandjou, neither madrasa was providing instructors with financial compensation for their work. With his savings dwindling, Amadou put his hopes on the idea of starting a business, one that even he would admit was far-fetched. After discussing various ideas with friends and more established Mbororo businessmen, Amadou came up with the idea of opening a milk bar.

Still a bit perplexed, I asked Amadou to explain the concept of a milk bar. My question elicited a hearty laugh from Amadou. Standing up suddenly, Amadou said he would be right back before retreating behind the bar counter and disappearing through a thick curtain. Minutes later Amadou returned to the table, balancing a small metal tray with three plastic cups. The pungent odor was a

163

clue as to the cups' content and Bouba's exuberant exclamation of "It's *pendi*" confirmed my

suspicions. I drank my cup of *pendi* in what must have been record time since both Bouba and

Amadou stared at me incredulously after I pushed the empty cup away from me. I explained that

during my MA fieldwork in northern Cameroon I frequented a weekly market where young

Mbororo women sold fresh milk and *pendi*. My host family often sent me to the market to purchase

one liter of *pendi* and over time I grew to love the taste.

It was through my MA fieldwork in northern Cameroon that I first learned of the significance

of milk amongst Mbororo communities, as a dietary staple and a source of income for women.[113]

During my MA fieldwork, buying a cup or two of *pendi* at the weekly market became one of my

favorite activities. It was not unusual for me to spend an hour or two chatting with the female

sellers; all of whom were Mbororo. It was through these informal conversations that I learned of

the challenges facing Mbororo women engaged in milk selling.[114] Each milk seller trekked over two

hours (round-trip of four hours) to reach the market (located in the town of Mayo-Darlé). In the

absence of public transportation, women travelled by foot. These women navigated treacherous

paths while balancing large tin containers of *pendi* on their heads.[115]

As a result of my MA experience, I became accustomed to the presence of Mbororo women at

the market selling milk. Thus, it came as a surprise when I moved to Mandjou to learn that only

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[113] Milk is often referred to as a Mbororo dietary staple. Derrick Stenning's (1959:102) early ethnography characterizes Mbororo diet as one in which "the family lives on milk…Either milk or milk products must be drunk or eaten ad nauseam or milk must be sold or exchanged for other foods". Within the anthropological literature, Mbororo women are depicted as being engaged – in varying degrees – in the milking, processing and subsequent marketing (i.e. selling at the local market) of milk and secondary milk products. Mbororo women are integral in terms of their economic contribution to the household (See Burnham 1996; Dupire 1962, 1970; Stenning 1959; Virtanen 2003, 2010).

[114] Aisatou was the only member of the milk selling group who spoke French. Her presence was critical in facilitating communication with other female milk sellers.

[115] Mbororo milk sellers lived at higher elevations alongside, or in close proximity to their husband's or father's cattle. Rain or shine they trekked through thick vegetation. Rainy season was a particularly dangerous period for milk sellers. Overnight a steady stream could transform into a raging river. Women were often forced to ford these dangerous waters en route to the market.

powdered milk was available at the market.[116] Nodding his head in quiet acknowledgement, Amadou revealed that fresh milk and *pendi* had once been sold at the Mandjou daily market. Both Bouba and Amadou recounted, as children, being sent to the market to purchase milk. The number of Mbororo women selling milk varied, remembered Amadou, but they always set up their folding tables with attached umbrellas along Mandjou's main road and in the center of the market. Though Amadou had distinct memories of his interactions with milk sellers, he struggled to recall why milk had disappeared from the Mandjou market; likely a result of having resided in Garoua-Mboulaï (two hundred fifty kilometers north east of Mandjou) at the time. Bouba, on the other hand, had no trouble remembering the events that had led to the collapse of Mandjou's milk market since he was still living in Mandjou.

A series of violent attacks against Mbororo women en route to Mandjou in 2007 resulted in the permanent closure of the milk market. Most attacks occurred late at night when Mbororo women were returning to their residences with their profits tucked away in the folds of their tailored wrap. Armed bandits – thought to be from the neighboring Central African Republic – worked in groups and waited in locations with no mobile service.[117] When the Mbororo women appeared, bandits would emerge from their hiding spots brandishing machetes and knives. Money was the primary objective and once acquired, bandits fled. On occasion, however, bandits had employed violent tactics to procure women's monies. After one particularly brutal and violent assault, Mbororo residents (only adult males were invited to participate in the community meeting) decided to close the milk market permanently. Bouba conceded that the decision had been difficult. However,

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[116] Powdered milk was sold in individual sachets of 100 grams. Considered expensive at 100 CFA per sachet, purchases of milk powder were reserved for occasions in which groups of Mbororo men gathered. The milk powder was added to hot tea.
[117] The East Region's reputation of being "under-developed" extends to the phone network coverage. As of late 2010 there were large areas with no mobile phone service.

explained Bouba, Mbororo women's safety took priority over Mandjou's Mbororo community having access to milk.

No longer traveling to and from Mandjou, Mbororo women's exposure to violence was substantially reduced after the closing of the milk market. Bouba's rationale for the elimination of the milk market would appear justified. Upon reflection, however, the events Bouba and Amadou described, paired with other anthropological works depicting similar actions in other Mbororo communities, suggested a slightly different motivation for the dismantling of the milk market. Bouba commented that married Mbororo women in Mandjou rarely left their residence – exceptions being evening visits to the homes of new mothers and the infirm and Saturday afternoons at the local madrasa. Nodding his head in agreement, Amadou noted that female milk sellers were regularly characterized as behaving shamefully and immodestly. Their visibility outside of the home, admitted Amadou, compromised Mbororo religious beliefs in which men and women should remain separated.

During her doctoral research in the mid-1980s in northern Cameroon, Catherine VerEecke (1988:195) depicts Mbororo women as "hav[ing] enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom outside the domestic terrain. Young and middle-aged women depart from their households often daily to sell their milk at the market". Milk selling, explains VerEecke (1989:56), contributed substantially to the family economy since Mbororo men were focused on accumulating cattle rather than selling them at market. VerEecke's characterization of settled Fulbe women bore little resemblance to that of Mbororo women. Unlike their Mbororo neighbors, Fulbe women were generally restricted from traveling beyond their residence. When they did leave their home, they wore a veil. According to VerEecke (1989:61), the wearing of the veil and gender segregation amongst town Fulbe were practices that reflected their Islamic religious beliefs.

Nearly a decade following the completion of VerEecke's research, Tea Virtanen, a Norwegian anthropologist working in Adamaoua Region (northern Cameroon), illustrated the extent to which Mbororo women's participation at the local markets as milk sellers had declined. Speaking with her Mbororo informants, Virtanen concluded that their concern over how female mobility would be perceived by other Muslims (settled town Fulbe) was a motive in limiting women's participation in the market. According to Virtanen (2003:216), there was a desire to "[bring] their society culturally closer to that of the Muslim village people". And Mbororo women's mobility, writes Virtanen (Ibid.:252) was identified as having a "non-Islamic quality". As a result, argues Virtanen (2003, 2010, 2013), some Mbororo men circumscribed their wives' mobility, i.e. prohibiting wives from continuing to pursue milk selling as an economic activity. Limiting Mbororo women's circulation decreased the likelihood of Mbororo practices being characterized as 'un-Islamic'.

Philip Burnham, an anthropologist working in northern Cameroon, noted a similar pattern in which Mbororo men began to forbid their wives from selling milk at the market. According to Burnham (1996:5), Mbororo husbands believed that preventing their wives from engaging in local markets would substantiate their observance of gender segregation and gain religious credibility from their Fulbe neighbors. In Mbororo settlements further south, Lucy Davis (1995:218), a social scientist examining Mbororo-led political movements in the mid-1990s, identified the steady erosion of Mbororo women form the market as "one of the few visible indicators of Islamic influence in sedentary Mbororo society."

In Mandjou, I argue, the elimination of the milk market was effective in terms of Mandjou Mbororo residents distancing themselves from the rural and less than pious Mbororo, i.e. female milk sellers and by extension their husbands and fathers. Moreover, the permanent closure of the milk market was a public and visible indication that Mbororo residents in Mandjou prioritized gender segregation. In the process of achieving recognition as pious Muslims, however, Mbororo

167

residents in Mandjou lost access to fresh milk and *pendi*. Amadou's milk bar provided Mbororo with

a dietary staple without the involvement of female milk sellers, whose presence compromised the

separation of men and women.[118] Mbororo men, my primary interlocutors in discussions on the

closing of the milk bar, did not directly substantiate my claim; the permanent closure of the

Mandjou milk market was a result of the Mbororo community desiring to make a very public

demonstration of piety. Only through casual conversations and innuendo was I able to develop my

claim. My status a Canadian researcher, and presumably a staunch advocate for gender equality, was

a factor in the wariness Mbororo men had in discussing the community's motivation for closing the

milk market.

Kadafi, Biri's eldest son, provided a more candid assessment for the decision to open a milk

bar in Mandjou. In the months preceding the opening of the milk bar, Mbororo religious leaders –

including Oustas Sali and Cheik Abakar – and elders held community meetings to voice concerns

about Mbororo youth engaging in acts of debauchery. There were stories of young men frequenting

Gbaya bars, drinking excessively and even consuming illicit drugs. Careful to avoid incriminating

himself or his close friends, Kadafi acknowledged that young Mbororo men struggled to steer clear

of Gbaya bars. Though reticent to speculate about whether Amadou's milk would prevent young

men from patronizing Gbaya establishments, Kadafi was confident that the milk bar would, at the

very least, provide young Mbororo men with an alternative.

Amadou's bar, explained Kadafi, was unlike Gbaya bars because it promoted Mbororo

solidarity – customers were Mbororo – without the risk of participating in immoral or deviant acts,

i.e. no alcohol, no women, no drugs. Moreover, Mbororo youth frequenting Amadou's bar were

perceived to have a stronger commitment to Islam since they had the option to socialize at Gbaya

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[118] Once a week Amadou drove with an all-terrain vehicle to Mbororo settlements (two to three hours east of Mandjou) to pay Mbororo women for liters of *pendi*. Mbororo women were still involved in the process of preparing *pendi*. However, they were no longer traveling to Mandjou to engage in the selling of milk products.

bars. Though encouraged by the opening of Amadou's bar and the potential it would have to steer young Mbororo men away from Gbaya bars and engaging in negative behavior, Kadafi doubted it would be enough. Kadafi reasoned that the only sure-fire approach to take would be to eliminate Gbaya bars altogether. In the summer of 2010, Kadafi's commentary was far more prescient than I realized.

In August 2011, Mbororo community leaders were waiting to receive word on the status of a petition they had submitted to the local Mandjou government to reduce the operating hours of Gbaya bars. The brutal murder of a young Gbaya man one month earlier had precipitated Mbororo-led efforts to rid Mandjou of bars – sites in which deviance and immoral behavior was encouraged.[119] It was Kadafi who informed me of the community petition during my return visit to Mandjou in the first week of July 2011. Kadafi thought the decision to shorten bars' operating bars was a good first step and would lead to a reduction in criminal activity. When I spoke to Simon about the Mbororo petition, he had a decidedly different opinion.

Admittedly, explained Simon, Gbaya men were fond of alcohol and occasionally excessive drinking led to lapses in judgment. After one too many beers there was always the chance that a fight could break out. Nevertheless, to prohibit bars from serving alcohol was not the answer and it would do little to prevent conflicts in the future. Simon held out little hope that the mayor's office would dissuade Mbororo residents from moving forward with plans to close Gbaya bars. Mbororo population surpassed that of Gbaya and it was only a matter of time before they would be making decisions. Simon was certain that the elimination of Gbaya presence in Mandjou was what had made it possible for Mbororo leaders to condemn bars as spaces in which criminal and immoral activity was being indirectly encouraged.

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[119] Murder of Tchmako, young Gbaya man, is discussed in greater detail in the conclusion of the dissertation.

Amadou's milk was a structure within which pious behavior was encouraged. Within the milk bar, young Mbororo men socialized without the presence of alcohol, drugs and women – variables that contributed to Mbororo engaging in lascivious behavior. Moreover, the visibility of the milk bar stood as a material testament to Mbororo residents' piety. Amadou's milk bar, unlike the former milk market with Mbororo women working as sellers, provided residents with regular access to milk without compromising female seclusion. Lastly the milk bar contributed to the building of a physical landscape that outsiders, like Madiya, associated with being religious. Though these Mbororo-led modifications to the physical landscape were effective in strengthening Mbororo visibility and thus their claim of belonging to Mandjou, the same cannot be said for Gbaya residents.

Part III: Built environment and place through everyday practices

Denise Lawrence and Setha Low (1990:454) describe the built environment as "any physical alteration of the natural environment, from hearths to cities, through construction by humans". Additionally, it is the built form – loosely depicted as "building types…created by humans to shelter, define, and protect activity" – that Lawrence and Low (Ibid.:454, 471) identify as important in both the expression and direction of social processes affecting human interactions. Since the 1990s, the ways in which culture is expressed in spatial terms has been a topic that has generated much interest amongst anthropologists. Rather than treating the study of built forms and space as background, Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003:1) suggest a closer examination of ways in which humans engage with the built environment. According to Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Züniga (1999:9), "people can encode built structures with all kinds of practical meanings to express a particular identity or status".

Pierre Bourdieu's detailed analysis of the Kabyle home was a critical moment in the anthropological studies of space. His work refused to allow the material world to languish as background (See Lawrence and Low 1990:469; Lawrence 1992:214; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). A frontrunner to his work on habitus, Bourdieu begins his essay on the Kabyle House with an extensive description of the physical layout of the home. Bourdieu's intention extends beyond that of attributing a functionality to spatial organization decisions. Bourdieu (1970) illustrates the way in which symbolic oppositions emerge in his detailed physical description of the Kabyle house. One of the most prominent oppositions exposed through Bourdieu's analysis is that of gender. Ostensibly, Bourdieu argues that the physical organization of the material world, in this case the Kabyle house, is a reflection of Berber cosmology. Bourdieu, however, extends his argument further by interrogating the way in which individuals absorb the symbolic oppositions that emerge from the material world – in this case the Kabyle House – and, in turn, respond.

Deborah Pellow, an urban anthropologist working in Ghana, depicts the substantial physical transformation of Sabon Zongo (new *zongo*) – a bustling community located on the outskirts of Accra – since its formation in 1910.[120] Malam Bako, a Hausa leader and founder of Sabon Zongo, was uncomfortable with the absence of Islamic orthodoxy in what was then downtown Accra.[121] It was his intention, vis-à-vis the foundation of a distinctly Hausa and Muslim community, to build a place "where they [Hausa] could observe Islamic orthodoxy" (Pellow 2003:163). One of the ways in which Malam Bako spatially expressed his adherence to religious principles was through the construction of a compound that reinforced female seclusion and limited women's mobility.

By the 1990s, Hausa homes bore little resemblance to those of Malam Bako's era. According to Pellow, several factors – new settlers (Christians and Muslims alike), economic development, and

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[120] In Hausa *zongo* refers to a stranger quarter. Pellow (2008:126) depicts *zongos* in Ghana as Muslim in religious orientation and preferring Islamic education to that of western schooling.
[121] Hausa are a predominantly Muslim ethnic group.

171

Ghana's independence – contributed to significant modifications in architectural design. For example, Sabon Zongo was a popular destination for new immigrants but with a fixed geographical area it became difficult to accommodate settlers. Long-term Hausa residents – all identifying as religious Muslims – began to modify their homes. Courtyards, previously enclosed to prevent women's visual exposure to the public, were opened. Within the Hausa home, new rooms were built as add-ons to house new tenants. Incorporating tenants into the compound further limited any expectation of gender separation. Changes in the cultural, economic, social and religious tapestry of Sabon Zongo, concludes Pellow (2003:178-180), have resulted in modifications to the spatial organization and design of the home. Pellow (Ibid.:178) considers alterations to the architectural design as unsurprising since houses both "embody social life" and "exemplify social life".

Pellow's focus on the study of the built environment is one that I find useful when taking a closer look at the radical physical transformation Mandjou has undergone over the last thirty years. Pellow (2008:7) asserts that "social institutions realized in or built into spaces promote legitimate behaviors and gradually gain the credibility of tradition". Gender segregation, arguably a "social institution", was a source of Mbororo consternation. Town Fulbe characterized Mbororo as 'less than pious' based on the absence of the practice of female seclusion. All three built forms discussed above, encouraged Mbororo residents in Mandjou to modify behavior (i.e. separation of men and women), allowing Mbororo to acquire legitimacy as pious Muslims.

Amadou's bar provided young Mbororo men with an alternative to that of Gbaya bars – sites in which Mbororo were far less likely to pursue pious activities. Furthermore, the substitution of the milk market with the milk bar was a visible and very public expression of Mbororo residents' support of female seclusion, a practice that was associated with being pious. Madrasas and their subsequent expansion exposed married Mbororo women – and later children and adolescents – to an Islamic education; resulting in both the enhancement of Mbororo visibility as pious as well as

172

developing pious practices. Enclosures surrounding Mbororo homes were the most prominent method by which Mbororo residents substantiated their adherence to female seclusion. Spatial modifications, i.e. milk bar, fences and madrasas, Mandjou conveyed Mbororo legitimacy as good Muslims to the outside world while continuing to encourage and develop greater piety.

Pellow's depiction of the physical transformation of Sabon Zongo lends itself to the larger argument that the built form is a formidable social actor whose role can no longer be reduced to that of background. Pellow (2008:29) writes, "the built form encodes and expresses power relations within the home and between homes of different people or members of different populations. These settings, the actual structures and layouts of the house as well as its situation in a neighborhood, represent an imprint of culture. They help to produce and reproduce behavior".

David Sibley (1995:xi-xii), an urban geographer, acknowledges the power of built forms and argues, "[t]here are implicit rules of inclusion and exclusion in a built form that contribute to the structuring of society and space in a way which some will find oppressive and others appealing". Kim Dovey (1999:15), argues that built forms and structures reproduce power hierarchical structures. In his work on the organization of space, Kim Dovey associates one's ability to organize and use space with having power. If control over spatial organization is perceived to be an indication of one's power, Mbororo residents' power in Mandjou has exceeded that of their Gbaya neighbors.

Teresa Caldeira, an urban anthropologist working in Sao Paolo, examined the proliferation since the 1980s of what she refers to as "fortified enclaves". These enclaves are exclusive sites where the upper and upper-middle classes have now isolated themselves behind heavy armed walls and within these walls they are able to live their day-to-day lives in relative isolation from the dangers and chaos of the public space. Caldeira paints a rather startling image of a socially and spatially segregated urban milieu in which the fortified enclaves have become the most pervasive symbol. Walls are now being erected to separate economic classes, transforming public space from one relating "to the

modern ideals of commonality and universality" to one that showcases "separateness" (Caldeira 2001:214). Caldeira (Ibid.:291) notes that the "fortified enclaves" prevent the poor, a source of insecurity to the rich, from having direct contact with the middle and upper class.

According to Caldeira (Ibid.:297), fortified enclaves "affect patterns of circulation, habits, and gestures related to the use of streets, public transportation, parks, and all public spaces". Teresa Caldeira's work with the fortified enclaves illustrates the impact of built forms on social relations and how these structures can impact social relations – specifically those of class in the Brazilian context. Fortified enclaves have produced a growing divide between economic classes. In the case of Mandjou, the built forms described above, contributed to Mbororo acquiring greater visibility as pious Muslims. Additionally, the proliferation of Mbororo structures resulted in the production of a transformed physical landscape with a decidedly religious tenor. Christian Gbaya, however, struggled with the spatial modifications and many sought to relocate their homes and places of religious worship outside of Mandjou. Gbaya affiliation with Christianity, though strong, was only visible outside of Mandjou. It was here that one could discern various religious structures. These built forms reflected Gbaya engagement with Christianity while also serving as a means to underscore the wide of array of Christian denominations (i.e. Seventh Day Adventists, Jevohah's Witnesses, Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, Catholic Church, Lutheranism, Protestantism, etc.) that were at play within the Gbaya community.

Though Christian churches, writes Lang (2017:36), have historically played both a critical role in building unity amongst "a large number of ethnic groups" and have been a critical force in combatting the growth of Islam, this has lessened in the last two decades. The rapid growth of Pentecostalism, argues Lang, has "aggravated denominational competition" (Ibid:37). In the case of Mandjou, the proliferation of places of worship for Gbaya Christians has undermined any unity that may have previously existed. Mbororo residents of Mandjou are members of one, and only one

mosque. Gbaya residents, on the other hand, are affiliated with multiple variants of Christianity, all of which present themselves as distinctive built forms outside of Mandjou.

Eyal Weizman's provides a thoughtful spatial analysis of the role of architecture in the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Weizman (2007:5) interrogates the way in which "the different forms of Israeli rule inscribed themselves in space, analyzing the geographical, territorial, urban and architectural conceptions and the interrelated practices that form and sustain them".[122] According to Weizman (Ibid.), these seemingly conventional "elements of planning and architecture have become tactical tools and the means of dispossession".

In June 1967, the Israeli government extended the boundaries of the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem vis-à-vis the annexation of roughly 70 square kilometers of land. Approximately 69,000 Palestinians were incorporated into the newly expanded Jerusalem. Following the military intervention, the Israeli government sought to make the expansion permanent. Jewish neighborhoods were constructed on the newly annexed land, creating a "belt of built fabric that enveloped and bisected the Palestinian neighborhoods and villages annexed to the city" (Weizman 2007:25). The industrial zone was relocated to the perimeter of the municipal, resulting in the severe reduction in mobility of the Palestinian work force.[123] An outer layer of settlements was constructed – Israeli planners termed the 'organic' or 'second wall' – that further extended the city's metropolitan reach. Additionally, a criss-crossing tapestry of roads and infrastructure were built to connect the disparate sectors of the urban landscape. According to Weizman (Ibid.:26), the Israeli government employed these "spatial mechanisms" to strengthen Jewish Israeli occupation and to remove the possibility of re-partitioning Jerusalem.

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[122] Weizman suggests the power of organizing "geographical space" extends well beyond the Israeli government and is diffused amongst several actors, many of who are not engaged directly with the state. Architects play an integral role in the spatial organization.
[123] Most of the employees working within the industrial zone were Palestinians.

In yet another attempt to thwart possible challenges to the expanded perimeter of Jerusalem, explains Weizman (2007:26), architects and planners sought to "naturalize the new construction projects, make them appear as organic parts of the Israeli capital and the holy city". According to Weizman (2007:26), this would be accomplished in the following manner:

> Architecture – the organization, form and style by which these neighborhoods were built, the way they were mediated, communicated and understood – formed a visual language that was used to blur the facts of occupation and sustain territorial claims of expansion. This project was thus an attempt to sustain national narratives of belonging while short-circuiting and even blocking other narratives".

In 1968 the historical by-law to utilize 'Jerusalem Stone' – colloquial name for different kinds of limestone – in the cladding of all structures began to be strictly enforced.[124] The decision to utilize Jerusalem stone, suggests Weizman, was clearly strategic.

Jerusalem stone has long carried a sense of spirituality, even holiness. Jerusalem is recognized as a holy city and the use of a 'holy stone' to construct built forms is a material extension of the city's holiness. The incorporation of Jerusalem stone into everyday Israeli architecture "placed every remote and newly built suburb well within the boundaries of 'the eternally unified capital of the Jewish people', and thus, as far as most Israelis are concerned, away from the negotiating table" (Weizman 2007:47). The proliferation of Jerusalem stone has reinforced Israeli Jewish identification with Jerusalem as their city.

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[124] Following the surrender of the Ottoman army in December 1917, Colonel Ronald Storrs – political attaché to the British military – was appointed military governor of Jerusalem. Storrs, argues Weizman (2007:28), "saw Jerusalem through the religious-orientalist perspective of a European purview, and his role in Herodian terms, as a link in the long line of the city's builders". The war had radically transformed Jerusalem. Toward the end of the late Ottoman era, Jerusalem was a sprawling cosmopolitan city with extravagant compounds. Following the end of the war, it became the destination for refugees. Lavish buildings were soon replaced with rather impermanent structures made of wood, tin, and mud. Concerned with the proliferation of these types of constructions as well as the squalor in which the "parasitic population" lived, Storrs invited William H. McLean, a British urban engineer, to produce a development plan aimed to revitalize Jerusalem. McLean recommended that moving forward, all new structures in the Old City be cladded with Jerusalem stone. Storrs adopted his recommendation and temporarily halted ongoing constructions in the Old City. Once the moratorium was lifted, Storrs banned "the use of plaster, mud, tents or corrugated iron as construction material…only local limestone was to be used in the construction of new buildings, extensions and rooftops within the perimeter around the Old City" (Ibid.:29).

Weizman's reading of the Israeli government's policy of achieving 'demographic balance' illustrates the way in which spatial organization through the building – or absence of building as the case may be – can exclude a population. The policy, argues Weizman, contributes to the exclusion of Palestinians from Jerusalem. "[T]he planners and architects of the municipality of Jerusalem and those working for them have effectively taken part in a national policy of forced migration…a crime according to international law" (Weizman 2007:49). Effectively, Palestinians requesting permits to build are more likely to be refused than Israeli Jews residing in the municipality of Jerusalem.[125] With a severe housing shortage and limited access to building permits, many Palestinians have constructed 'illegal' homes that the municipality can threaten with demolition. Overpopulation in Palestinian neighborhoods and the exponential growth of property prices have only exacerbated the housing crisis for Palestinians. Many have been forced to leave Jerusalem and seek less expensive permanent accommodation in nearby villages and towns in the West Bank. Palestinian relocation to the West Bank is tantamount to permanent exclusion from not only Jerusalem but from Israel. Palestinians 'choosing' to resettle in the West Bank have their "Israeli resident" status revoked. Over the last forty years, states Weizman, approximately 50,000 or more Palestinians have lost their status. According to Weizman (Ibid.:5), '[t]his was precisely what the government planners intended". In an interview with Al Jazeera reporter Ana de Sousa, Weizman states that "[a]rchitecture and the built environment is a kind of a slow violence. The occupation is an environment that was conceived to strangulate Palestinian communities, villages and towns, to create an environment that would be *unliveable* [my italics] for the people there" (De Sousa 2014).

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[125] Since 1967 the municipality of Jerusalem has issued 1,500 permits annually issued and built upwards of 90,000 housing units for Israeli Jews residing in East Jerusalem. In contrast, since 1967 the municipality has annually issued about 100 building permits to Palestinians. The disparity has resulted in a severe housing shortage for Palestinians (Weizman 2007:49).

Weizman hinges his analysis on the premise that spatial organization plays a critical role in regulating and controlling a population. In the context of post-1967 Jerusalem, argues Weizman, a multitude of spatial mechanisms are employed to ensure Israel's permanent territorial occupation and substantially diminish (read: create an "unliveable" space) the Palestinian presence. Weizman's work is important because it demonstrates the way in which spatial organization through structures and buildings contributes to the occupation of place and furthermore, the exclusion of populations.

Mbororo initiatives to transform the built environment, in this case Mandjou, centered on a shared desire to materially express their piety. As Mbororo steadily built more structures in Mandjou, Gbaya faced the challenge of engaging with a newly built environment that was shaped by and for Mbororo. Weizman characterizes the actions of the Israeli state and architects as unmistakable in their intention – to create an inhospitable built environment for Palestinians. I would argue that the Mbororo had no explicit intention to exclude Gbaya. Mbororo efforts to transform the built environment in such a way to reflect their piety as well as contribute to their attachment to Mandjou inadvertently led to the physical exclusion of Gbaya. Forging a 'livable' built environment for Mbororo came at the cost of building a Mandjou that was 'unlivable' for Gbaya.

Conclusion

Individuals, argues Pellow, will take a variety of measures to assert their claim over space. They will "develop it [space], build on it [space], divide it [space] up into varying shapes and sizes, mark it [space] as their own. They design and build dwellings, that is, they produce spaces to live in the space they have claimed" (Pellow 2003:160). Similarly, Mbororo residents in Mandjou have "produced spaces" within which to reside. Mbororo residents have spearheaded efforts to alter the physical landscape of Mandjou. These spatial modifications have both encouraged pious behavior and garnered Mbororo recognition and visibility as

178

pious Muslims. Though modifications to Mandjou aided in the shaping of a Mbororo town, conversely, these spatial modifications have produced spaces in which Gbaya have struggled to reside, a factor in Gbaya dispersal and relocation to areas outside of Mandjou.

Life from the Margins of Mandjou

'We [Gbaya] are aware that Mbororo are racist. They want to chase us from
our land and we do not know why…Mbororo use witchcraft and prayers to
block the development of Gbaya. Everything we try to accomplish, fails'
(Interview with Honoré on June 22, 2010)[126]

Simon was unwavering in his belief that Gbaya were the only ethnic group who could claim to

be *les autochthones du Mandjou*. Simon's conviction followed a farmer's logic – his people had arrived

first to clear the land; they had been there before anybody else. To further his point, he emphasized

the limited time most Mbororo had spent in Mandjou, fewer than thirty years. Simon was confident

that the "nomadic nature" of Mbororo would not permit them to permanently settle in Mandjou.

Ironically, Simon was somewhat of a nomad himself, having spent much of his childhood and

adolescence moving from one village to the next.

Simon was born in a small village, one hundred kilometers from Mandjou. Simon's father, a

man known for his fiery temper, had uprooted his family on multiple occasions, bouncing from one

village to the next with his brood of ten children and two wives in tow. Before moving to Mandjou

at the age of eighteen, Simon had lived in at least twelve locations. Sensing my surprise at the

number of changes in residence, Simon explained that the frequent relocations were tied to his

father having suffered a series of unexplained illnesses. While still quite young, Simon's father, Alain,

had achieved a great deal of commercial success as a farmer. He was one of the first Gbaya to

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[126] I interviewed Honoré with the help of Jean Marie, one of my primary research assistants. This particular interview
was not recorded but both Jean Marie and I took detailed notes during the interview and discussed the content of the
interview after leaving the home of Honoré. Therefore, rather than use quotes for the excerpt, I have elected to utilize
single quotes to demonstrate that what I have decided to include is not a direct quote from our conversation but rather a
reconstruction.

purchase a mobile phone and install electricity in his home. These purchases did not go unnoticed. Shortly thereafter, Alain suffered his first bout with the mysterious illness that left him bedridden for several weeks. It was only after pulling up stakes and moving to another village – one in which he was a relative stranger – that his health improved. Yet, explained Simon, within a matter of months, his father's health deteriorated, forcing Simon and his family to once again resettle. This cycle of settling and resettling continued throughout much of Simon's childhood and adolescence.

Simon attributed his father's illnesses to *sorcellerie* [witchcraft].[127] Moreover, Simon believed his father's financial success had made him a target of witchcraft. According to Simon, "[p]eople will mock you sometimes because you make an effort [i.e. build a business] to get ahead and succeed. But if you try this somewhere else where there are no Gbaya, you will have no one mocking you". For Simon, mobility was the best strategy one could employ in order to elude the prying eyes of jealous Gbaya neighbours.

While Simon had not inherited his father's temper, he was well on his way to matching his father's predilection for frequent shifts in residence. Since moving out of his father's compound two years earlier into a shared home with Adeline, he had already relocated his young family twice. Regardless of Simon's readiness to discuss his residential shifts, he was unwilling to characterize these frequent residential shifts as evidence of Gbaya being mobile. As he would point out to me, time and time again, the only mobile people in Mandjou were Mbororo.

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[127] Drawing from his fieldwork with Gbaya communities in Meiganga during the late 1960s, Burnham identifies Gbaya as believers in witchcraft. According to Burnham, though Gbaya believed that witchcraft could lead to sickness and great misfortune, rarely would witchcraft result in death. Gbaya suspected of concealing money from members of their clan, writes Burnham, would often fall prey to witchcraft. In his analysis as to the motives underling Gbaya engagement in witchcraft, Burnham suggests that the belief in witchcraft reinforces co-operation amongst Gbaya and serves as a mechanism to strengthen fledgling social ties (Burnham 1980:186-190). Witchcraft tales in Mandjou followed a similar pattern. Gbaya perceived by other Gbaya to be unwilling to share their wealth, became targets of witchcraft.

Introduction

Simon's narrative illustrates the centrality of residential mobility in Gbaya life. The openness

with which Simon depicted these movements was surprising considering his reticence to discuss

these relocations in terms of 'being mobile'. In this chapter I explore Philip Burnham's argument –

based on long-term fieldwork with Gbaya communities in Meiganga (Adamaoua Region, Cameroon)

from the late 1960s onwards, coupled with a comprehensive review and synthesis of the scant

colonial writings about Gbaya society – in which he introduces residential mobility as a critical tool

in Gbaya social organization[128] (Burnham 1980:122).

Gbaya residents in Mandjou have continued to rely on mobility and their motivations for

shifting residence resonate with those Burnham enumerated in his doctoral dissertation.

Nevertheless, the economic, environmental and political contexts in which Burnham conducted and

subsequently analyzed his data share few similarities with the Mandjou of 2010. Moreover,

Burnham's discussion refrained from identifying risks associated with shifts in residence. In this

chapter, in light of modifications to the environment, transformation of the economy and the

prioritization of local belonging, I examine the challenges facing Gbaya engaged in residential

mobility in Mandjou. Though a Gbaya coping mechanism, I argue that frequent shifts in residence

place Gbaya at risk of losing their autochthone status and threaten their long-term engagement in

agriculture. As I discussed in chapters one and two, since the 1990s, local belonging in Cameroon

has taken precedence over belonging to the nation. In the absence of having a physical attachment

to place, a community will struggle to acquire the rights of citizenship. Frequent shifts in residence, I

argue, threaten to undermine the physical attachment Gbaya have to Mandjou, resulting in Gbaya

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[128] Frequent shifts in residence, explains Burnham, were a Gbaya strategy to retain autonomy and reduce social conflict (Burnham 1975:586). According to Burnham, on average, an individual Gbaya would relocate to five or six different villages during the span of a lifetime. Burnham estimated that entire villages changed their location every nine years (Burnham 1975:586). Though not a motive for their frequent changes in residence, Gbaya engagement in swidden agriculture facilitated their mobility, as did the fact that land was plentiful and did constrain movement (1972:25-26).

being stripped of the rights and privileges of being *les autochtones du Mandjou*. Mbororo efforts to shape Mandjou into a town that reflects their Islamic piety has played a critical role in reducing Gbaya presence in the Mandjou market. In the physical and economic absence of Gbaya, Mbororo have a stronger claim to assert the identity of *les autochthones du Mandjou.*

Tracing Gbaya mobility: The story of Simon and Adeline

As Simon was small in stature and had a predilection for baggy jeans, I had to continually remind myself when we were together that he was in his mid-twenties, married and with three children under the age of six. Simon was one of the first Gbaya residents I met when I began fieldwork in Mandjou and we became fast friends. I marvelled at the way in which he managed to shoulder unending stresses – family conflicts, long-term unemployment, mounting debt – and still find time to share his infectious laugh with those around him. Simon appeared remarkably undeterred by his struggles, which contrasted strongly with his wife Adeline who rarely cracked a smile, her brow permanently etched with worry lines.

Late one June afternoon, in the midst of a particularly dry rainy season, Simon and I were returning from a small patch of land that belonged to Adeline.[129] We had spent the day clearing weeds and harvesting several kilos of manioc. We turned off the main road and headed towards their small one room mud hut, one of several in the neighbourhood. While re-adjusting the heavy burlap sack filled with manioc, I could make out the rhythmic *whack* of cassava being pounded into flour, sending my stomach into overdrive.[130] I was hungry, and it had been hours since I had devoured an

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[129] Cameroon has two seasons, dry and rainy. The latter commences in April and ends in November. The dry season runs from November until April. Alain, Simon's father, had sold most of the family's land to Mbororo settlers. All that remained were a few acres that Alain had divided amongst Simon and his two elder brothers. Though the land had been divided into equal parcels, Simon's elder brothers expressed their unhappiness at the quality – deeming it superior to their own – of Simon's plot. In fear that Simon would bow to the pressure of his older brother to give up his rights to his plot, Adeline gained her father's permission to farm an acre of his land.

[130] Manioc is a staple food for Gbaya. Once harvested, manioc is peeled, cut into small pieces and washed. The manioc pieces are scattered onto tarps and left to dry. Several days later, the chunks of dried manioc are placed in a wooden

unripe mango for lunch. Approaching their home, I expected to find Adeline bent-over her makeshift hearth, struggling to turn the thickening cassava porridge (cassava flour added to boiling water and stirred quickly thickens into a massive doughy substance) in her blackened cooking pot. Yet when we reached the hut, there was no sign of Adeline. Moreover, judging from the pile of untouched firewood in the hearth, Adeline had not yet begun dinner preparation. When I asked where Adeline was, Simon guessed she was at a neighbour's house and would be back shortly. Sensing Simon's embarrassment at having no prepared food to offer and little idea as to where his wife could be, I excused myself and began the thirty-minute trek back to Biri's compound where I was living at the time.

Almost a week to the day that I left their compound, Simon and Adeline stopped by Biri's compound to find me. Over the next hour and a half, we sat in Biri's parlour and drank hot cups of coffee while I listened as they explained to me the events leading up to and following Adeline's disappearance. That afternoon, realizing she had forgotten to purchase petrol during her last trip to the Mandjou market, Adeline borrowed a small amount from her neighbour. Upon her return, she saw a tall man standing outside her home, leaning against a parked motorbike. His back was to Adeline, but as she approached he turned to face her. Adeline immediately recognized him as their Mbororo landlord. Casting his eyes downward so as to avoid eye contact with Adeline, the landlord requested to speak to Simon. Explaining that Simon was still on the farm, but due home shortly, Adeline told the landlord that he was welcome to wait. In a gesture of hospitality, Adeline rose from her small wooden stool and offered it to him. Yet, rather than accept the stool, the man stood in silence for several seconds before once again requesting to speak to Simon. Frustrated at the man's unwillingness to engage, Adeline turned her back on him and returned to the task at hand: preparing

mortar. Gbaya women will then pound the manioc into flour with a heavy wooden pestle that is usually two feet in length. The process of pounding manioc is labor intensive. Families with the financial resources will take the dried manioc to the local mill to be processed into flour.

dinner. It was only after the landlord cleared his throat that Adeline realized that the landlord had never left. Shifting uncomfortably from side to side and once again averting her gaze, he stated that Simon and his family needed to vacate the compound by the end of the month. With no further explanation, he gathered the folds of his pristine tunic, hopped on his motorbike and sped away.

It took a moment for Adeline to digest the news; her family's eviction was imminent. Adeline panicked. With only three days remaining before the end of the month, Adeline needed to act fast. With the battery on her small phone depleted there was no way to contact Simon, so she decided to seek help from her father, a man who many Gbaya considered to be somewhat of an expert in conflict resolution. Gbaya residents held Adeline's father, Jean, in high esteem and now in his retirement he frequently worked as a 'consultant' for Gbaya residents tied up in acrimonious land disputes with Mbororo and other Gbaya. Before heading to her father's, Adeline shuttered the sole window of their thatched hut and pulled the front door shut before tying Preta, her youngest child, to her back with a faded cloth wrap.

Several hours later, a determined and reinvigorated Adeline returned and broke the news to Simon. They stayed up late into the night and arranged with their neighbours to store some of their belongings (a foam mattress, two broken chairs and a few kitchen supplies) until they could relocate and, more importantly, secure the money necessary to rent a new home. Since rental prices closer to Mandjou were expensive, it was likely that Adeline and her family would be forced to resettle even farther outside of Mandjou. In the meantime, Adeline's father had extended an invitation to his daughter and son-in-law to stay with him until new accommodation could be sorted out.

Considering her father's reputation as a frequent and vocal advocate for Gbaya involved in bitter land contestations with Mbororo, I was somewhat surprised to learn from Adeline that her father had counselled her to accept, rather than contest the eviction. Her father, explained Adeline, was convinced that physical distance would allow Adeline, Simon and her young family to engage in

185

Gbaya cultural practices that their current proximity to Mbororo had prevented. Many of my Gbaya interlocutors shared Adeline's father's opinion, attributing the loss of cultural and economic activities to the arrival of Mbororo settlers who sought to transform Mandjou into a Muslim town. In the process, they claimed, Mandjou had become an inhospitable space for Gbaya. Yet for Gbaya residents like Adeline and Simon, the prospect of increasing their distance from Mandjou was met with reluctance.

Nearly one month after receiving their landlord's verbal notice of eviction and armed with a sizeable financial contribution from Adeline's father, Adeline and Simon moved into a new rental home. As expected, the location of their new home was even farther outside of Mandjou than their previous dwelling. The weeks following Adeline and Simon's eviction and their subsequent struggles to secure housing served as a turning point in my fieldwork. Previously, my interactions with Gbaya residents were limited to small exchanges with Gbaya women selling food items at the daily market. As my friendship with Adeline and Simon grew, it helped to expand my social network to include a greater number of Gbaya residents. Over the next several months I interviewed many Gbaya whose experiences with Mbororo mirrored that of Adeline and Simon. Mbororo were depicted as greedy and callous landlords who were eager to evict Gbaya in order to make room for Mbororo tenants. Gbaya, more often than not, had little choice but to resettle outside of town – anywhere from half a kilometer to five – since they could ill afford the rents Mbororo landlords demanded. Though Gbaya informants often discussed their limited presence in town as a result of Mbororo-led evictions, there were several factors that had contributed to a general decline in the physical visibility of Gbaya within Mandjou.

Long-term residents like Andre and Gilbert, remembered a time when Mandjou had been a small village with only a handful of Gbaya families. Though they both recounted the early 1980s as the period in which Mbororo began to settle in Mandjou, neither Gilbert nor Andre recalled Gbaya

186

being under any pressure to relocate since there was plenty of available land within Mandjou.[131]

Mbele Simon, the village chief of Mandjou, warmly welcomed Mbororo settlers, offering them land in exchange for a small tribute (livestock such as a calf or an older milking cow).[132] As I detailed in chapter two, Mbele Simon was supportive of Mbororo settlers remaining in Mandjou because he felt they had the financial resources to help Mandjou transition away from a subsistence-based economy. Giving away land was an incentive to motivate Mbororo to relocate and permanently settle in Mandjou.

As I noted in the introduction of the dissertation, 2003 marked a turning point for the town of Mandjou in terms of its demographic makeup. It was in this year that a mass exodus of Mbororo, hoping to escape "*coupeurs de route*", entered Cameroon as refugees from neighbouring Central African Republic.[133] Though initially a temporary residence, many of the refugees opted to permanently settle in Mandjou. After decades of unfettered demographic growth, land was no longer abundant. Consequently, Mbele Simon could no longer allocate plots of land with the ease that he once had. Gbaya, realizing that Mbororo settlers were willing to pay exorbitant prices for the most desirable locations within Mandjou, capitalized on the economic opportunity. It was these initial land transactions that led to the first wave of Gbaya residents to relocate outside of Mandjou. By late 2010, Mbororo had purchased much of the land that comprised *Carrefour Batouri* and built a thriving market with almost exclusively owned Mbororo businesses. Within the residential neighbourhoods

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[131] In a locally produced PLAN International report, Mbororo were identified as having first arrived in Mandjou in 1980 (PLAN Cameroun 2000:2)

[132] The chief was referred to as Mbele Simon but this was an inversion of his first and last names.

[133] Political instability has plagued the Central African Republic (CAR) for decades. Since its independence from France in 1960, CAR has witnessed five coup d'états and between 1997 and 2006 four separate international peacekeeping missions were placed within its borders. CAR's political uncertainty is due, in part, to the "leaders' manipulation of ethnic allegiances" (Berman and Lombard 2008:5). CAR is a landlocked nation-state that shares borders with war-torn countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Sudan. The internal conflicts in neighbouring counties have spilled over into the CAR, resulting in political and economic upheaval within the CAR (Ibid.:xxi-3). Poverty and high unemployment led to highway banditry becoming a "standard means of livelihood" for many CAR residents (Pemunta and Aristide 2013:275). Motivated by the possibility of securing hefty ransoms, many highway bandits or "*coupeurs de route*" targeted Mbororo – usually women and children – for kidnapping. Growing insecurity and uncertainty resulted in thousands of Mbororo abandoning their possessions and seeking refuge in Cameroon (UNHCR 2001; UNHCR 2007).

of Mandjou, adjacent to the market, Gbaya residences were few and far between. With few exceptions, most Gbaya continuing to reside in Mandjou were renting from Mbororo landlords.

Frequent shifts in residence and the centrifugal nature of the relocation – away from Mandjou – were points of commonality in the life histories of Gbaya I interviewed during my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011. Nevertheless, Gbaya were wary to characterize themselves as being a "mobile people"; a term they preferred to employ to identify Mbororo settlers. Examining the limited ethnographic and colonial writings on Gbaya society, residential mobility emerges as a critical instrument in Gbaya social organization.
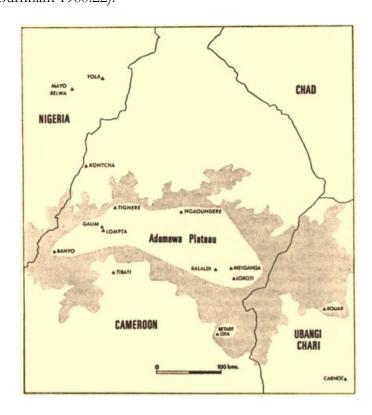
History of residential mobility within Gbaya communities

Philip Burnham's work amongst Gbaya communities in northern Cameroon (Adamaoua Region) spans over forty years (1968-present) and has contributed substantially to the field of Gbaya studies. When Burnham began his doctoral fieldwork in 1968, ethnographic data on Gbaya society was scarce, a point Burnham acknowledges in the introduction to his 1972 dissertation *Residential Organization and Social Change Among the Gbaya of Meiganga, Cameroon*. Burnham writes that aside from a brief report on communal fishing, "no published ethnographic works dealing specifically with this group had appeared" (Burnham 1972:2).

Burnham's writings on Gbaya society in northern Cameroon are relevant to my own research in Mandjou, in part, due to the dearth of ethnographic writings featuring Gbaya communities in East Cameroon.[134] Several colonial ethnographies – based on fieldwork conducted in present-day Central African Republic (C.A.R) and thus closer in geographic proximity to my own field site of Mandjou than that of Burnham's – were useful in terms of providing a snapshot of Gbaya way of life during

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[134] Since the mid-2000s a handful of graduate students, including MA student Dieudonne Ndanga Ngnantare (2007), have expanded the limited writings on Gbaya communities living in East Cameroon.

the early 20th century. Günter Tessmann, a German anthropologist contracted by the German

colonial administration, provided a comprehensive depiction of Gbaya social organization in the

early 20th century vis-à-vis two volumes – *Die Baja: Teil I: Materielle Und Seelische Kulture* (1934) and *Die*

Baja: Teil II: Geistige Kulture (1937). Paul Charreau's monograph, *Un Coin du Congo: le cercle de Kundé*

(1905), offered a detailed analysis of Gbaya political structure. Burnham's work, on the other hand,

plays a more critical role in my analysis because of the duration – over forty years – of his fieldwork

and the fact that it continued after the departure of the colonial rulers. Coupled with archival

material and colonial ethnographies, Burnham weaves together a comprehensive narrative in which

he illustrates the extent to which residential mobility is critical in Gbaya social organization[135]

(Burnham 1980:22).

Map of Adamaoua Region. Citation: Burnham 1975:579.

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[135] In one of Burnham's earliest publications, Burnham refers to Gbaya of Meiganga as "mobile cultivators" (Burnham 1975:578).

Working through colonial records housed in archives and the few limited written ethnographic

accounts of Gbaya society, Burnham writes that Europeans arriving in the late nineteenth century

encountered Gbaya "hamlets" scattered across the present-day Adamaoua Region. Within the

confines of each hamlet, there were a dozen or so adult men belonging to the same patri-clan and

their families. These hamlets, usually inhabited by no more than ten or fifteen families, were further

organized into a "loose alliance within a bounded territory", often referred to as a "clan territory" [136]

(Burnham 1975:578). Ideally, a clan territory would be comprised of members from the same clan,

but Burnham notes that this was not always the case. More often than not, clan territory

membership extended beyond that of one clan and included other entire clans or segments of other

clans. In the case of the latter, it was the founding clan or dominant clan that provided the political

leader or "chief" (Burnham 1980:20). Colonial authorities identified the clan territory as the most

extensive form of Gbaya political organization.[137] Yet, argues Burnham, any form of political

organization for a clan territory necessitated the formation of alliances between and within clans

sharing the territory. According to Burnham (1975, 1980, 1996), these alliances were short-lived.

Clan solidarity depended on the extent to which individual clan members identified their association

with the clan as being personally advantageous (Burnham 1975:578).

Burnham (1980:21) illustrates the fragility of clan territory membership by noting that an

argument between members of a clan could lead some members to seek an alliance with other clans

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[136] Village, *tribu*, clan and *sippe* were terms Europeans – administrators, travelers and ethnographers – used to identify a self-sufficient political structure (Burnham 1980:19).

[137] As a reminder to the reader, German colonial rule of this region preceded that of the French administration. Though the French were the first to penetrate the eastern edges of the Fulbe state of Ngaoundere (Adamaoua Region), German forces killed Lamido Mohamadou Abbo, ruler of the Fulbe state of Ngaoundere, in 1901. The death of Lamido Abbo provided the Germans with the opportunity to select a leader that would act on their behalf. Consequently, throughout much of the First World War, the Germans remained largely absent in terms of their administrative visibility in Ngaoundere. After their defeat in the First World War, the Germans ceded political control of Ngaoundere to the French.

in another territory. Based on extensive consultation of source material, Burnham (Ibid.:23) concludes that political authority was as fluid as clan membership; though a Gbaya leader had an identifiable role and duties and "enjoyed a substantial degree of legitimacy", his political authority over clan members was never for an extended period of time. Paul Charreau's work with the Gbaya in neighbouring Central African Republic – formerly French Equatorial Africa – depicted the *chef du village* as utterly powerless and fearful of his people (Charreau 1905:131). Charreau and Tessmann's research, explains Burnham (1980:21), depicted the Gbaya as an ethnic group in which "individualism and competitiveness in local level politics resulted in fluctuations in patterns of settlement and shifts in clan territory allegiance".

These frequent shifts in Gbaya residence hindered colonial efforts to collect taxes from Gbaya and prevented them from having access to a permanent labour source. Moreover, shifts in Gbaya residence made it difficult for colonial authorities to monitor potential insurrections. As a result, both German and French colonial administrations took steps towards forcefully relocating disparate Gbaya hamlets into larger villages located in close proximity to heavily trafficked roads (Burnham 1980:47-8; Burnham 1996:33). Resettling native populations was a common colonial administrative strategy employed throughout West Africa and continued well into the post-colonial era. In his 1998 book *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James C. Scott sets out to examine why it is that states desire to sedentarize populations:

> "the state has always seemed to be the enemy of 'people who move around'…Nomads and pastoralists (such as Berbers and Bedouins), hunter-gatherers, Gypsies, vagrants, homeless people, itinerants, runaway slaves, and serfs have always been a thorn in the side of states. Efforts to permanently settle these mobile peoples (sedentarization) seemed to be a perennial state project – perennial, in part because it so seldom succeeded" (Scott 1998:1).

As it turns out, Scott (1998:2) explains, sedentarization was one of many state-led initiatives "to make society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion". According to Scott (Ibid.:4), the state viewed

people as resources and thus opted to reorganize societies to ensure that the highest labour productivity would be achieved. In a similar vein, Timothy Mitchell's *Colonizing Egypt* explores the colonial strategies utilized to render colonial subjects "picture-like and legible", "available to political and economic calculation" (Mitchell 1991:33).

Following the end of the First World War, and the signing of the Versailles Treaty in 1919, Germany ceded its colonies – including what is now the region known as Adamaoua in Cameroon – to the French. Initially, however, France opted to utilize the French military to govern the Gbaya (Burnham 1972:75-6, 1996:33). During the French military's short reign, they "accomplished very little beyond establishing minimal French control and restoring a degree of calm to the region" (Burnham 1972:76). Due to financial and material (i.e. manpower) shortages, the French military opted to revert to the former German system of governance, that of "using the centralized Fulbe political apparatus as intermediary" (Burnham 1975:581). Fuelling the French military's political ambivalence towards the Gbaya, writes Burnham (1972:80), was their belief that "the Gbaya region appeared to be economically stationary". Though the French military chose to govern the Gbaya vis-à-vis the Fulbe, they continued to put forth efforts to regroup Gbaya settlements (Burnham 1975:584). Nevertheless, writes Burnham (Ibid.), the French military preferred to avoid confrontation and employed "a relatively voluntaristic approach toward Gbaya regrouping".

By 1930, the French military had relinquished administrative control to the French government. With the military officials ousted from their leadership role, the new French civilian administration formalized the policy of *regroupement* and redoubled their efforts to corral scattered hamlets and force their inhabitants to resettle in larger villages[138] (Burnham 1975:586). As with the German

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[138] A central tenet of French colonial policy was that villages "were 'natural', traditional-based units of political organization that could be used as the building blocks of the French colonial administrative system" (Burnham 1975:585). Gbaya mobility proved to be problematic for the French. As a result, the French authorities decided to impose a structure upon the Gbaya in the form of these "natural" villages (Ibid.).

administrators, the French authorities were confident that the grouping of Gbaya into villages would facilitate "census-taking, tax collection, labour recruitment, and agricultural inspections" (Ibid.:584). These organizational schemes mirror Scott's depiction of the modern state methods imposed to create a legible population. Under threat of violence – the burning of homes and fields – most Gbaya acquiesced to French demands that they leave their smaller hamlets. French colonial authorities, aware of the potential for conflict should related clan lines (living in different hamlets) be regrouped into the same village, permitted senior Gbaya men to decide with which village to merge[139] (Burnham 1975:586). Due the population growth within villages from the early 1930s onwards, the French considered the *regroupement* policy largely successful (Ibid.:584).

In addition to doggedly pursuing the policy of *regroupement,* French colonial authorities sought to establish a hierarchical political structure within Gbaya villages. The French created the administrative office of village headman for each village. This officer was to be elected by a selected group of senior men of the clan segment that claimed to have first settled the village. Unsurprisingly, the village headmen had little actual political power. His primary role was to act as an intermediary between the canton chief and the Gbaya village (Burnham 1975:586). Canton chiefs were one level removed from that of village headman and were authorized to organize "customary courts" that dealt with minor infractions of the law (Burnham 1972:92). While Gbaya selected village headman, the French identified the leaders of the most "dominant clans" and appointed them to the position of canton chief (Burnham 1975:585).

In the immediate post-colonial period, the newly elected leaders of the Cameroonian state attempted to stabilize these manufactured Gbaya villages. But there was little that could be done to prevent Gbaya from scattering once the colonial presence withdrew. Burnham explains that only

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[139] Günter Tessmann, as cited by Burnham, illustrated the fragility of regrouping hamlets with a shared lineage when he wrote "[i]t is easier to herd fleas than to keep a Gbaya clan under one roof" (Tessmann 1934:89 cited in Burnham 1980:56).

with threats of violence did the state succeed – and only nominally – to anchor Gbaya to a village. With the removal of colonial pressure, writes Burnham (1975:586), "Gbaya villages rapidly flew apart".[140] Burnham's fieldwork (Ibid.:593) substantiated that residential mobility retained a "structural significance within Gbaya society". Their mobility, concludes Burnham (1980:272), acted as "a mechanism of conflict regulation and as a means of reaction against the imposition of constraint on individual freedom or faction".

Though over forty years separated Burnham's initial doctoral fieldwork and subsequent conclusions from my own in Mandjou, a comparison of our findings reveals continuities, namely, frequent shifts in residence. Burnham's argument (1975:593) that residential mobility is a "political strategy and means of dispute regulation" hinges on a "permissive ecology". According to Burnham, the abundance of land, coupled with a relatively sparse population, facilitated Gbaya residential mobility. Nevertheless, Burnham is careful to avoid reducing Gbaya mobility to that of economic and/or ecological necessity. Barring a "truly radical change", i.e. land scarcity, Burnham (Ibid.) expresses doubts that Gbaya would opt to permanently settle.

Gbaya in Mandjou, like the Gbaya communities Burnham depicted in Meiganga, are engaged in residential mobility. Discussions with my Gbaya informants illustrated that avoiding conflict – one of Burnham's justifications for Gbaya residential mobility – played a role in Gbaya decisions to relocate. Specifically, Gbaya in Mandjou were eager to reduce contact with Mbororo. However, unlike Burnham, I argue that the prospect of financial gain played a role in the frequent shifts in Gbaya residence. As I noted above, Mbororo settlers were eager to settle in central Mandjou. The exponential population growth fuelled land transactions between Gbaya sellers and Mbororo buyers

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[140] Burnham (1980:56) notes that French authorities tasked "native police" i.e. local Gbaya, with apprehending and forcing the return of Gbaya who attempted to flee their village. Some village headmen were keen to support French authorities' initiatives to radically diminish mobility because they saw how economically beneficial – growth in tax revenues with a proportion lining their pockets – it was to increase the number of village residents.

and resulted in the first wave of Gbaya outward migration from Mandjou. By the time I began my fieldwork in 2010, Mbororo owned most of the land in central Mandjou. However, Mbororo were eager to expand their economic pursuits to include agriculture. In order to do so, Mbororo sought to purchase land from Gbaya who were already living outside of Mandjou. Thus, began a cycle in which Gbaya would shift residence after accepting the highest Mbororo bid. This process would be repeated as the Mbororo population increased. Gbaya have a long history of being dependent on agriculture as their primary economic livelihood. Rampant land transactions between Gbaya sellers and Mbororo buyers, however, have reduced Gbaya engagement in agriculture, resulting in growing economic uncertainty. Unable to depend on agriculture as a source of income, some Gbaya have turned to alternative activities.

On the move with Adeline

During the last six months of my fieldwork in Mandjou I bore witness to a series of crisis that left Adeline and Simon continuously teetering on the brink of financial ruin. Money had not always been so tight. In early 2008, nearly two years prior to the start of my fieldwork in Mandjou, Adeline and Simon's financial situation was enviable. After several consecutive months working as a bricklayer, Simon had managed to save nearly 75,000 CFA ($170 CDN).[141] With their bills paid, Adeline and Simon had discussed how best to utilize the money. Simon wanted to put down a deposit on a piece of land that was adjacent to Adeline's father's farm. Simon proposed to use the land solely to grow crops to be sold at the market. Though not opposed to the idea of investing in land, Adeline proposed opening a hair salon in Mandjou. Simon raised a few objections, including

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[141] The exchange rates between foreign currencies and the Central African CFA franc fluctuate. For the sake of uniformity, I have taken the daily exchange rates from the first stint of my fieldwork (November 2009 – October 2010) in Cameroon and produced an average. 1 CDN dollar is equivalent to approximately 440 CFA.

feasibility, but he eventually gave in to Adeline's cajoling. Within two months, Adeline's hair salon was open for business.

Doing hair in Mandjou, or really any part of Cameroon, is not a task for the faint of heart. A dedicated hair stylist or *coiffeuse* could spend ten hours or more styling, which almost certainly involved the braiding of hair. Whether for a special event such as a wedding, Christmas, or *Fete du Id,* or simply for regular upkeep, women sought out other women to braid their hair rather than doing it themselves. A *coiffeuse* was therefore always in demand. Generally, there are two routes for braiding in the Cameroonian context; adding weave – synthetic hair – and then braiding; or simply braiding with the person's natural hair.

Adeline had spent her entire life braiding hair, and was well known in and around Mandjou as a talented braider who could work well with both synthetic and natural hair. Previously Adeline had worked from her home, though when necessary, she would travel to a client's residence to braid. Confident that a Gbaya-run business could succeed in Mandjou, Adeline moved ahead with her plans to start a hair salon. She secured a small plot of land situated alongside the main road bisecting Mandjou. It was an ideal location considering that every morning Gbaya women, bearing baskets laden with foodstuffs to sell at the daily market, passed by en route to Mandjou. Those same women were sure to pass by in the late afternoon after a long day of selling at the market. Adeline appeared to confirm my suspicions when she stated that 'Gbaya women leaving the market carry empty baskets but their pockets are full'. As it turned out, it was more than luck and Adeline's business acumen that had secured such prime real estate. Adeline's father was the owner of the small parcel of land on which Adeline planned to build her hair salon. When Adeline had told her father about her idea to start a business, he offered her the use of the small plot.[142] Had it not been for her father

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[142] Adeline's father, unlike Simon and most other Gbaya, had been unwilling to sell his land to new Mbororo arrivals. Over the years he had received numerous offers from Mbororo buyers, but he had always refused. Adeline's father prided himself on the fact that he was one of the only Gbaya to still own land in Mandjou.

providing her the land, Adeline doubted that she would have had the money necessary to cover building materials, start-up costs as well as paying monthly rent to a Mbororo landlord.

Simon's savings, combined with a loan of 25,000 CFA ($56 CDN) from her father, covered the cost of several sheaths of corrugated aluminum for the roof as well as the installation of electricity. In order to illuminate the sole light bulb hanging from the ceiling, Adeline diverted electricity from her neighbour – for a negotiated one-time fee of 75,000. With what remained, approximately 25,000 CFA, Adeline bought printed posters displaying the latest braiding styles, a large mirror, and an array of hair products (hair weaves of varying colors and length, jars of hair moisturizing crèmes, and several picks and combs). An experienced bricklayer and builder, it was Simon who crafted the bricks by hand – a mixture of soil, water and bits of straw placed into moulds and then allowed to dry under direct sunlight for several days – and built the salon from the ground up.

When Adeline's salon opened for business in the spring of 2008, business had been great. As Adeline had suspected, late afternoons and early mornings were the periods from which she drew most of her clients. From 5:00 p.m. onwards, Gbaya women began to trickle out of the market after a long day of selling vegetables. Walking past Adeline's salon, it was hard for Gbaya women to resist taking a peek inside to ask about the prices. These drop-in visits, explained Adeline, often resulted in new clients. Weekdays were generally slow, one to two appointments in the evening. By Friday afternoon, however, her weekend was usually booked. For over a year, Adeline saw her earnings remain steady, averaging 3,000 CFA a week.

In the latter half of 2009, Adeline began to experience a number of unexplained health problems. At times, recalled Adeline, even the slightest movement would send shooting pains throughout her body. There were days where she suffered from blinding migraines that left her with diminished vision. Wracked with pain, Adeline often struggled to make it out of bed. With her

health deteriorating, Adeline decided to temporarily close her hair salon. In early January 2010, nearly six months after deciding to take a break from the salon, Adeline re-opened the salon.

Within the first few weeks of being back at work, Adeline noticed a sizeable drop in her earnings. Initially, she attributed the sluggish sales to her long-term absence and the fact that many of her former clients were not aware that she had re-opened the salon. However, by late summer of 2010, a little over two years since the grand opening of the hair salon and over six months since she had returned to work, her business was on the verge of collapse. Adeline was struggling to clear 1,000 CFA a week.

It was late afternoon in early September 2010 when I decided to stop by Adeline's salon. Three weeks had passed since we last spoke. Biri had requested that I travel to the NW on his behalf to visit his ailing mother and during that period Adeline's phone was out of service. Our lack of contact was a source of anxiety since prior to my departure Adeline had confided in me that she feared that it would only be matter of weeks before she would be forced to permanently shut the doors of her hair salon.

That afternoon, as I drew closer to the salon, I was surprised to see that the front door of Adeline's hair salon was closed and secured with a metal lock. Assuming she had left to run an errand and would be back soon, I set aside my knapsack and sat under the metal awning that extended over the doorway of the hair salon. After an hour passed and Adeline failed to appear, I hailed a motorbike and headed to the rental home that she shared with Simon and their children.

Twenty minutes later I was sitting on a small wooden stool and watched as Adeline widened the spacing between the three stones of the hearth in order to accommodate the large metal cauldron. Somber and detached would be the best way to describe Adeline. As she prepared for supper, Adeline spoke at length about her financial troubles and explained that the week before had been particularly brutal. For five consecutive mornings, explained Adeline, she had travelled by foot to

Mandjou and nervously awaited the arrival of the first client of the day. And for five days, not one client passed through the salon's front door. Every afternoon, Adeline had trudged home empty-handed and slightly more discouraged than the previous day. This particular morning, unwilling to spend yet another day sitting in her salon waiting for potential clients, Adeline chose to work her father's land alongside Simon. Though two people were not needed to work the small field, Adeline preferred working in the field to sitting idle in her salon. It had been that morning that Adeline had made the decision to close the salon permanently. As long as the Gbaya remained without money, noted Adeline, the door of her salon would remain padlocked.

Adeline took a few minutes to wipe the sweat from her brow and readjust her stool. She then began to turn the manioc flour and hot water mixture in the blackened pot with a large wooden pestle. I watched silently as Adeline quickened the pace of her 'turns' before removing the wooden pestle and placing it horizontally on her lap. Few words were exchanged as the two of us sat before the black cauldron and watched as the dough-like mixture began to boil.

It was during these few minutes of silence that I wracked my brain trying to think of a possible means by which Adeline could continue to keep the doors of her hair salon open. That same week, Madina, Biri's second oldest daughter, had made an off-handed remark about her struggle to find someone to braid her hair. Only one week remained until the end of Ramadan and the commencement of *l'Aïd el-Fitr* – an important religious holiday that marked the end of the one-month fast. The days preceding *l'Aïd el-Fitr* were the busiest times of year for Mbororo women since they were tasked with preparing large quantities of food to distribute to visitors. Food preparation during this period of time was prioritized, thus reducing Mbororo women's engagement in any other activities, including braiding hair.

It was with Madina's remarks in mind that I turned to Adeline, who was focused on reducing the flame and searching for dishes to serve the manioc porridge, and asked her if she had considered

199

reaching out to the Mbororo community in order to secure new clients. I pointed out that with the end of Ramadan only days away, many Mbororo women would be looking for someone to braid their hair. Though it was not a permanent solution, it could provide Adeline with cash for the moment and if Mbororo women liked her work, surely, they would come back. Eyeing me suspiciously, her anger palpable, Adeline shook her head with disgust before declaring, 'a Mbororo women will never pay to braid'.[143] According to Adeline, Mbororo women depended on women within their community to braid their hair. No money was exchanged for such a service. There was little chance, explained Adeline, that a Mbororo woman would choose to pay her when she could seek out the services of a friend, neighbor or family member for free.

There was yet another important impediment that prevented Adeline from reaching out to Mbororo women. The bulk of Adeline's income was generated from the braiding of synthetic hair – hair weave. Synthetic hair is used to create the illusion of longer and thicker hair. Gbaya women's hair tended to be coarser and more likely to break than that of Mbororo women. In order for a *coiffeuse* to create the elaborate hairstyles Gbaya women desired, she would braid synthetic hair into the roots of the woman's natural hair. This technique provided a Gbaya client with longer and thicker hair. Mbororo women, noted Adeline, refused to use synthetic hair; they claimed it was *haram* – forbidden under Islamic law.

A conversation later that evening with Jamila, Biri's eldest daughter, confirmed Adeline's claim. Synthetic hair, explained Jamila, was an abomination; a Mbororo woman with the most rudimentary Quranic knowledge would never agree to place synthetic hair in her own hair. When I asked Jamila about the possibility of paying a Gbaya woman to braid her hair sans synthetic material, Jamila hesitated before slowly shaking her head from side to side. As if to justify her physical response,

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[143] Recollection from a discussion in my notes dated September 2010. I have opted to insert single quotes as an indication that this was not a direct quote.

Jamila explained that within her circle of Mbororo friends and neighbours she always managed to find someone to braid her hair for free. Distance, offered Jamila, was another factor that had led Mbororo women to seek out other Mbororo women to braid their hair. Any Mbororo woman seeking out the braiding services of a Gbaya woman would have to travel several kilometers outside of Mandjou. According to Jamila, it was easier to seek out a Mbororo woman to braid her hair than travel several kilometers and pay a Gbaya woman.

Adeline's narrative was personal, one in which she recalled the highs and lows of running her hair salon in Mandjou. For a short period of time, Adeline's earnings from her work at the hair salon had been more than enough to pay rent, schools fees, and to purchase household items. Though Adeline's commentary underscored her family's precarious economic situation, it also alluded to the economic vulnerability of Gbaya more broadly. Land transactions had reduced Gbaya access to arable land, thus preventing Gbaya from producing sufficient yields to sell at the Mandjou market. With the loss of agricultural income, Gbaya women struggled to find the money to pay for Adeline's services as a hair stylist. Adeline acknowledged that land transactions between Gbaya sellers and Mbororo buyers had reduced Gbaya visibility in the agricultural sector. Yet when it came to attributing blame for the salon's closure, Adeline lashed out against Mbororo residents. Somewhat surprisingly, Adeline anger was primarily directed at Mbororo men. According to Adeline, rampant Mbororo land purchases had led to the impoverishment of the Gbaya

The history of Gbaya economic activities: from manioc cultivation to selling land

Gbaya have struggled to achieve recognition as contributing to the economy. During the French colonial rule, writes Burnham (1975:582, 592), authorities were reticent to invest their time, energy, and monies to develop "a backwater worthy of little immediate interest" whose natives, i.e. Gbaya, were subsistence farmers "incapable of a meaningful contribution to the development of the

colonial economy". The colonial authorities' dismissive attitude towards Gbaya economic

livelihoods was shaped, in part, by their frustration at Gbaya unwillingness to cultivate cash crops.

Gbaya preferred to grow manioc, a crop that held little economic value for the colonial

administration. Refusing to yield to colonial pressure, Gbaya were soon relegated to the role of

peripheral actors in the regional economy (Burnham 1972:95).

Gbaya preference for manioc stemmed from the fact that it was an undemanding crop requiring

minimum investment in time and labor (Burnham 1972:20-1). A hardy tuber, manioc could be

planted without first clearing the land of all vegetation. Furthermore, planting manioc was an

uncomplicated process: cutting the stem of a mature manioc plant into sections (approximately 20

cm in length) and placing the pieces in small holes (1980:129). Once planted, manioc took about

eighteen months to mature. Unlike most other crops, including maize, mature manioc could remain

unearthed for two to three years without spoiling. The ease with which manioc was cultivated and

stored, coupled with land being readily accessible with few land tenure restrictions in place,

facilitated Gbaya mobility (Burnham 1972:25). The French colonial government, however, was eager

to redirect Gbaya agricultural pursuits and have them focus their efforts on producing cash crops

that would replenish the colonial authorities' coffers.

From the 1930s onwards, the French colonial administrators embarked on development

schemes to 'improve' Gbaya agricultural practices. Realizing that Gbaya were unlikely to be

convinced to reduce their dependence on manioc, colonial administration encouraged Gbaya to

adopt new strains of manioc that produced larger and more predictable yields. Additionally, they

financed the construction of roads, substantially expanding the reach of Gbaya-produced manioc

and facilitating the development of local and regional markets. According to Burnham (1980:60-1),

the colonial administration never lost sight of the fact that Gbaya played a vital role in terms of

feeding the local population. Nevertheless, Gbaya refusal to adopt colonial agricultural directives (i.e.

cultivating cash crops), combined with Gbaya reticence to resettle in villages, resulted in French colonial authorities redirecting financial resources to develop economic livelihoods with greater potential, i.e. Mbororo cattle husbandry.

Cattle sales were a lucrative source of income for Mbororo cattle herders and provided the French administration with an opportunity to extract large sums of money from Mbororo in the form of cattle tax. Mbororo cattle quickly became "the chief economic resource" in Meiganga (Burnham 1996:37). Lending credence to the French colonial administration's focus on developing the cattle industry was a 1955 report from the colonial agricultural service in which cattle husbandry was promoted over Gbaya agricultural endeavours (Burnham 1975:103). Prioritizing cattle husbandry signalled the French colonial administration's waning support of Gbaya economic activities. Following the withdrawal of French colonial authorities in 1960, the newly minted democratic government opted to discontinue all financial support to the Gbaya. The elimination of financial support, explains Burnham (1980:83), was based on government officials deciding that Gbaya crops (manioc in particular) had made "no contribution to overseas exports".

The actions of colonial authorities and the Cameroon state – reducing financial support of Gbaya economic activities – played a role in Gbaya struggling to gain a foothold in the economy. Nevertheless, argues Burnham (1996:81, 84), "social demands of participation in Gbaya life" ostensibly precluded Gbaya from achieving "success in the market economy of northern Cameroon". Wealth accumulation – necessary if an individual were to raise capital to establish a business – contravened the "egalitarian ethos" undergirding Gbaya society. Burnham (1996:80, 1980:191-7) reveals, were a Gbaya community member to flout the "egalitarian ethos" he would "likely to attract the malevolent attentions of witches or the curses of fellow clansmen". Agriculture, not being a lucrative endeavour and unlikely to provide Gbaya farmers with the opportunity to accumulate capital, was the economic activity to which Gbaya gravitated (Burnham 1980:197).

Drawing from his doctoral fieldwork during the late 1960s, Burnham (1996:81) claims Gbaya commitment to an "individualistic approach" – unwillingness to pool economic resources to establish a business made – ostensibly reduced their economic opportunities and potential for economic success. The Gbaya approach was markedly different from that of their non-Gbaya neighbors, who were more likely to be engaged in "collaborative business norms"[144] (Ibid.). Burnham provides a clear-cut example of the different business approaches when describing butchers in Meiganga. Prior to establishing a business, a butcher needed to apply and pay for a license. Hausa opted to pool their money to share the cost of a single operating license. Gbaya butchers, on the other hand, preferred to purchase an individual operating license (Burnham 1996:81). Gbaya reluctance to collaborate with one another effectively reduced their physical presence in Meiganga. Burnham (Ibid.) writes, "virtually the entire commercial centre of this 'Gbaya' town has been taken over by non-Gbaya who have gradually bought out the original Gbaya landowners".

Burnham's historical account of the challenges and struggles Gbaya in Meiganga encountered in achieving economic success bares a strong resemblance to those of Gbaya living in Mandjou today. Several factors led to Gbaya remaining perpetually on the margins of the regional (Meiganga) economy and these same factors, to varying degrees, emerge in discussions with Gbaya residents living within and outside of Mandjou today.

"*Nous sommes derrières à tous*" (We are behind everyone) was a phrase that became all too familiar to me during conversations with Gbaya living within and outside of Mandjou. It was an utterance that conveyed frustration, anger, and at times, despair. And for many Gbaya, it was a sentence that

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[144] Burnham (1996:81-2) identifies several ethnic groups residing in Meiganga that are major operators in the regional market economy. Fulbe and Hausa merchants dominate the regional trade of cattle and kola nut. Bamileke residents are engaged in the selling of dry goods, hardware, second-hand textiles, etc. Both the Hausa and Bamileke are more recent settlers in comparison to Fulbe, Mbororo and Gbaya residents. According to the Burnham's ethnographic data, Mbororo are primarily engaged in cattle herding.

communicated their economic and social position in Mandjou, marginal and largely obscured. Mayo, a recent widow living on the edge of Mandjou, was the first Gbaya resident I interviewed to have remarked, "*nous sommes derrières à tous*". She was nearing seventy but continued to work her small patch of land. On a scorching afternoon in mid-July 2010 we sat opposite one another on low wooden stools and I watched as Mayo carefully skinned several kilos of manioc, pausing every few minutes to massage her arthritic hands. Mayo was surprisingly candid when discussing what she referred to as "Gbaya problems". Gbaya, asserted Mayo, had played a central role in their economic struggles. Shaking her head in disgust, Mayo stated that Gbaya were incapable of helping one another and preferred plotting their fellow Gbaya's demise.

Using land transactions to illustrate her point, Mayo explained that a Gbaya seeking buyers for his plot of land would always prefer a Mbororo buyer to that of a Gbaya. If one were to sell to a fellow Gbaya, it was only a matter of time before accusations of witchcraft emerged. According to Mayo, Gbaya would do anything to thwart the success of a fellow Gbaya.[145] Mayo was not alone in acknowledging the role that Gbaya social norms had played in Gbaya 'being behind everyone'. It was a sentiment that resonated within the Gbaya community. However, more often than not, the Cameroonian state and Mbororo settlers were the targets of Gbaya frustration and anger.

Honoré, Mandjou's director of public sanitation, had a reputation as somewhat of a political firebrand, having publicly admonished the state for systematically ignoring the East Region. Contaminated drinking water had resulted in multiple cholera outbreaks throughout the region, including in Mandjou. Cholera, argued Honoré, had cost many residents their lives and was likely to kill more. And the state, exclaimed Honoré, having denied communities' access to clean drinking water, had been complicit in all of these deaths. The state had chosen to respond to Gbaya supplications for clean water with silence. Had the government identified the East as a region replete

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[145] Interview with Mayo on July 11, 2010.

with extractable resources, stressed Honoré, Gbaya would not be in the position that they are in today.

It was the state's absence, explained Honoré that had persuaded former chief Mbele Simon (discussed at length in previous chapters) to extend an invitation to Mbororo to settle. Many Gbaya had been convinced that the presence of Mbororo would encourage the state to take an interest in the region and more specifically, Mandjou. According to Honoré, from the 1980s onwards – coinciding with the arrival of the first wave of Mbororo settlers – the state's presence was felt.[146]

When I questioned Honoré as to why the state would finance public works as means of incentivizing Mbororo settlement, he explained that it was fairly simple; Mbororo were wealthy. For the state, the Mbororo and their economic pursuits were a source of tax revenue, one that far exceeded what the Gbaya could provide with their rudimentary farming tools and dependence on manioc cultivation. Additionally, financing development projects was an effective way to engage Mbororo politically and to potentially secure them as allies in future elections. Honoré was unequivocal in his belief that Mbororo settlement had come at a great cost to Gbaya. Honoré, though careful in his depiction of the much beloved former Gbaya chief, faulted Mbele Simon for his misplaced confidence in the Mbororo. Mbele Simon had mistakenly believed that a strong Mbororo presence would encourage the government to take a more active role in the development of the East. Gbaya would surely benefit due to their proximity to Mbororo settlers. Gbaya residents,

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[146] As I noted in the introduction, in 2003 a steady stream of Mbororo entered Cameroon from CAR seeking refuge from highway bandits. International humanitarian agencies identified Mbororo as refugees and provided them with "financial aid, food hand outs, financial incentives and agricultural inputs to boost agricultural production" (Pemunta and Aristide 2013:278). Pemunta and Aristide identify these humanitarian interventions – based on Mbororo status as refugees – as a source of tension between Mbororo and Gbaya. In a similar vein, Norberg (2000:11) problematizes humanitarian relief projects and the potential they have to "fuel existing conflicts". This should come as no surprise, argues Norberg (Ibid.), considering that these types of projects "supply resources to areas with extremely limited resources. Though I concur with Pemunta and Aristide's premise that the injection of aid from humanitarian agencies exacerbated local tensions, I argue that the humanitarian aid based on Mbororo status as refugees has subsequently been replaced with aid based on Mbororo being indigenous. By the time I arrived in Mandjou in early 2010, most of the humanitarian aid for refugees had dried up. It is the aid based on Mbororo being recognized as indigenous that was most concerning to my Gbaya interlocutors.

conceded Honoré, had managed to make a bit of money from selling off their land to wealthy Mbororo. Nevertheless, the slight economic boost was of little comfort to Gbaya, once they realized that the selling of their land deprived them of access to arable land. In hindsight, asserted Honoré, land transactions between Gbaya sellers and Mbororo buyers had resulted in Gbaya experiencing greater economic instability. Long dependent on agriculture, Gbaya had been thrust into economic uncertainty after selling their land to Mbororo settlers. Gbaya had been seduced by the prospect of a financial windfall, hence the eagerness to sell their land to Mbororo. Mbororo, in turn, offered exorbitant sums for land in order to ensure Gbaya would agree to sell. Mbororo, Honoré assured me, wanted Mandjou for Mbororo only.

Having lived in Mandjou for several years, Simon was familiar with Honoré's political diatribes against the government and Mbororo settlers. Simon, however, was far more diplomatic when characterizing the impact of Mbororo migration to Mandjou. Mbele Simon's (Mandjou's former *chef du village*) decision to use land to entice Mbororo to migrate and settle in Mandjou, argued Simon, was successful in terms of providing Gbaya access to development. For decades after the first Mbororo moved to Mandjou, Gbaya benefitted from their presence. Shortly after the Mbororo began to arrive, asserted Simon, the state offered to finance the construction of several public works. One of the biggest projects to date, claimed Simon, was the paving of the road connecting Mandjou to Yaoundé in the mid-2000s. For years Gbaya leaders had unsuccessfully petitioned the government to pave the road. Yet when Mbororo lodged complaints that the poor road conditions had led to significant delays in the transportation of goods (cattle, timber and crops) to other regions in Cameroon, government funding suddenly became available to pave the road. Even the threat of a delay was a source of concern for the government. A long enough delay could result in food shortages and civil unrest. Thus, reasoned Simon, the government's decision to build the road made sense. It was not only the completion of the paving of the road for which Mbororo were

207

responsible, asserted Simon. Mbororo businessmen had also pushed the two major mobile phone carriers, MTN and Orange, to extend their network coverage to Mandjou. Temporary as it may have been, Simon subscribed to the belief that Mbororo settlement brought "development" to Gbaya. Furthermore, noted Simon, Mbororo migration to Mandjou facilitated greater Gbaya involvement in the economy outside of agriculture.

Mbororo settlement in Mandjou resulted in the emergence of a strong wage economy in which Gbaya offered their labour-power (agriculture, cattle husbandry, and house construction) to Mbororo in exchange for remuneration. Mbororo sought out Gbaya men to employ for temporary jobs and paid in cash.[147] After moving to Mandjou at the age of eighteen (circa 2003) Simon found seasonal employment as a farm labourer – clearing land of vegetation, planting and harvesting corn – with a wealthy Mbororo landowner who had purchased several acres of land. Simon was not alone in his work as a wage labourer. Many Gbaya men had sought employment from Mbororo men. Though much of the short-term work offered to Gbaya men centered on agriculture, house construction was a sector in which Mbororo regularly hired Gbaya. These jobs, once plentiful, lamented Simon, were now exceedingly rare. Mbororo, remarked Simon, preferred to hire less affluent Mbororo than Gbaya. Though Simon was willing to concede that Gbaya no longer benefitted from the presence of Mbororo residents, he was hesitant to hold Mbororo responsible for the current impoverished state of the Gbaya community. Nevertheless, Simon was discouraged by the seeming obliviousness of Mbororo as to the impact of their actions on Gbaya. For years Gbaya had extended their hospitality to Mbororo settlers, commented Simon, and now Mbororo were repaying their kindness with total disregard.

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[147] Burnham (1980:230) described a similar economic scenario in Meiganga in which Mbororo and Fulbe employers "contribute[d] significantly to the income of the great majority of rural Gbaya households". In Meiganga, as in Mandjou, Gbaya men were active in the wage economy, providing their services in agriculture, house construction and cattle husbandry.

Mbororo were dismissive of both the idea that as a community they were working to exclude Gbaya from Mandjou and that they were intentionally preventing Gbaya from achieving economic success. During an interview in late August 2010, I spoke to Al Hadji Hassan at length about Mbororo and Gbaya interactions in Mandjou. As with many Mbororo men I interviewed, he was a more recent (2007) transplant to Mandjou from the NW. In Mandjou he had set up a travel agency that catered exclusively to Mbororo desiring to participate in the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca and considered a religious duty for Muslims). Al Hadji Hassan organized flights, food, accommodation as well as interpreters for groups of three or more. Having previously lived in Bamenda – a thriving city with a population of over one million residents and housing the largest Mbororo community in Cameroon – Al Hadji Hassan had hesitated to relocate to Mandjou. A brief visit to Mandjou in early 2006, however, had erased his doubts. The Mbororo in Mandjou, boasted Al Hadji Hassan, were far more religious than Mbororo in the NW. Mbororo in Mandjou were not only well aware of their obligation to complete the *Hajj,* but also committed to do so. Mbororo in Mandjou, offered Al Hadji Hassan, were not necessarily wealthier than Mbororo in other parts of Cameroon. Rather, they were more willing to work hard to accumulate the funds necessary to make the *Hajj.*

During our interview, I broached the subject of development in Mandjou and asked whether or not Al Hadji Hassan had witnessed any changes to Mandjou since his arrival, a little over three years ago. Al Hadji Hassan hesitated for a few moments before suggesting that perhaps only someone having lived in Mandjou for longer could provide an answer. Shifting the discussion to development, i.e. electricity, water wells and schools, I asked Al Hadji Hassan who was responsible for bringing development to Mandjou. Al Hadji Hassan chuckled and explained that this was simple. Mbororo were responsible for the development and growth of Mandjou. Moreover, added Hassan, 'Islam was the source of development. It was a religion that encouraged the construction of buildings, education and commerce. It had been the Mbororo who built the schools and now that everything

was built, more people were deciding to settle in Mandjou'.[148] As a follow-up, I asked Al Hadji Hassan about the role of Gbaya in the development of Mandjou since they were often referred to as *les autochtones du Mandjou*. With a wave of his hand, Al Hadji Hassan dismissed this idea. Gbaya, he explained, had done very little aside from being the first to settle Mandjou. More than one hundred years since the Gbaya had first arrived in Mandjou, remarked Al Hadji Hassan, and they were still using machetes to farm. Mbororo, he countered, used tractors.

Al Hadji Hassan's faulted Gbaya inaction for their economic struggles and scoffed at the idea that Mbororo would collude to imperil Gbaya livelihoods. Al Hadji Hassan described the hardships he and other Mbororo had faced while living in the Bamenda Highlands (NW). Political exclusion and limited access to natural resources had driven many Mbororo out of the NW into the East, including Al Hadji Hassan. And while Al Hadji Hassan acknowledged Gbaya settlement having preceded that of Mbororo, they had done little else.

Within the Gbaya community, opinions varied on the degree of Mbororo culpability in Gbaya being "*derrières à tous*". Nevertheless, Gbaya I interviewed were confident that Mbororo settlement and their subsequent actions, i.e. buying up vast amounts of land and refusing to employ Gbaya, had played a role in their impoverished state. With the loss of agriculture and no longer able to depend on short-term contracts from Mbororo, Gbaya have begun to engage in other economic livelihoods. Most notable among these new economic pursuits is the hunting of wild game and raising pigs. In the following section I describe the challenges facing Gbaya who engage in these activities. Additionally, I explore claims from Gbaya that Mbororo are impeding their participation in these new livelihoods, resulting in their further marginalization.

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[148] During my interview with Al Hadji Hassan on September 17, 2010 I was unable to use my recording device. Instead I was permitted to take detailed notes throughout. The comments I have included are paraphrased responses from Al Hadji Hassan.

Hunting bush meat; raising pigs

One mid-July day in 2010, Adeline and I, having narrowly escaped a downpour, pushed past a number of people in order to claim a seat on the wooden benches that took up most of the space in Guillaume and Hélène Adgia's living room. Though it was still quite early in the afternoon, the gathering thunderclouds blocked the sun, sharply decreasing the visibility in their salon, a situation Hélène was trying to alleviate by strategically placing oil lanterns around the room. It was Sunday and I was attending the *Nous sommes ensemble* weekly gathering. *Nous sommes ensemble* was the name of a Gbaya *tontine* of which Adeline and Simon were members.[149] The actual meeting in which the president and secretary collected, documented, and distributed monies usually lasted an hour and was followed by great festivities that carried on well into the night. This particular afternoon, after the meeting broke up, members carried the wooden benches and additional seating outside – the rains having passed – and waited impatiently as the first of two plastic jerry cans (holding 20 liters) containing home-brewed corn beer was pried open. Members made a beeline for the corn beer with cups in hand before retaking their seats. While waiting for the meal to be served, members chatted boisterously, exchanging bits of gossip. These afternoon gatherings, following the end of the *tontine* meeting, were often the only times during the week when members had the opportunity to catch up with one another. There was a small group of women tasked with serving dinner – a portion of sticky pounded cassava (*cous cous de manioc*) and a leaf-based sauce with thick pieces of roasted pork.

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[149] *Tontine* is a type of savings and credit association that is common in much of West and Central Africa. Members contribute varying amounts to the association in the form of savings. Members usually withdraw a portion or all of their savings to cover large expenses i.e. school fees, building a new compound, buying land, etc. It is possible to belong to more than one *tontine* but this can become cumbersome due to the responsibilities that come with being a member. *Nous sommes ensembles* requires members to pay two fixed amounts at every meeting, in addition to any additional money they would like to put towards their savings. Each member is required to contribute 200 CFA to off-set the costs, i.e. food and alcohol, of hosting the *tontine*. The host of the following week's *tontine* is presented with the cash collected. Additionally, members are required to contribute an additional 200 CFA, the sum of which is awarded to a member at the close of the meeting and before festivities begin. The irony in choosing such a moniker for the *tontine* was lost on neither Adeline nor I. Adeline explained that the members decided on the name *nous sommes ensemble* to encourage collaboration within the organization as well as to promote solidarity within the larger Gbaya community. It was the absence of the solidarity that Gbaya residents identified as an '*obstacle*' (obstacle) for Gbaya 'development'.

With drink and food in hand, I took a seat between Adeline and Hélène and listened intently as the two women talked about their financial problems and how to best go about paying for the school fees that would be due in early September. Seeing that my plate was clean, Adeline grabbed it out of my hands and returned a few minutes later with a plate piled high with chunks of pork. I told her that there was no way that I could eat all this food before heading home. Adeline chuckled and reminded me that I had better eat as much as I could because this kind of Gbaya food was not available in Mandjou. Hélène seconded Adeline's comment and said that one of the reasons she did not mind living so far from town (her house was a forty minute walk from *Carrefour Battouri*) was that she and her family no longer had to deal with the everyday conflicts her male Mbororo neighbours initiated. Curious as to the nature of these conflicts I asked Hélène if she remembered any details.

Upon hearing my question Hélène laughed out loud, spilling nearly half of her beer on the ground. Mbororo men, reminded Hélène, were combative and prone to violence. Conflict, she quipped, was thus an everyday occurrence. While still living in Mandjou, recalled Hélène, she and Guillaume had been on the receiving end of multiple attacks from their Mbororo neighbour, a middle-aged trader with a small shop in the market. Hélène had no trouble remembering the event that had triggered her neighbour's rage. She was preparing dinner late one afternoon, a spinach sauce with large succulent chunks of roasted pig, when she heard the familiar greeting "*Sallam Alaikum*". Her back was to the visitor when she offered the obligatory response, "*Alaikum Sallam*". Moments later, Hélène stood up and turned to identify the unknown voice. Her gaze fell upon a face belonging to a tall, slim Mbororo man that she recognized but could not quite place. Clearly uncomfortable and doing his best to avoid eye contact with Hélène, the Mbororo man demanded to speak to her husband. Familiar with Mbororo men's unwillingness to engage with Gbaya women, Hélène sent one of her younger children to fetch Guillaume from his favourite bar. While waiting

212

for Guillaume to arrive, Hélène tried to make her guest more comfortable, offering him a wooden stool and a cup of water. Hélène's neighbour responded to her gestures of hospitality with silence. Thirty minutes later, Guillaume stumbled home with his young daughter running ahead of him. Irritated at having been forced to leave the bar early, Guillaume cut short the compulsory set of greetings and asked the neighbour what it was he needed. The Mbororo man, recalled Hélène, identified himself as their new neighbour, having finalized a land transaction with a Gbaya seller within the last few weeks. Focusing his gaze at Guillaume, their new neighbour requested that the household refrain from preparing pork – Hélène had been in the process of frying pork in palm oil when the Mbororo neighbour had greeted her. Perplexed, Guillaume asked why. Hélène recalled the neighbour indicating that the smell of pork had caused his wife to become violently ill. Guillaume grew increasingly restless as the neighbour spoke, commented Hélène. Thinking back, Hélène thought that perhaps the alcohol had caused Guillaume to respond uncharacteristically with violence. Saying nothing, Guillaume picked up a machete, brandished it menacingly in the direction of the Mbororo neighbour and demanded he leave immediately. The man, remembered Hélène, was surprised at Guillaume's outburst but acquiesced. Guillaume, recalled Hélène, had revelled in that small victory. Days later the Mbororo neighbour returned and once again received a tongue-lashing from Guillaume.

Over the next year the frequency and tenor of the harassment from the neighbour intensified and led to Hélène and Guillaume relocating outside of Mandjou. Though the physical distance from Mandjou presented challenges, i.e. children had to travel farther to school, no clean water supply, etc., Hélène was confident that the decision to resettle had been for the best. The family's relocation, Hélène admitted, had been necessary so as to prevent an escalation in the war of words between Guillaume and the Mbororo neighbour. Moreover, explained Hélène, the physical distance

from Mandjou limited her family's exposure to Mbororo everyday practices that were increasingly impinging on those of the Gbaya.

It was well past 7:00 p.m. when I left the *nous sommes ensemble* meeting. Most of the members, including Hélène, were on their third and fourth beer. It had been an eventful afternoon and I was eager to get home and write-up my conversation with Hélène. Adeline, worried that I would not find my way back, insisted on accompanying me. Together we traveled by foot for nearly forty minutes until we reached Biri's residence. En route to Mandjou, I expressed to Adeline my confusion over the absence of pork producers in Mandjou since Gbaya were ready and willing to buy pork whenever possible. Gbaya, admitted Adeline, not only preferred pork but also were more likely to purchase pork over any other animal protein.[150] It was not by choice, lamented Adeline, that Gbaya engaged in pork production had disappeared from Mandjou and resettled far outside of Mandjou. Rather, asserted Adeline, Mbororo residents in Mandjou had offered remuneration to pig farmers willing to relocate. Pig farmers, with only a few exceptions, accepted the offers. Those who had refused, reasoned Adeline, paid a heavy price. Several Gbaya pig producers had fallen ill with a mysterious illness after rejecting the Mbororo offer. It was not long thereafter, added Adeline, before their pigs began to die. Shaking her head, Adeline conceded that Mbororo had used their witchcraft to rout the few Gbaya with pigs that had refused to relocate.[151]

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[150] Based on more than thirty interviews with life-long Gbaya residents, I estimated that the availability of pork began to decrease in the late 1990s. Several Gbaya informants indicated that the pork industry began its steady decline as the Mbororo population expanded. By the time I arrived in 2010, pork was unavailable at the market and there were no signs of pigs being raised in Mandjou. When the question of reduced pork consumption was raised, most of my Gbaya informants indicated that pork had become exceedingly difficult to procure. Pig producers who had formerly resided in Mandjou had relocated outside of Mandjou. At the time of my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011 the nearest pig farm was located ten kilometers east of Mandjou. The time and finances necessary to travel to purchase pork had resulted in Gbaya limiting their pork consumption to special occasions, i.e. weekly *tontine* meetings.

[151] Adeline's particular claim that Mbororo had employed witchcraft to cause harm to Gbaya pork producers and pigs was unsurprising considering the frequency with which Gbaya accused Mbororo neighbours of using witchcraft to 'block' and 'command' them. Many Gbaya I interviewed, blamed Mbororo witchcraft for their personal hardships (i.e. medical, financial, etc.).

Having been privy to many conversations and interviews in which Gbaya accused Mbororo of engaging in witchcraft, Adeline's remarks were not surprising. What did come as quite a shock was her response to my follow-up question in which I asked her if she had considered why Mbororo had gone to such lengths (engaging in witchcraft) to rid Mandjou of all pork producers. Adeline speculated that Mbororo greed was behind the elimination of Mandjou's pig farmers. Mbororo were heavily invested in the beef industry. They were both the producers of beef and the largest consumers of beef. Eager to broaden their consumer base and increase their profits, Mbororo beef producers had eliminated their only competition, i.e. Gbaya pork producers.

Nearly an hour had passed since Adeline and I departed the *tontine*. Standing in front of Biri's gate I motioned for Adeline to come in and have some tea. With a slight shake of the head Adeline began the long trek home. It was difficult to process the tail end of our conversation regarding Mbororo motivation for effectively eliminating pork production and the sale of pork within Mandjou. Over the next several months, I encountered many Gbaya who expressed their frustration at the inaccessibility of pork. They too, blamed Mbororo for the disappearance of pork at the market. Unlike Adeline, however, these Gbaya informants attributed Mbororo efforts to eliminate the presence of pork to Mbororo religious convictions. One older Gbaya farmer pointed out that Mbororo had become fearful of mistakenly consuming pork, a food that the Qur'an prohibited Muslims from eating. It was fear that had led Mbororo to work together and push out not only pork from the market but also pork producers.

Several weeks after my early exit from the *tontine* gathering, Kadafi, Biri's son, and I were chatting about potential Mbororo interviews in his father's salon when I recounted what Adeline had said about ongoing Mbororo-driven efforts to ban the selling of pork and raising pigs. Though dismissive of Adeline's claims, Kadafi admitted that there had been discussions between Mbororo elders and the mayor's deputy about possibly "moving" – Kadafi was careful with his word choice –

215

pig farming to the outskirts of Mandjou. After a heavy pause, Kadafi stressed that relegating pig

farming to the outskirts of Mandjou was not an attack against Gbaya, but rather an effort to

establish a cleaner more presentable town. Only a backwards village would allow pigs to roam

freely. Kadafi's response prompted me to ask whether Mbororo would have allowed pork

producers to remain had they offered to confine their pigs. Kadafi was thoughtful for a moment

before explaining that animals did not belong in towns. If Mbororo do not graze their cattle in

town, he argued, then why should the Gbaya be allowed to keep their pigs in Mandjou? [152]

Though Gbaya disagreed on the motives behind Mbororo efforts to eliminate pig farmers and

pork from Mandjou, they readily identified Mbororo as having played a critical role in the reduction

of pig farming and sale of pork. With pork inaccessible, Gbaya began to rely on beef (i.e. tenderloin,

thigh, ribs, brain, tripe, etc.), the only animal protein readily available at the Mandjou market.[153]

Whether or not Mbororo greed, as Adeline claimed, had motivated Mbororo to reduce Gbaya

access to pork was unclear. However, from my own observations and discussions with Gbaya

residents, beef had replaced pork as the most frequently consumed animal protein.

There was, however, another source of animal protein that I learned of whilst traveling with

Simon to Adeline's farm. Slightly after 9:00 a.m. in late September, Simon and I departed his home

and headed towards the farm. Simon had chosen to take a longer route than normal. We moved

slowly through the thicket and every so often Simon would slash the vegetation to create a bit more

room for the two of us. At one point, Simon came to a sudden stop and stood motionless for

several seconds. He signalled for me to approach with caution and then pointed to the ground. I

could make out the faint footprints of what appeared to be a chicken, or at least an animal with legs

resembling that of a chicken. Simon asked for my indulgence, pulled a small piece of wire from his

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[152] En route to a Mbororo wedding with Biri's teenage daughter was the only time I spotted roaming pigs. About an
hour into the trip I spied a large sow and her three piglets moving towards a trough.
[153] Two Mbororo butchers had set up shops on either side of the central market in Mandjou.

burlap sack and with the aid of small broken twigs, deftly constructed a small snare. He turned to me and said *"Les Gbaya connaissent bien comment on prend le viande de brousse"* (Gbaya know how to catch/hunt bush meat).

Once we arrived on the small rectangular tract of land that was Adeline's farm, our first task was to weed the small manioc plants and aerate a small patch of soil for next season's groundnuts. Unlike Biri and most of their Mbororo neighbours, who invested in an array of pesticides and had access to expensive farm equipment like tractors, Simon and Adeline were almost entirely dependent on rudimentary farming tools – several dull machetes and ground hoes. Simon believed that the simplicity of these tools contributed to the dismal crop performance and his lack of a surplus to sell at the market. With this being their third harvest in a row to have underperformed and consequently having left them with mounting debt, Simon and Adeline were in no position to even consider purchasing pesticides. In his father and grandfather's day, there was no need to use heavy doses of chemicals to ensure a good crop return. Nowadays, without regularly spraying crops with store-bought pesticides, noted Simon, there was little chance that there would be a harvest. The overuse of soil and the shortening of the fallow seasons had weakened the soil quality. With every passing season, the harvests were growing smaller. Soon, feared Simon, the land would no longer meet the subsistence needs of their growing family. This was troubling and played a role in Simon's decision to pursue alternative sources to procure both food and income.

Having completed the first task, Simon and I spent the next three hours clearing the young corn stalks of choking weeds and extracting several kilos of mature manioc. It was half past one when Simon shouted from the other side of the field that enough work had been done. It was time to head back. I watched as Simon knotted a burlap sack filled with the harvested manioc before swinging it over his shoulder. Minutes later we were on our way.

217

After more than four hours labouring alongside Simon under the brutal sun, I was sluggish and dehydrated. Drained of all energy, I was more than a bit irritated to learn that Simon wanted to once again take the longer route home. Rather than express my annoyance, I tried to imagine what a cold Coke would feel like once I made it back to Biri's. Minutes must have passed when I suddenly heard Simon let out a large "whoop". His exclamation broke the silence and ushered me back into reality.

Simon, eyes wide, pointed to the ground. I drew closer and saw what appeared to be two squawking "chickens" furiously trying to escape Simon's snare. With little more than a few twigs and a wire, Simon had captured two bush fowl. Simon reached down to release the bush fowls – one at a time – before breaking their necks and placing the carcasses in another burlap sack. Simon took a few minutes to reset both traps before swinging the burlap sacks – one with manioc and the other with the two guinea fowls – over each shoulder.

Catching the two guinea fowl had put Simon in a great mood and he was more than willing to entertain my naïve questions about hunting, a topic that he had previously avoided. Simon's hesitation was likely due to the fact that the procurement and selling of wild game was illegal. Those found guilty of trafficking wild game faced heavy fines and a lengthy jail sentence. His father had first taught Simon to hunt whilst still a young child. Simon recalled accompanying his father to the bush and watching him set small wire snares. They would then return several hours later to check to see if any animals had been caught. As he grew older, Simon's father taught him several additional techniques to build traps to catch larger game. When I asked Simon if either he or his father hunted with rifles, Simon shook his head from side to side. Most Gbaya men, explained Simon, relied on traps rather than guns.[154]

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[154] Burnham's analysis of the Gbaya economy in the late 1960s noted the cultural importance associated with the hunting of wild game as well as the significant impact hunting had on the Gbaya diet[154] (citing nutritional studies from mid 1960s). Yet over time, writes Burnham (1980:163), hunting was "relegated almost to the status of a sport". By 2010 in

Though Simon learned how to hunt as a young child, it was only in the last year or two that he had returned to hunting. The scarcity of pork, offered Simon, had resulted in a greater dependence on beef. However, Simon and Adeline's financial struggles – hair salon closing, reduced access to farm land for subsistence, and loss of wage labour – had made the regular purchase of beef quite difficult. Hunting small animals, rationalized Simon, provided him with a means to feed his family and did not require any financial investment. He simply set up his small wire traps and within a day or two he was sure to catch something. Simon was adamant that he did not sell any of the game he caught, thus reducing the possibility of being arrested. Nevertheless, Simon acknowledged that many Gbaya depended on the sale of wild game to support their families and were thus willing to assume the risks – lengthy prison sentence and/or paying a hefty fine. Fuelling bush meat hunting, added Simon, was the willingness of urban dwellers in cities like Douala and Yaoundé to pay high prices for bush meat.

A trap set by Simon hidden en route to Adleline's father's farm. Photo: Author

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Mandjou, and increasingly outside of town, Gbaya had returned to hunting out of necessity – a source of income and animal protein for their families – as opposed to sport.

Government legislation coupled with international outcry over dwindling forest resources and the killing of endangered species has rendered hunting effectively illegal. In 1994 the Cameroonian government enacted the Forestry and Wildlife Law (henceforth 1994 Law), which provided a working guide for the "management and exploitation of wildlife and forest resources" (Ngoufo, Tsague and Waltert 2014:18). Shortly thereafter, the Cameroonian government introduced the 1995 Decree of Application on wildlife (henceforth: Wildlife Decree) with the purpose to "lay down the conditions for the implementation" of the 1994 Law (Wildlife Decree 1995:1). One of the objectives in altering forestry management was to encourage local communities' engagement in the protection and management of wildlife and forest products (non-timber and timber) (Egbe 2001a:1; Egbe 2001b:26). Such a drastic shift in forest and wildlife management policies was part of a larger initiative to implement institutional reforms supporting decentralization. From the 1980s onwards, donor agencies (i.e. the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) made decentralization – a process by which the central government cedes power and authority to local actors – a condition for Cameroon's participation in the Structural Adjustment Program (Ngima 2015:145).

In a discussion on the impact of decentralization on natural resource management reforms in West Africa and South East Asia, Arun Agrawal and Jesse Ribot (1999:474) suggest that the rationales behind the promotion of decentralization center on "the assumption that greater participation in public decision making is a good in itself or that it can improve efficiency, equity, development and resource management". Nevertheless, argue Agarwal and Ribot, in practice, decentralization has done very little to engage local communities in terms of natural resource management. At best, write Agarwal and Ribot (Ibid.:494), local actors receive "subsistence benefits". Government officials, conservationists and entrepreneurs, on the other hand, wield total authority "over commercially valuable products and species" (Ibid.).

Cameroonian anthropologist M.G. Ngima's (2015:149) analysis of the impact of both the 1994 Law and Wildlife Decree on local communities coincides with the findings of Agarwal and Ribot; the paradigmatic shift from centralized to decentralized forest management adversely impacted communities' access to wildlife and forest resources and discouraged their participation in the management of these resources. Samuel Egbe, a legal scholar specializing in environmental law in Cameroon, argues that the implementation of both legal instruments effectively eliminated local communities from any form of participation in decision-making. Furthermore, writes Egbe (2001a:10), "the state remains the *de jure* owner of wildlife resources, charged with setting the manner of exploitation as well as conflict resolution (including prosecution of offenders)".

In the case of Cameroon, many local communities depend on the exploitation of wildlife to earn an income as well as provide them with a source of animal protein. However, the enactment of the 1994 Law and the Wildlife Decree places severe restrictions on the extent to which local communities are permitted to exploit wildlife, i.e. hunt. Though the 1994 Law authorizes hunting throughout the national territory, excluding property belonging to third parties and state forests prioritizing wildlife conservation, local communities wishing to hunt may do so only if they utilize 'traditional tools'.[155] Furthermore, they are limited in terms of the animal species they are permitted to hunt (Egbe 2001a:5; Nguiffo, Kenflack and Mballa 2009:15). Additionally, the Wildlife Decree stipulated that any products derived from hunting "shall be used exclusively for food and shall, under no circumstances, be marketed" (Wildlife Decree, Section 24, Part 3). In other words, an individual found to be buying or selling bush meat is engaged in an illegal activity. Thus, the severe restrictions levied against local communities' hunting practices have, "paradoxically encouraged the expansion of illegal activities" (Nguiffo and Talla 2010:16).

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[155] "Traditional hunting: hunting carried out using weapons made from materials of plant origin" (Wildlife Decree Section 2, Part 20).

International conservation organizations, i.e. WWF and WCS, have contributed to local communities having their access to forest and wildlife resources severely restricted (Ngima 2015:151). Both the WWF and WCS have applied a particular approach to conservation, "fortress conservation", in which humans are identified as the greatest threat to wildlife and forest resources. Dan Brockington (2002:7), an environmental anthropologist assessing the impact that environmental and conservation policies can have on exacerbating social inequality, argues that the "forest conservation" approach promotes the creation of protected areas that are devoid of humans. Part and parcel of this particular conservation model is the forceful removal of entire communities from an area that has been identified as worthy of protection (Ibid.). This particular conservation framework, argues Brockington (Ibid.:8), has done little to improve animal populations and reduce forest degradation. In a review on political ecology and conservation, Vaccaro, Beltran, and Paquet (2013:263) characterize the fortress conservation model as inefficient and the first of several "types of conservation that have been developed during the modern era"

Neither government nor conservation policies have been effective instruments to reduce bush meat hunting. Several studies have indicated that hunters are willing to expose themselves to the risk of being apprehended because of their dependence on bush meat as both a food and as a source of income. David Wilkie et al. (2016:403-4) suggest that for rural households, bushmeat may comprise nearly half of their yearly protein requirements. Families living in the Congo Basin derive between thirty to eighty percent of their protein from bush meat (Koppert et al 1996). Aside from the fact that it is a valuable food source, E.J. Milner-Gulland and Elizabeth Bennett (2003:352) offer a number of cases in the tropics (southeast Asia, South America, and sub-Saharan Africa) in which bushmeat can be a significant source of revenue for poverty-stricken families. The growth of illegal hunting or "poaching" of bushmeat is, in part, a response to limited options in terms of economic survival and procuring animal protein rather than flagrantly dismissing laws.

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Simon, though only peripherally engaged in bush meat hunting and taking steps to minimize

his risks of being apprehended, was nevertheless engaged in an illegal activity. While he was not

engaged in the sale or distribution of bushmeat, he violated Section 2, Part 20 of the Wildlife

Decree by using a metal trap. Simon's hunting was a source of conflict between Adeline and Simon.

On several occasions, Adeline had asked Simon to stop hunting. Simon had refused.[156] Several

weeks after witnessing Simon bag two guinea fowl, I had the opportunity to talk with Adeline about

her views on hunting. It was frustrating for Adeline to see her husband take risks but she was also

aware that he was doing these activities to ensure their family's survival. Other Gbaya families were

taking even greater risks by engaging in the selling of bushmeat. Nevertheless, as Adeline pointed

out, there were many Gbaya families who had no choice but to engage in illegal hunting. What

worried Adeline most was the possibility that Simon could be rounded up during a sting operation.

Rumours were circulating that several Mbororo residents had provided local authorities with the

names of Gbaya hunters. Adeline had suspected one of her former Mbororo neighbours as having

denounced several Gbaya hunters for having sold bushmeat to regional traders. Several Gbaya I

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[156] International conservation organizations have partnered with the Cameroonian government to catch poachers (read: hunters) as well as other individuals involved in the illegal trafficking of wild game (bushmeat). Alain Ononino, the director of the WWF's wildlife law enforcement program in Cameroon, has vehemently opposed the procurement, consumption, and selling of bushmeat. Ononino has urged local authorities to take action against individuals who are proven guilty of this crime. In a 2013 WWF newsletter, Ononimo was quoted as stating, "[u]nder Cameroonian law, whoever is caught in possession of live or dead protected species – including their parts – is considered to have killed this animal and can thus be punished by up to three years in prison" (WWF Global 2013). The WCS has supported large-scale sting operations in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and CAMRAIL – the Cameroonian National Railway – to curtail the illegal transportation of bush meat from small villages to large cities, i.e. Yaoundé and Douala[156] (Vubem 2006). Nearly sixty individuals were arrested and charged with "poaching protected species" over the course of 2008 in East Cameroon. Forty-seven of the accused were found guilty and given prison sentences of ten days to three years. Furthermore, the court-issued fines ranged from CFA 27,000 to 2.7 million (approximately CDN $60 to $5,950) (WWF UK 2009a; WWF UK 2009b). Considering the average monthly income in Cameroon is CFA 30,000 (CDN $66), even the lowest fine would financially devastate most Cameroonians. In 2009, a week-long sting operation involving the police, military, and the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife led to the arrest of fifteen poachers and the confiscation of more than 2,000 pounds of illegal bush meat (WWF UK 2009b).

met during fieldwork expressed their concerns about Mbororo surveillance and intimated that they were taking precautions to avoid having their involvement in the bushmeat trade discovered.

Honoré speculated that Mbororo had offered the names of Gbaya hunters to officials in order to ensure fewer Gbaya trying to sell bushmeat at the market. In addition to exposing Gbaya to potential criminal recriminations from officials, Honoré stated that Mbororo had gone as far as to threaten to denounce Gbaya hunters – operating stalls at the market and clandestinely selling bushmeat – to the authorities. Mbororo intimidation tactics, commented Honoré, had worked; it was impossible to find even one Gbaya selling bushmeat at the Mandjou market.[157]

When I questioned Biri about the rumours of Mbororo collaborating with government officials and conservation organizations to eliminate the sale of bushmeat, Biri rejected Gbaya accusations as nothing more than village gossip. However, remarked Biri, Gbaya had only themselves to blame for any legal entanglements since all Cameroonians were well aware of the fact that hunting was illegal. Though Biri shrugged off rumours of Mbororo collusion with authorities to apprehend Gbaya hunters, he readily admitted that Mbororo merchants with stores in the market had forced Gbaya hunters with temporary stalls to relocate. Biri explained that these makeshift tables were directly in front of Mbororo merchants' storefronts. It was thus fairly easy to prohibit Gbaya hunters to set up their temporary stalls to sell bushmeat.

Al Hadji Hassan, like Biri, was critical of Gbaya hunters selling bushmeat at the Mandjou market. Yet his motives for reducing bushmeat were religious in nature. Bushmeat, like pork, was *haram* – not a food that Muslims were permitted to consume. According to Al Hadji Hassan, many Mbororo now living in Mandjou had previously lived in the bush for their entire lives. Bush life,

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[157] Bushmeat, though illegal, is openly sold at many markets throughout Cameroon. Worried about the potential backlash from citizen groups, the government has done little to curtail the sale of bushmeat at markets. At the central market in Mandjou, however, there was no trace of bushmeat being sold. Any transactions that took place occurred behind closed doors.

reminded Al Hadji Hassan, was very different from living in the village. Mbororo residing in the bush had limited knowledge of Islam and had likely consumed bushmeat on occasion. To prevent new Mbororo settlers from consuming bushmeat, argued Al Hadji Hassan, it was best to eliminate bushmeat from the town altogether.

Conclusion

Though, historically, residential mobility has been a component of the Gbaya cultural repertoire, the stakes of remaining mobile pose particular challenges for Gbaya. In Mandjou, shifts in residence have provided Gbaya with a well-tested strategy for resolving conflict. Financial gain (i.e. selling land to eager Mbororo buyers) was another critical motive behind Gbaya resettling outside of Mandjou. Though Gbaya were remunerated for their land, the land transactions, paradoxically, have imperiled their economic security. Agriculture has been a critical Gbaya economic and food resource. Once the needs of the family were met, Gbaya sold their surplus at the market. The arrival of Mbororo settlers, however, and their commitment to farming has jeopardized Gbaya residents' ability to remain engaged in the agricultural sector. No longer wedded to pastoralism, Mbororo have purchased land from Gbaya and built farms. The former nomadic pastoralists have succeeded Gbaya farmers as the primary agricultural producers in Mandjou.

Gbaya relocation outside of Mandjou following land transactions with Mbororo neighbours, coupled with both land scarcity and Mbororo taking a greater interest in large-scale agriculture, has resulted in Gbaya reducing their involvement in agriculture and shifting their focus to alternative economic livelihoods, i.e. hunting bush meat and pig production. Though these pursuits have generated income for Gbaya, Mbororo have effectively eliminated the products of Gbaya economic livelihoods from the market. Already physically detached from Mandjou, Mbororo efforts to prohibit pork and bush-meat from being sold at the Mandjou market have ostensibly detached

225

Gbaya from the local economy. Physically and economically disconnected from Mandjou

jeopardizes Gbaya claim to the status of *autochthones* of Mandjou.

<div align="right">**CHAPTER 5**</div>

<div align="center">International *autochtone* versus local *autochtone:* The battle for Mandjou</div>

On August 9, 2009, in recognition of *La Journée internationale des populations autochtones*,

Cameroonian national, regional, and local leaders gathered in Mandjou's main administrative

building (location of the mayor's office and that of his deputies) to publicly show their support of *les*

autochthons of the East Region.[158] That morning, government representatives took turns welcoming

audience members – approximately thirty to thirty-five Mbororo – and outlining on-going

collaborations between the Cameroonian government and international non-governmental

organizations to address the historical marginalization *autochtones* have endured at the hands of

dominant ethnic groups. The PLAN International representative addressed the issue of who

precisely the *autochtones* were in her opening statement when she identified Mbororo nomadic

pastoralists and forest-dwelling Baka as the *autochtones du l'Est.* PLAN International is an

international NGO that has collaborated with Mbororo-led organizations on multiple development

projects since the early 1990s.[159]

The list of speakers that morning was extensive, with local representatives from several

government ministries present and eager to discuss on-going programs to eradicate discrimination

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[158] The events I describe on August 9, 2009 are based on a series of interviews I carried out with Kadafi, Jean Marie, Simon, Adeline and Honoré during my fieldwork in Mandjou. As of that date I had yet to start fieldwork in Mandjou.
[159] PLAN was found in 1937. The organization's original name was 'Foster Parents Plan for Children in Spain'. The aim of the organization during the late 1930s was to support children who had been adversely affected by the Spanish Civil War. In the 1970s, "PLAN International" was adopted as the organization's new name in order to reflect the expansion of their programming to support projects in other parts of the world (PLAN International 2016).

felt by *autochtones*.[160] Some of the guests had come from as far away as Yaoundé (eight to ten hours by public transportation) and would be returning immediately following the small reception scheduled in the afternoon. Towards the end of the seminar, the PLAN International representative highlighted several of the "success stories" that had been made possible by collaborative projects between local Mbororo-led NGOs. One such project involved the collection and distribution of educational bursaries to young Mbororo who would have been otherwise unable to afford university. Just before adjourning for the day, the representative from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Family expressed his gratitude at being able to work with such progressive *autochtones* who were willing to collaborate and work with the government to improve their political and economic well-being.

Unbeknownst to Mbororo audience members, a small group of seven to eight Gbaya men had gathered outside of the building towards the end of the seminar. After spending the better part of the morning on their farms, the men were returning to their compounds when they spotted a large banner imprinted with *La Journée internationale des populations autochtones* stretched across two pillars supporting the deck of the mayor's office. Leading the small group of Gbaya was Honoré – a politically savvy long-time resident and one of the most vocal opponents of Mbororo settlement. It had been Honoré who had first noticed the banner. After recognizing a CTV journalist on the scene with a cameraman, Honoré grew curious and asked the reporter if he had any details about the event. When he was told that the seminar was to discuss future development projects for the *autochtones,* Honoré demanded to be let into the meeting based on his self-identification as *autochtone.* According to Honoré, his entry was refused and he was asked to leave.

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[160] The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Family, and the Ministry of Lands all sent representatives.

Initially, Honoré refused to vacate the premises and threatened to cause a disruption if he was not allowed access to the meeting. Several men, who were also denied entry to the meeting, gently reminded Honoré of the ramifications (i.e. losing his political post with mayor's office) were he to continue to shout and draw attention to himself. With no one willing to stand alongside him, Honoré yielded to the coaxing of his companions and returned home. Months later, when I interviewed Honoré about that afternoon, his bitterness was still palpable. Being denied access to the meeting that afternoon substantiated Honoré's belief that Mbororo were scheming to exclude Gbaya from Mandjou. And were they to succeed, Honoré was certain that it would only be a matter of time before Mbororo began to identify Mandjou as a Mbororo town. What confused Honoré was why the Cameroonian state and international development organizations would recognize Mbororo as *autochtones*. Such an act, explained Honoré, illustrated how far Mbororo had come in their plan to rid Mandjou of Gbaya.

One year later, I was seated next to Biri's son Kadafi in the mayor's office for the second annual *La Journée internationale des populations autochtones*. At this year's meeting, the decorations were kept to a minimum. The banner that had been the cause of great debate the year before had been packed away and the invitations inviting Mbororo to attend the meeting had circulated with little notice. Biri had received his invitation in the early morning and decided to send his son in his place. In terms of content, very little had changed. Sitting amongst Mbororo men, I listened as one speaker after the other – a series of local and national government officials – took to the podium to identify the various projects the Cameroonian government was spearheading, with the support of various international aid organizations, to improve the lives of Mbororo residents. Nearly every official made reference to Mbororo as a marginal and vulnerable population, heavily involved in nomadic pastoralism, in need of financial resources to bring about their "development." Glancing around the room, I could not help but wonder how it was that the wealthiest residents of Mandjou were present

228

at a meeting in which the objective was to showcase on-going and potential projects to combat their peripheral status in Cameroon.

Honoré's understanding of *autochtone* corresponded with that of most Gbaya residing in Mandjou. It was an identity that applied to Gbaya only, since it had been their ancestors who were first to settle the town. Judging from their identification of Mbororo as *autochtones,* it appeared as though the local reading of *autochthone* carried no weight with the speakers at either meeting. The government officials and representatives of PLAN International employed a different set of criteria for being considered an *autochtone,* including historical marginalization and cultural distinctiveness.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the Cameroonian government has strayed significantly from its earlier focus on allocating rights based on belonging to the Cameroonian nation-state. Previously, all citizens were of purportedly equal status. Today, the means of distributing resources is contingent on establishing a recognizable association with a natal home or village. In the absence of such an attachment, one's citizenship and associated rights become uncertain. In French-speaking Cameroon, belonging is articulated in terms of being an *autochtone* or an *allogène.* The latter identifies a 'person who was not born here', while the former is used to demarcate a 'person who is a native'. These identities depend on geographic context. Should an *autochtone* relocate from his ancestors' village to another village, his *autochtone* status remains but in the new setting he would be identified as an *allogène.* Yet for Cameroonians unable to obtain recognition as having a natal village, the status of *autochtone* remains out of reach.

Though recognized as Cameroonian citizens, Mbororo have failed to access the status of '*autochtone'* in the NW. Due their inability to obtain recognition as '*autochtones',* Mbororo residing in the NW are prevented from seeking political office and have limited access to natural resources.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the concepts 'indigenous' and '*autochthone*' and exposes the ways in which global governing bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and International Labour Organization (ILO) utilize these terms interchangeably. However, in local francophone contexts such as Cameroon, the term '*autochtone'* carries an altogether different understanding. The international rendering of the concept obscures the local reading. Following this section I examine key developments in the history of the indigenous peoples' movement in order to showcase the extent to which the concept of 'indigenous' has gained international purchase. Subsequently, I illustrate the ways in which the international definition of 'indigenous' falls apart in the context of Cameroon. Taken together, this chapter demonstrates how the international reading of 'indigenous peoples' and subsequent local application of the status has the potential to exacerbate tensions within a community. Lastly, I problematize the efficacy of using the category of 'indigenous' or '*autochtone'* to address relationships of inequality.

Distinguishing between *les peuples autochtones* and indigenous peoples

In 1971, Jose R. Martinez Cobo, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, led a comprehensive UN-sponsored study to investigate the "problem of discrimination" confronting indigenous peoples. After more than two decades of research, Martinez Cobo's findings were reported in the *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*. Martinez Cobo had as one of his objectives to put together a definition of 'indigenous peoples' that would be flexible and would allow both individuals and groups to self-identify as indigenous. It is this flexibility that has allowed the definition to endure the test of time:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They

230

form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.

This historical continuity may consist of the continuation, for an extended period reaching into the present of one or more of the following factors:

a) Occupation of ancestral lands, or at least of part of them;
b) Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands;
c) Culture in general, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, lifestyle, etc.);
d) Language (whether used as the only language, as mother-tongue, as the habitual means of communication at home or in the family, or as the main, preferred, habitual, general or normal language);
e) Residence on certain parts of the country, or in certain regions of the world;
f) Other relevant factors.

On an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group).
This preserves for these communities the sovereign right and power to decide who belongs to them, without external interference (Martinez Cobo 1986a:paragraphs 379-382).

Throughout the French translation of Martinez Cobo's study (*Étude du problème de la discrimination à l'encontre des populations autochtones*), including in the title, references to 'indigenous peoples' or 'indigenous' are replaced with either *'populations autochtones'* or *'les autochtones.'* This translation decision suggests the two concepts are interchangeable (See Martinez Cobo 1986b). However, despite the fact that the terms are synonyms, upon closer examination, Martinez Cobo's definition bears little resemblance to the local understanding of *autochtone* in Cameroon. In Martinez Cobo's working definition of indigenous peoples, the present occupation of ancestral lands is only one of several criteria used to establish "historical continuity". Yet in Mandjou and throughout Cameroon, an *autochtone* is unequivocally an individual who can demonstrate long-term physical attachment to a

231

place and whose ancestors' arrival to said place predates that of any other group. Whereas Martinez Cobo saw occupation of ancestral lands as *a* criteria for indigenous status, in Cameroon it was *the* criteria for indigenous status.

In the wake of the publication and dissemination of Martinez-Cobo's working definition, international agencies collaborating with indigenous peoples, or *les populations autochtones,* have strongly endorsed criteria that acknowledge self-identification as a critical component of indigenous or *autochtone* identity. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was one of the first international governmental bodies to address the well-being of indigenous peoples through legal mandate. In 1989 the ILO adopted Convention #169 (ILO #169), a document heralded as "the most concrete manifestation of growing responsiveness to indigenous peoples' demands" [161] (Anaya 1995:47). When first adopted, the ILO #169 was the only legal instrument "dedicated to the rights of indigenous peoples" (Salomon and Sengupta 2003:19). Moreover, asserts Barsh (1994:44), ILO #169 was the first international document to acknowledge the validity of indigenous peoples' collective rights, disavowing the liberal emphasis on individual rights. Arguably the most fundamental aspect of ILO #169 is the opening article. The article reads:

> 1. This Convention applies to:
> (a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community*,* and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
> (b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions

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[161] The ILO is a specialized agency within the United Nations "devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, pursuing its founding mission that labour peace is essential to prosperity" (ILO 2017)

> 2. *Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion*
> *for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply* (my
> italics ILO 2013:32-3).

As with Martinez Cobo's working definition, the ILO recognized the importance of self-identification as a criterion in defining indigenous peoples, and valued this measure over that of being first to settle a place. Nevertheless, ILO #169 is only considered to be legally binding within the States that have ratified the international document. As of 2013, only twenty-two of ILO's 187 members had ratified ILO #169 (ILO 2016). Members refusing to ratify ILO #169 cited the potential threat to their government's political authority as justification (Anaya 1995:47-8)

In another important contribution to efforts at defining indigenous peoples or *les autochtones,* Erica-Irene Daes included any previous or current "experience of subjugation" (Daes 1996:49). Daes, chairperson of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) from 1984 to 2001, suggested a number of relevant factors that should be considered when recognizing indigenous peoples:[162]

> a. priority in time, with respect to the occupation and use of a specific
> territory;
> b. the voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness, which may include
> the aspects of language, social organization, religion and spiritual values,
> modes of production, laws and institutions;
> c. self-identification, as well as recognition by other groups…as a distinct
> collectivity; and
> d. an experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion,
> or discrimination, whether or not these conditions persist (Daes
> 1996:49).

As with the Martinez-Cobo definition, Daes included long-term occupation of a territory or "priority in time, with respect to the occupation and use of a specific territory" as a component. And as with the previous definition, there were several factors contributing to the identification of

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[162] The UNWGIP is recognized as a precursor to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The group, formed in 1982 as means by which indigenous peoples could share their experiences, met for the last time in July 2007 after accomplishing one of their primary goals; the ratification of the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (IWGIA 2009).

"indigenous". In French-speaking Cameroon, international readings of *autochtone* were not readily accepted since locally, regionally, and nationally, *autochtone* was a status that centered entirely on 'being the first to occupy land'. Albert Barume, ILO Coordinator and specialist on indigenous peoples' issues in Cameroon, acknowledged the local practice of characterizing an *autochtone* as being the first to settle an area in his 2005 ILO-sponsored report *Étude sur le cadre légal pour la protection des droits des peuples indigènes et tribaux au Cameroun.*[163] However, he argues for the discontinuation of the local usage of the concept, and advocates for the application of *autochtone* to be limited to members of communities and groups who have historically been marginalized by other dominant groups. Barume characterizes *autochtones* in the following manner: "*leurs modes de vie et cultures qui sont non seulement différents, mais aussi menacés d'intégration par le mode de vie dominant, à savoir l'agriculture*" (Barume 2005:29). Furthermore, Barume (Ibid.) reduces the parameters of eligibility when he stipulates that *autochtones* "*sont soit des chasseurs-cueilleurs, soit des pasteur-nomades*".

The preparation of Barume's ILO report involved consultations with communities the ILO recognized as '*autochtones.*' Barume moderated three regional workshops in which *autochtones* were invited to discuss their everyday challenges. Barume's report reveals the ways in which *autochtones* in Cameroon struggle to access government services, i.e. education, health, employment, and identifies strategies to improve the lives of *autochthones* vis-à-vis development programming and initiatives. Members of the Mbororo community from the NW were invited to participate in one of these consultations. When asked why they considered themselves to be *autochtones* they presented the following written statement:

> *-Notre façon de vivre n'est pas acceptée par d'autres qui la considèrent retrograde;*
> *-Nous sommes considérés comme étrangers par d'autres Camerounais;*

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[163] In a footnote in the ILO report, Barume addresses his choice to utilize "*peuples indigènes et tribaux*" in the title as opposed to the term "*autochtones*". While utilized interchangeably in the report, Barume explains that the ILO prefers to use "*peuples indigènes et tribaux*", whereas the United Nations favours "*autochtones*" (Barume 2005:153).

-Nous avons été dépossédés de nos terres jadis occupies et utilises par nos ancêtres;
-Nous sommes une minorité facile à dominer;
-Nous sommes marginalisés dans divers secteurs notamment l'éducation, l'emploi, la
  santé, etc,;
-Nous continuons de vivre conformément à nos traditions et coutumes;
-Nous sommes sans terres à cause de notre mode de vie de type nomade;
-On nous refuse des droits;
-Nous avons un système d'organisation sociale qui continue d'être régi par la coutume;
-Nous sommes étouffés en tant que peuple;
-Nous sommes forcés d'abandonner notre mode de vie qu'est l'élevage
(Barume 2005:25-6).

The Mbororo-produced statement reflected several of the components of the international

definitions noted above, including references to marginal economic and political status and cultural

distinctiveness. Michaela Pelican's work with Mbororo communities in the NW supports Mbororo

claims of historical and on-going marginalization. In the NW, explains Pelican (2006, 2008, 2009,

2015), being recognized as strangers consistently impeded Mbororo efforts to gain permanent access

to political rights and natural resources. Yet, in somewhat of a paradox, though Mbororo in the NW

are unable to claim the status of local *'autochtone,'* internationally, Mbororo qualify as international

autochthones. As I illustrate in the following section, acquiring international recognition as 'indigenous'

or *'autochtone'* from international governing bodies provides Mbororo with an alternative avenue to

seek the rights and privileges afforded to other Cameroonians.

 Unlike Mbororo residents in the NW, however, Mbororo in Mandjou have made substantial

progress in terms of acquiring the status of local *'autochthone'*. Specifically, they have done so by

shifting the focus from their recent settlement to their development of the economy and visible

contribution to the physical transformation of the landscape. Ironically, their local economic success

has not registered with global governing bodies, donor organizations, and international NGOs who

continue to apply the status of 'indigenous peoples' or *'autochtones'* to all Mbororo living in

Cameroon rather than taking a closer look at the particularities of each case. In Mandjou, Mbororo

have received financial and material resources aimed at improving their 'marginal and vulnerable

position.' Mbororo residing in Mandjou have thereby acquired the status of local and international '*autochtones*,' and thus now have two distinct avenues in which to lay claim to political representation and access to natural resources, i.e. land.

It is worthwhile to take a moment to reflect on what would happen should the series of Mbororo justifications to identify as '*autochthones*' be applied to Gbaya – replacing "*nous*" with "Gbaya". Based on the previous chapters of this dissertation, the Mbororo statement is arguably a more fitting depiction of Gbaya life in Mandjou. Gbaya have ostensibly lost access to their territory by way of land transactions to Mbororo settlers. Mbororo dominate the Mandjou economy, leaving Gbaya with limited options. Those they do pursue, i.e. subsistence farming and wild game hunting are fraught with risks. Though perhaps not a demographic minority, Gbaya are economically dominated by Mbororo residents. Yet there is no effort from the ILO or any other international governing institution to recognize Gbaya as 'indigenous peoples' or '*autochtones*.' Furthermore, Mbororo economic domination and their radical physical transformation of Mandjou threatens to undermine Gbaya status as local '*autochtones*.' If recognition as an international '*autochtone*' could potentially provide Gbaya with a means by which to alleviate their marginal status, why are Gbaya ostensibly excluded?

Indigenous peoples move beyond the state

Ronald Niezen (2000:122), noted legal anthropologist, characterizes indigenous peoples' use of international lobbying as an innovative strategy since it involves appealing to "international bodies of states to overcome the domestic abuses of states themselves". This approach to seek redress vis-à-vis international governing bodies was first attempted nearly a century ago. In 1923, Levi General Deskaheh, hereditary chief of the Cayuga Nation and representative of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, travelled to Geneva hoping to gain an audience with the League of Nations

236

"concerning a dispute with Canada over tribal self-government" [164] [165] (Niezen 2000:123, 2003:31).

Ultimately, General Deskaheh was unsuccessful in his bid to officially present his case to the League's member states. As a policy, the League of Nation "was not receptive to claims of sovereignty that conflicted with the interests of states" (Niezen 2003:34). However, Chief Deskaheh's actions and those of his delegation aroused sympathy and support from various member states, as well as "humanitarian societies" (Niezen 2003:34). The very fact that several nations articulated their support for Chief Deskaheh's campaign was a source of great embarrassment to both the British and Canadian governments. In 1923, Herbert Ames (Canadian representative at the League of Nations) wrote Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to express his concerns that Canada's international reputation had suffered a major blow due to the perception that Canadian government officials were ignoring the presence of Chief Deskaheh and his activities. In his correspondence, Herbert Ames suggested that "it will be necessary to pay some attention to this lest our apparent indifference be misinterpreted and thus our excellent reputation over here suffer somewhat" (Ames 1923:3, cited in Niezen 2000:125). The wariness Ames articulated in his correspondence with the Prime Minister illustrated the extent to which seeking an international audience could prove a winning strategy for indigenous peoples in their efforts to advance local and national concerns. National governments hesitated to have their reputation maligned. It would be another fifty years following the historic journey Chief Deskaheh made to Zurich before the plight of indigenous peoples from around the world would find an international outlet vis-à-vis the United Nations.

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[164] The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was originally comprised of five aboriginal nations; Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Oneida. The French referred to the political unit as the Iroquois Confederacy while the British referred to the confederacy as the League of Five Nations. Once the Tuscarora nation joined the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the British changed the name to the Six Nations of the Grand River (abbreviated to Six Nations) (Haudenosaunee Confederacy 2016).

[165] The League of Nations was founded in 1919. Representatives of states convened to discuss issues surrounding social justice (Swepston 1998:18). In the aftermath of World War II, the United Nations replaced the League of Nations. The premise of the United Nations was to serve as a watchdog over national governments.

Elsa Stamatopoulou (1994:60, former Chief of the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, argues that from the inception of the United Nations, it was an international organization that "revolutionized international relations…by including the promotion of human rights as one of its four basic aims". The existence of the United Nations, writes Stamatopoulou (Ibid.), marked a paradigmatic shift in which "the fate of human beings is no longer the prerogative of absolute state power, but the shared moral, legal, and political responsibility of the whole international community". Though it would be the United Nations that gave indigenous peoples access to an international platform in which their concerns could be expressed, the process by which indigenous peoples acquired admittance proved to be long and winding.

Following the directives of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Jose Martinez Cobo was tasked in 1971 with carrying out a comprehensive study that became critical in establishing a relationship between indigenous peoples and the United Nations.[166] The results of the Martinez Cobo study, writes Stamatopoulou (1994:67), "contributed significantly to the assertion by indigenous peoples of their own identities at the international level under the flag of universal human rights". One of the most important conclusions to emerge from the study was that indigenous peoples should not be considered minority groups, nor should they be identified as communities facing racial discrimination (Martinez Cobo 1986a). The formation of a distinct category of "indigenous peoples" acknowledged the specific challenges they faced.

In 1982, prior to the submission of Cobo's report, Augusto Willemsen Diaz, a UN employee and lawyer, pushed for the establishment of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP). Douglas Sanders (1989:407), a lawyer specializing in international law and indigenous

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[166] ECOSOC, one of the six central branches of the United Nations, oversees the expert and subsidiary bodies engaged with the social, environmental and economic domains (UN ECOSOC 2017). It took thirteen years for Jose Martinez Cobo to complete *Study of the Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations* and the study, contends Stamatopoulou (1994:67), remains "[t]he most voluminous United Nations study" in the area of human rights.

rights, writes that the working group provided indigenous peoples with permanent access to the United Nations and a physical location in which members could meet to "review current development affecting the rights of indigenous populations". However, as Sanders (Ibid.) explains, the group retained no adjudicatory power; any of their recommendations would have to travel through several layers of bureaucracy before reaching the General Assembly of the United Nations. After several years of annual meetings, indigenous peoples and additional members of the UNWGIP concluded that a more permanent structure within the United Nations was imperative if the voices of indigenous peoples were to be heard. In 2000, the United Nations established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), a body whose mandate is to "deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights" (UN 2017; UNPFII 2017.).

Global forums such as the UNPFII and local and regional conferences organized by the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) have enabled indigenous peoples from all corners of the world to engage in dialogues with one another as well as with national governments. Within the African context, however, the penetration of the transnational indigenous peoples' movement has been slower.[167] It was only in the 1990s that African indigenous groups began to participate in organized sessions of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP)[168] (Barume 2000:50). In 1997, well after the emergence of the transnational indigenous peoples' movement in other parts of the world, delegates from several African indigenous groups participating in the UNWGIP formed a geographically specific sub-group, the Indigenous Peoples

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[167] Douglas Sanders (1989:417-8), writing prior to the final ratification of ILO #169, explains that during the UN working sessions on indigenous populations, no representatives from African indigenous groups were in attendance. Moreover, on-going discussions on indigenous rights were devoid of any African representations (Ibid.).

[168] The UNWGIP is recognized as a precursor to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The group, formed in 1982 as means by which indigenous peoples could share their experiences, met for the last time in July 2007. Prior to disbanding, the group accomplished one of its primary goals, the ratification of the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (IWGIA 2009).

of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC), to address the particular concerns of indigenous peoples in Africa (IPACC n.d.).

Many African governments have refused to employ the working international definition of 'indigenous' or '*autochtone.*' The core of their argument is that 'indigenous' is a concept that works only when describing the diminished populations of the 'original' inhabitants of the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand. The application of the status of 'indigenous' or *autochthone* upon communities in Africa and Asia remains highly contested and these debates have emerged within academic circles. Margaret Moore (2003:103-4), a political scientist who has written extensively on indigenous peoples and their right to self-determination, concedes that colonial authorities perpetrated grave injustices against the 'original' inhabitants of the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, argues Moore (Ibid.:103), in the case of Australia, New Zealand and the Americas, "the settlement of Europeans was more complete and the decimation of the original population more serious". Moore claims that the indigenous identity carries political weight and provides 'original' communities residing in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand with an opportunity to seek redress against their governments. In the case of Africa and Asia, explains Moore (Ibid.:104), the 'original' occupants "have had their capacity for political agency restored to them through the process of decolonization". Though Moore does not deny the use of indigenous identify for inhabitants of Africa and Asia, she finds it unnecessary to utilize the concept as a means of rectifying colonial injustices.

Though many African governments have been unwilling to give credence to communities self-identifying as 'indigenous' within their borders, their efforts to eliminate the conversation entirely has been unsuccessful. IWGIA, one of several international human rights organizations collaborating with indigenous peoples, supports the employment of the indigenous identity to refer to particular communities within the African context. IWGIA's position stems from the belief that

240

the withdrawal of colonial administrators did not preclude post-colonial governments from maintaining a system in which certain groups continued to be repressed (IWGIA 2009). Due, in part, to the advocacy and lobbying efforts of international organizations like IWGIA, indigenous communities from Africa are reaching out to international governing bodies that recognize communities as 'indigenous.' Claiming the status of 'indigenous peoples' in Africa has allowed marginalized groups to "draw attention to and alleviate the particular form of discrimination they suffer from" (IWGIA 2005:88).

Sidsel Saugestad, an anthropologist working with San communities in Botswana, takes a decidedly different position from that of Moore in terms of the employment of the indigenous status in the African context. According to Saugestad (2001:306-10), decolonization has done little to improve the marginal and peripheral status of particular communities within Africa. Saugestad believes that African governments have marginalized certain communities based on their cultural, political, and economic distinctiveness. Consequently, asserts Saugestad (Ibid.:308), the indigenous identity remains a critical means for these communities to seek political redress. The status of 'indigenous peoples' provides specific groups with a potential avenue to circumvent their national government and seek support, gain access to platforms for redress, and obtain financial resources from the international community (Ibid.:308-10).

Jens Dahl, former IWGIA director and anthropologist, characterizes the bi-annual UN meetings as providing indigenous peoples with opportunities to engage with government representatives, donor organizations, NGOs, and international agencies.[169] This type of direct access, writes Dahl (2012:78), would be difficult to achieve in their home country. Indigenous peoples, explains Dahl

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[169] The United Nations holds two annual meetings in which indigenous peoples and indigenous peoples' organizations are invited to participate. UNPFII is held in New York City. The UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) holds its annual meeting in Geneva.

(Ibid.), capitalize on their limited time at the meeting to approach to potential funders to discuss the possibility of supporting projects in their home country.

Since 2002, the Mbororo Social and Cultural and Development Association (MBOSCUDA) has annually sent a Mbororo delegation to UN conferences held in New York City and Geneva. In preparation for the meetings, MBOSCUDA executives submitted a written statement to be read publicly during the conference in which member states' representatives, indigenous peoples, donor agencies, and NGOs were present. The documents varied in style and tone but the central message conveyed the adversity and struggles Mbororo faced on daily basis. These statements entreated the international community, including both UN member states and the Cameroonian government, to take actions to eliminate the persecution and marginalization of Mbororo (see Dahirou 2002; Bouba 2012; Ndamba 2013). Attendance and participation at the UN conferences provided Mbororo with the opportunity to engage and dialogue with international human rights organizations that have, in turn, offered legal assistance and advocated on behalf of Mbororo living in Cameroon.

A long brewing land dispute between a wealthy Fulbe landowner and Mbororo pastoralists in the NW had launched MBOSCUDA's participation in the bi-annual UN forums. In an article published on the Survival International (SI) website, Alhadji Baba Ahmadou (the wealthy Fulbe landowner) was alleged to have threatened Mbororo residents for over sixteen years in an effort to displace Mbororo pastoralists and take their land. Not only did SI disseminate the article vis-à-vis their website, but the organization "lobbied the Cameroon authorities, the Commonwealth and the British government on the prisoners' behalf" (SI 2004). Both Cultural Survival (CS) and IWGIA published news releases in which Alhadji Baba Ahmadou's efforts to appropriate land were denounced and characterized as illegal (CS 2003; IWGIA 2011). In 2013 the conflict escalated with the arrest of Musa Usman Ndamba, a Mbororo political activist from the NW as well as Vice President of MBOSCUDA. After publicly denouncing Alhadji Baba Ahmadou's attempts to extend

his tea farm vis-à-vis appropriating Mbororo pastures, Ndamba was arrested and charged with defamation. Ndamba's legal persecution, notes Caven (2013) was likely a consequence of his efforts to challenge the harassment and discrimination Mbororo have endured at the hands of ranchers and land speculators. Michaela Pelican argues that "Mbororo have enjoyed few advantages from their status as an indigenous people," and that only those "cognizant of international development and rights' discourse and have the intellectual and social capital to act as representatives of their community" have registered any benefits (Pelican 2009:60).

PLAN International brings sewing machines to town

While Pelican's research in the NW indicates that the international indigenous identity had very little impact on the day-to-day lives of Mbororo residents, the same cannot be said for Mbororo in Mandjou. The development interventions provided by external agencies, ostensibly carried out to improve the lives of 'marginal and vulnerable Mbororo' residing in Mandjou, impacted the lives of all Mbororo. Not only were Mbororo residents receiving funding and materials, but also these organizations were referring to Mbororo as *autochtones.*

In late August, a year after Honoré and several of his friends had been refused access to the seminar for *autochtones,* Bouba, a member of the *Association Jeunesse du Est de Mbororo* (AJEMBO) and a student at the University of Yaoundé, arrived at Biri's compound.[170] He was in a hurry and told me that an important ceremony was scheduled to take place within the hour at the public elementary school. Before exiting the courtyard, Bouba asked me to bring Jamila, Biri's oldest daughter. I tried in vain to figure out the purpose of the event, but Bouba had already rushed out of the courtyard

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[170] AJEMBO is a regional Mbororo youth association that has partnered with PLAN International on several development projects. It is also recognized as a local Mbororo NGO. PLAN International's mandate centers on improving the lives of children and with a specific gendered focus on girls. Whereas MBOSCUDA has usually been the only Mbororo association that facilitates development projects from international funders, in Mandjou, it is AJEMBO that has taken the lead.

and jumped on the back of a passing motorbike. Twenty minutes later Jamila and I were standing in the pavilion just outside of the recently constructed elementary school, courtesy of a significant monetary donation from PLAN International. Neither Jamila nor I had any idea as to why Bouba had asked for us to be present. We spent the next thirty minutes chatting with the other young women as they began to arrive. No one appeared to have a clue as to the purpose of the last-minute gathering. As the sun continued to beat down upon the crowd, Jamila and I sought shelter under the awning of the main building of the school.

Perhaps it was the oppressive heat that had prevented me from figuring it out earlier, but after an hour or so I noticed only Mbororo were present. It was at that moment when Jamila pointed out the banner that hung from the rafters of the school, welcoming the *autochtones* of Mandjou. According to the logos present on the banner, this event had numerous sponsors, including the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Family, PLAN International, and the United Nations. Jamila and I remained in the shade until we caught sight of Bouba, who explained the purpose of the last-minute gathering[171]:

> '…the government and these organizations realize that Mbororo women need help with finding employment. They have decided to give seven sewing machines to the Mbororo in Mandjou and there is a small building in Carrefour Batouri that the Ministry has offered to give us. Mbororo women will be trained as tailors and earn a living outside of their compound'.

For the next couple of hours, various local political leaders, including the *chef du village* and mayor, took the podium and offered their congratulations to Mbororo for being the recipients of this great honour and wished them luck on this new and exciting entrepreneurial endeavour. Bouba circulated throughout the event and struck up conversations with a number of young Mbororo men

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[171] Bouba had known about the ceremony for some time but had been under the impression that the donation was for the Mbororo community rather than being specifically allocated for young Mbororo women. Wary of antagonizing the funders who had designated the "gifting" of the space and sewing machines to young Mbororo women, Bouba, as president of AJEMBO, assumed the responsibility of gathering as many young Mbororo women as possible to bring to the ceremony.

244

and women (all of whom were unmarried and attending secondary school). It was only towards the end of the event, when the last speaker was preparing to take his seat, that Bouba's movements began to make sense. He had gathered 15-20 Mbororo teens and was preparing them to close the ceremony with a "traditional" Mbororo dance, the *wamarde*. As I mentioned in chapter 3, the arrival of a MBOSCUDA employee forced the sudden disbursement of the dancers. When I questioned Bouba later that evening about the altercation with the MBOSCUDA representative, Bouba conceded that his decision to have Mbororo youth perform *wamarde* had been poorly thought out. Believing participation in *wamarde* ostensibly condoned the proliferation of un-Islamic behavior, both MBOSCUDA and Mbororo religious clerics in Mandjou strongly discouraged Mbororo youth from performing the courtship dance.[172] Nevertheless, Bouba had pushed for the youth to execute the dance as a 'thank-you' to the international organizations for the donation of both the sewing machines and the allocation of space to house the sewing center.[173] It was only several weeks after the ceremony that Bouba confided in me that as the president of AJEMBO, he had made the decision to include the dance at the last-minute since he thought it would lend Mbororo credibility as continuing their "traditions". It was a comment that struck me as odd at the time. However, my observations of interactions between PLAN International employees and AJEMBO – explored later in this chapter – provided me with greater clarity.

News of the donation – sewing machines and the workshop space – spread quickly through Mandjou. Shortly after the event, I interviewed several Gbaya residents to gauge their responses to what was being referred to as the "gifting" ceremony. Though there were Gbaya, like Honoré, who

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[172] The performance of the *wamarde* was "frowned upon" in the NW. Mbororo Muslim clerics stipulated that its performance promoted un-Islamic behaviour (Davis 1995:222).
[173] As I indicated in chapter three, Mbororo residents were adamant about publically demonstrating their adherence to Islamic doctrine. This was done, in part, to counter the negative and dismissive attitudes Fulbe held with regards to Mbororo religiosity. It was therefore unlikely – substantiated over time with follow-up interviews with Mbororo friends living in Mandjou – that Mbororo young women would enroll as students in the new sewing center. Over the next year the sewing machines were distributed to Mbororo men working as tailors in Mandjou and their male apprentices.

were outraged to learn about the donation, there were other Gbaya, like Jean Marie and his best friend and neighbour André, who were circumspect, and who refrained from lobbing accusations of treachery against Mbororo. Both Jean Marie and André reminded me of the massive development projects – the installation of two water wells, building of an extended electrical grid, construction of an elementary school – that were tied to the arrival of Mbororo settlers. Had Mbororo chosen another place to settle, Mandjou would have continued to languish in poverty. Nevertheless, both André and Jean Marie were troubled by the new wave of development projects that were directed towards Mbororo, to the exclusion of Gbaya residents.

Several weeks later, towards the end of September 2010, I sat on the small wooden stool and watched Adeline deftly plait the hair of Preta, her youngest child. With her hair salon permanently closed, it was only through her work on Preta's hair that Adeline was able to showcase her talents. As with many of my Gbaya informants, the "gifting" of the workshop and sewing machines soon came up in our conversation. Adeline provided a poignant response when I questioned her directly about how she felt about the donation of the sewing machines and the space allocated for a future workshop to train young Mbororo women as tailors. Sighing deeply, Adeline stated:

> You've lived in Mandjou and seen the way we [Gbaya] live. We have nothing and the Mbororo have everything. Every time a Gbaya tries to make a business it fails because Gbaya do not want to see their brothers succeed and Mbororo already have all the businesses. There is nothing we can do…Now these organizations give them [Mbororo] another business...

Adeline's anger at the choice of recipients for the "gifting" was exacerbated by the fact that her own business had failed, and that she felt as if neither the state nor international organizations were willing to provide her any financial support. Adeline found it difficult to understand why it was that Mbororo were targeted as the beneficiaries of development when it was Gbaya who were in greater need. The majority of Gbaya were living hand to mouth, yet the government and NGOs remained oblivious to their precarious economic state.

The donation of both seven sewing machines and a physical space to train female tailors upset many Gbaya. Yet what drew a stronger rebuke from the Gbaya community was learning that throughout the ceremony the government officials and PLAN International representative identified Mbororo as *les peuples autochtones du Mandjou* (the autochtones of Mandjou). Unlike the gathering at the mayor's office, to which Honoré failed to gain access, Mbororo were not only being recognized as *autochtones,* but were also recipients of donations based on the status. These events generated angry discussions amongst Gbaya who were determined to uncover why the national government and PLAN International would recognize Mbororo as the *autochtones* of Mandjou.

There was little doubt that the Cameroonian state and PLAN International supported applying the status of *autochtone* to Mbororo residents. However, their decision was based on the belief that *autochtone* was a calque for indigenous. Since French was the operational language in the East, *les peuples autochtones* or *les autochtones* was utilized when addressing Mbororo rather than indigenous. Neither the national government nor PLAN International acknowledged the local currency of the term *autochtone,* or how the recognition of a community as such could potentially be unsettling. Additionally, there was no deeper examination as to how Mbororo qualified as indigenous or *les autochtones.* As an ethnic group, they had achieved international recognition as a historically marginalized ethnic group with a distinctive culture and, as such, international NGOs accepted the status unconditionally. NGOs, like PLAN International, provided funding and material resources to *les peuples autochtones* or indigenous peoples without considering the impact their assistance would have on local social dynamics. The financial resources offered to Mbororo settlers, based entirely on their status as international *autochtones* or indigenous, suggested to Gbaya that both the government and PLAN International were complicit in Mbororo attempts to forge a permanent attachment to Mandjou. Gbaya believed these financial and material resources contributed to their economic,

physical, political, and cultural displacement from Mandjou, a town they identified as belonging to the Gbaya people.

PLAN International was not the first international organization to direct resources to the Mbororo community. Several weeks after the gifting ceremony, Bouba and I were seated in the AJEMBO office discussing the possibility of traveling together to Yaoundé in order to access the University of Yaoundé's archives. I had been told that being in the company of a registered university student, i.e. Bouba, would provide me with 'greater accessibility' to the archives. In reality, the presence of Bouba ensured a reduction in the bribe I had to pay to gain entry to the archives.

As we discussed potential departure dates I made an off-handed remark about the good condition of the computer equipment in the office. Bouba smiled and confirmed that the desktop and printer were new models. Intrigued, I asked Bouba how AJEMBO had managed to cover the cost of what was undoubtedly expensive equipment. Bouba responded with a hearty laugh. AJEMBO, explained Bouba, had no budget. Months earlier, recounted Bouba, he received a phone call from Mr. Sali, the NW program director for MBOSCUDA located in Bamenda. Mr. Sali stated that the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ) had donated several new computers and two printers to MBOSCUDA.[174] With the NW office already fully equipped from a previous equipment donation, Mr. Sali was offering to donate the printer and desktop computer to the AJEMBO office. Weeks later the AJEMBO office was officially equipped with a working computer

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[174] GTZ ceased to exist as of January 1, 2011. The organization has since merged with the Capacity Building International, (InWEnt) and the German Development Service (DED) to become the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (BMZ 2017). Prior to the merger, GTZ was an organization that focused more on building the capacity of local NGOs in developing countries. Initially GTZ provided direct funding for MBOSCUDA initiatives. By the late 2000s, GTZ shifted their focus to financing indirect rather than direct services. Indirect services included training MBOSCUDA staff on how to write grants that would fund the organization's operational costs and programming. GIZ is a German-based enterprise that is owned by the German government and specializes in international development. GIZ is involved in wide array of activities that include; assisting emerging economies effectively address climate change, collaborating with governments to promote economic development and supporting projects to alleviate issues of hunger in developing countries. GIZ is currently engaged in several projects in Cameroon, all of which were commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union (GIZ 2017). Though primarily involved in consultancy work, GIZ continues to provide funding (small grants) for local projects (See GIZ 2015).

and printer. International organizations designating Mbororo as recipients of material and financial resources based on their recognized status as international '*autochtones*' was the latest development in what appeared to be long-standing pattern; Mbororo received resources to which Gbaya were denied access.

Seven years prior to my research, Mandjou received an influx of humanitarian aid from international organizations. Once again access to the aid was limited to a small segment of the population and the response from the larger Gbaya community was decidedly negative. In 2003, a humanitarian crisis emerged in neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR) that led thousands of Mbororo to flee and resettle throughout the East and Adamaoua Regions of Cameroon. Many Mbororo refugees opted to resettle in Mandjou, a likely consequence of an already existing, settled Mbororo population. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identified the recent Mbororo arrivals as "refugees", and shortly thereafter humanitarian relief agencies flooded the East Region to provide services to them (Pemunta and Aristide 2013:284).

Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta and Atock Brice Aristide, two social scientists based at European research institutions, spent a month interviewing local residents along with aid workers to assess the impact of humanitarian interventions on the social relations between Mbororo refugees and Gbaya "natives" in several villages throughout the East Region, including Mandjou. Pemunta and Aristide concluded that the aid Mbororo received – financial incentives, agricultural inputs to improve production, and food – was a source of frustration for "natives".[175]

Joseph Mvele, a local Gbaya farmer, expressed frustration at Gbaya being excluded as potential recipients of aid. In an interview with Pemunta and Aristide, he stated:

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[175] Pemunta and Aristide employ the term "native" and "local" throughout their article, "Socio-spatial, occupation, conflict and humanitarian assistance for Bororo cross-border migrants in east Cameroon". The authors do not categorically state that either term is a synonym for Gbaya. Early in the text, however, "the local Gbaya tribe" are juxtaposed against "the immigrant Bororo community", suggesting "Gbaya", "local" and "native" are interchangeable (Pemunta and Aristide 2013:279).

> …How on earth can they [Mbororo] receive warm clothing, food rations, fertiliser for their crops and free healthcare treatment? The government gave them land belonging to us to farm on, without consulting us. We are poor and should be given the same nice things they are receiving from UN agencies (Interview with Joseph Mvele, cited in Pemunta and Aristide 2013:279).

Joseph Mvele's commentary foreshadowed Adeline's earlier remarks. In both cases, local Gbaya expressed incredulity as to why resources (material and financial) were directed towards Mbororo (in Mvele's case Mbororo refugees, and in Adeline's case all Mbororo in Mandjou). In yet another telling anecdote from 2003, a Gbaya resident articulated his anxiety over the possibility of Mbororo acquiring the status of *autochtone.*

> They are giving birth to children like pigs. Our children no longer have space in school. In the future, they will claim that they are autochtones [...] because they were born here and will dominate us in government and politics. There is scarcity of everything from firewood, water and farmland. They often collect wood and scrub not just for their personal use but also to resell them downtown. Will our own children have farms, firewood and jobs in the future? (interview with Jean Bosco, cited in Pemunta and Aristide 2013:279).

Though Ngambouk and Atock included the above quotation in their article, they avoided delving deeper into the issue of autochthony and the potential threat Mbororo refugees settling throughout the East Region posed to Gbaya retaining their status as *autochtones.* Nevertheless, their assessment of humanitarian interventions aggravating tensions between Mbororo refugees and Gbaya is compelling in terms of how it corresponds with the way in which I have framed PLAN International's allocation of materials and resources to the Mbororo community based entirely on their status as international *autochtones.* Pemunta and Aristide identified Mbororo refugees as recipients of assistance, whereas I identify all Mbororo as beneficiaries.[176] In both cases, however,

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[176] Pemunta and Aristide's analysis identified the actors involved in the increased tensions in Mandjou and several neighbouring villages as Mbororo refugees and Gbaya "natives". Though I concur with the author's criticisms of the impact of humanitarian aid and the way in which external interventions can be spread unevenly and exacerbate local tensions, their identification of the actors involved in the conflicts is decidedly different even though we are discussing the same town. By the time I arrived in Mandjou in early 2010, much of the humanitarian aid for refugees was gone,

Gbaya are excluded. The conclusion Pemunta and Aristide arrive at in their research, and which my own study of Mandjou substantiates, supports the central thesis of Amelia Branczik's powerful essay "Beyond Intractability." Branczik (2004:4), highly critical of humanitarian aid and development assistance argues that, "[a]id that helps only one side in a conflict can fuel tensions and competition between the sides. Simply ensuring equal distribution to different ethnic groups can reinforce divisions and 'labels'".

NGOs, strategic essentialism, and being "indigenous"

Claire Mercer (2002:8), a human geographer assessing the consequences of development in sub-Saharan Africa, acknowledges the critical role NGOs can play in opening spaces for individuals and groups, usually silenced, to be heard. Drawing a similar conclusion, Arjun Appadurai (1996:190) depicts NGOs as capable of being "alternatives to the national control of the means of subsistence and justice". Local NGOs in the African context are often viewed as critical to the furthering of the indigenous peoples' movement on a global scale and are "seen as the most effective brokers and mediators of global discourses of Western liberal democracy and modernization in the Third World" (Robins 2001:845). Yet as mediators, local NGOs are often forced to interact with complex "international funding circuits" and embrace conflicting messages in order to obtain support for indigenous peoples.

Steven Robins, an anthropologist working with the ≠ khomani San in South Africa, illustrates the manner in which development discourses are negotiated by local NGOs and rearticulated by San communities. In 1999, the≠ khomani San, internationally recognized as indigenous, were the victors

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replaced by international NGOs collaborating with local Mbororo-led organizations to support development projects. Mbororo refugees resided in Mandjou but had largely been incorporated into the larger Mbororo community and when Gbaya expressed frustration and outrage at the extent to which resources were directed towards Mbororo it was to all Mbororo, not only the refugees.

in a legal battle over a land claim in the Northern Cape Province. The South African San Institute (SASI), a local South African NGO created in the 1990s, played a critical role in brokering the land claim[177] (Robins 2001:836). Throughout the land claim process, explains Robins (Ibid.:840), SASI worked to establish and develop "coherent narrative of cultural continuity and belonging." SASI's efforts presented the ≠ khomani San as primitive hunter-gathers who were ostensibly the last of their kind. Though the campaign was arguably deceptive, notes Robins (Ibid.:850), it is unlikely that the land claim would have yielded as much publicity and received the full attention of the national government had the ≠ khomani San been perceived as anything but authentic "Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers". According to Robbins (Ibid.:842), shortly after signing the land claim, SASI was faced with carrying out the "dual mandate" of donor agencies and international NGOs; providing funding for projects that "promoted San cultural survival *and* [italics in original] the values and virtues of 'civil society' such as democratic decision-making and accountability". Robins (Ibid.:849) problematizes the funding procurement strategies of SASI and San communities that reinforce "primordialist notions of the San as hunter-gatherers" due to their contribution "towards the devaluation and marginalization of alternative livelihood strategies and social practices that do not conform to this stereotypical 'bushman image'". Though this form of "strategic essentialism" provides San with an opportunity to recuperate "social memory and identity", it can also widen divisions within the local community (Ibid.:850-1). According to Robins (Ibid.:850), international funders' narrow "focus on San exceptionalism and 'First People' status could end up isolating and alienating this claimant community from potential human resources and political allies in the neighbouring communal areas and rural towns".

James Igoe, an anthropologist working primarily amongst the herding Maasai in northern Tanzania, explores the rapid growth of indigenous NGOs following the liberalization of the nation's

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[177] Roger Chennels, a human rights lawyer, was the founder of SASI (Robins 2001:836).

economy in the 1990s. Local indigenous NGOs, asserts Igoe, have provided certain ethnic groups, i.e. Maasai, access to financial and material resources from international donors based on being "recognized" as indigenous. Acquiring identification as indigenous, writes Igoe (2006:403-4), involves "meeting certain cultural profiles". Within the African context, hunter/gatherers and pastoralists are the quintessential indigenous people. Moreover, in Tanzania, "there can be no doubt that the pastoral idea dominates the [indigenous] movement, even though increasing numbers of Maasai now practice agriculture – and many have for generations" (Ibid.:408). It is the characterization of indigenous peoples as part of a larger "international underclass or underethnicity" that Igoe (Ibid.:416) finds disconcerting.[178] In the case of Tanzania, argues Igoe (Ibid.:416-8), poverty is systemic and widespread and there are millions of citizens who are deemed ineligible to be considered indigenous. Though he recognizes the fact that particular ethnic groups like the Maasai have experienced discrimination and loss of land and resources, other ethnic groups have faced similar struggles. Yet their inability to acquire recognition as culturally distinct prevents them from accessing the indigenous identity, thus foreclosing a potential means of reducing their poverty.

AJEMBO and PLAN International shape Mbororo identity as international *autochtones*

In early October 2010, Bouba received an invitation to participate in an ILO-sponsored workshop for *les peuples autochthones du Cameroun*. Bouba was already in the midst of preparing to return to Yaoundé – the location of the meeting – to continue his university studies. As a participant, Bouba had been asked to present small *discours* to inform conference organizers and participants of AJEMBO's mandate and objectives. His *discours* was also to feature a brief narrative

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[178] Igoe borrows this term from Ronald Niezen's book, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human rights and the politics of identity* (2003:5).

depicting the on-going challenges facing Mbororo in the East Region.[179] As the day of his departure

approached, Bouba's anxiety, in anticipation of his formal presentation, was palpable. When I asked

about the source of his nervousness, Bouba explained that he was uncertain how to best present the

status of Mbororo residing in the East.

Only a few days before boarding the bus to Yaoundé, Bouba requested a last-minute meeting with

the local PLAN International office (based in Bertoua) to discuss the content of the narrative that

ILO had requested. As we headed to meet Claude, the local PLAN International field officer, at the

AJEMBO office, Bouba explained that PLAN International's role as a primary funder was in

transition. The "gifting" of the equipment and the allocation of the sewing workshop had been the

last of their material contributions, via AJEMBO, to the Mbororo community. With a reduced

budget, PLAN International no longer had the financial resources to contribute to AJEMBO

development projects. Nevertheless, Claude and the other PLAN International staff assured Bouba

and AJEMBO executives that they would continue to provide support in terms of seeking additional

sources of funding.[180] It was for this reason that Bouba had set up the meeting with PLAN

International: to seek Claude's advice as to what should be included in the narrative and brainstorm

potential development projects.

   Musa and Usman, both members of AJEMBO's board of executives, and Claude were already

seated in the AJEMBO office when Bouba and I arrived. Following a brief exchange of

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[179] The ILO invitation was significant because for the first time a member of AJEMBO was invited to attend and speak on behalf of Mbororo youth. In previous regional conferences, the only Mbororo NGO in attendance was MBOSCUDA. The invitation suggested MBOSCUDA's firm grip as the national voice of the Mbororo community was faltering. As I was leaving the field in late 2010, it became evident that tensions between the two organizations were on the rise.

[180] During my short stint as a volunteer with MBOSCUDA in the NW between November 2009-January 2010, I attended several workshops/trainings with members of MBOSCUDA's staff. Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV), an international development agency based in the Netherlands, organized these trainings. SNV had formerly provided MBOSCUDA with direct funding to support local development projects. In an effort to increase MBOSCUDA's self-sufficiency, SNV initiated an educational series in which they guided MBOSCUDA staff on how to put together grants and make requests for both national and international funding.

introductions, I was surprised to observe Bouba extracting copies of an agenda he had put together for the meeting. Claude nodded his head in approval. Clearing his throat, Bouba summarized the purpose of the meeting: to discuss the content of the narrative to be included for the ILO workshop and to identify development projects to present to ILO staff. Unbeknownst to anyone in the room, Bouba had spent the previous afternoon in a crowded cybercafé scouring the web in search of information about ILO's funding rubric. It did not take long for him to find a series of projects that ILO had funded in the NW.

Over the next hour, Claude guided the AJEMBO executives through a series of exercises all of which were aimed at helping the three young Mbororo men write their own narrative rather than have Claude tell them what to include. Claude began by posing a question to all three: 'what are AJEMBO's accomplishments in terms of improving the lives of Mbororo in Mandjou?' Judging from the blank expressions of Bouba, Musa, and Usman, Claude's direct question was jarring and unexpected. The three young men conferred for a few moments before Bouba once again took center stage and rattled off a series of projects that AJEMBO had facilitated. These projects included organizing a summer program in which Mbororo university students provided free tutoring sessions for Mbororo teenagers preparing to take *le diplôme national du Brevet* or *le baccalauréat*. Additionally, AJEMBO members had solicited donations from wealthier members of the Mbororo community that were designated as bursaries to support Mbororo graduates wanting to attend university.

Praising the quality of the examples Bouba provided, Claude pointed out that a successful narrative needed to demonstrate not only why Mbororo needed support, but also what the community had accomplished to effect change. Claude was certain that AJEMBO would have few difficulties arguing the latter. However, Claude reminded the executives that an effective strategy to secure future funding was to quantify previous development projects. Referring to the example of the tutoring program, Claude pointed out that when summarizing the project, Bouba should include

255

how many students received tutoring and how many passed their exam. Having explained that point, Claude then asked to see AJEMBO's mandate. It was imperative that the mandate corresponded with actual projects that AJEMBO had completed and ones they were developing. While Bouba searched for a copy of the mandate, Claude provided several factors as to why AJEMBO was likely to get funding before that of other communities. Not only were Mbororo internationally recognized as *autochtones,* but judging from what he had seen today, Mbororo were organized and educated.

Having found the mandate, Bouba handed the well-worn copy to Claude and waited as he read the document. As he was reading the mandate, Claude made a few notes in his notebook. Once finished, Claude acknowledged the quality of the content of the mandate and the way in which AJEMBO's development projects aligned with the objectives of the organization. However, Claude noted one potential issue that he felt the AJEMBO executive would need to address: the absence of gender parity. On the last page of the mandate, the names of AJEMBO's board members were listed. Amongst the ten names there was not one woman. Claude was confident that the ILO staff present at the meeting would notice the gender disparity and respond with disapproval. In order to avoid a negative response, Claude offered a few suggestions to address the issue. Claude recommended that Bouba find two or three Mbororo women whose name could be added to the board. Alternatively, rather than attempt to obscure the gender disparity, he could acknowledge AJEMBO's attempt to address the issue directly. Highlighting their involvement in encouraging Mbororo women to pursue economic livelihoods outside of the home, vis-à-vis the distribution of sewing machines and the allocation of a workshop, would certainly help to shape AJEMBO's image as a progressive indigenous NGO worthy of funding. After nearly two hours of discussion, the meeting came to an end. The AJEMBO executives thanked Claude for his time and Bouba promised to send him a final draft of the narrative before the end of the day.

When Bouba and I met later in the afternoon to read through his penultimate draft he confided that he was uncertain about the way in which he had written about Mbororo residing in the East. Having spent most of his life in urban centers he felt uncomfortable depicting Mbororo as uneducated and impoverished nomadic pastoral people. Mbororo he knew, including himself, were engaged in "safer" and more "profitable" economic livelihoods. As he pointed out to me, "no one depends on cows anymore."

Robin's characterization of SASI as a cultural mediator brokering development discourses between the San community and international donor agencies bears a striking resemblance to AJEMBO's role for the Mbororo community in Mandjou. Like SASI, the executives of AJEMBO, particularly Bouba, struggled to meet the contradictory objectives that donors, i.e. PLAN International and potentially the ILO, demanded. Both organizations faced what Robins has coined the "dual mandate". In the case of AJEMBO, Bouba and his fellow executives struggled to adhere to international donors' pressures to incorporate western liberal principles. On the other hand, like SASI, AJEMBO was confronted with conveying an image that would resonate with donors' perception of indigenous peoples, one in which Mbororo were depicted as marginal and vulnerable, and as struggling to maintain their involvement in nomadic pastoralism.

Several days after Bouba's exchange with Claude from PLAN International, I watched Bouba nervously take the stage – the well-worn pages of his *discours* in hand – and turn to face a sea of unknown faces. It was the second day of the three-day ILO workshop to which Bouba had been invited. Bouba gave me a slight nod, our pre-arranged signal to indicate the moment I should take a photo, before addressing the audience members. Bouba identified himself as a young Mbororo from Mandjou a founding member of AJEMBO and an *autochthone.* Following Claude's advice, Bouba characterized Mbororo as a nomadic people who engaged primarily in pastoralism. Despite residing in Cameroon for over a century, Mbororo continued to be identified as strangers, unable to secure

257

permanent access to land and seek political office. Bouba added that the geographic isolation of Mbororo, in part a strategy to avoid conflicts with their farming neighbours, had prevented many Mbororo from receiving an education. Even today, noted Bouba, it was common to encounter Mbororo who could only speak Fulfulde. The inability to converse in either one of the national languages, argued Bouba, had hindered the development and progress of Mbororo. Rather than voice their concerns about being marginalized and discriminated against, Mbororo remained silent. After dedicating nearly three quarters of his allotted time to present the struggles of his people, Bouba discussed one of AJEMBO's recent initiatives in which the organization had solicited monies from within the Mbororo community to provide youth with small bursaries to attend university. With time running out, Bouba did not address the absence of gender parity within the organization. Instead, Bouba reiterated that Mbororo continued to endure discrimination and requested that the government and international community take steps to address the marginalization of Mbororo in Cameroon. With his presentation complete, Bouba left the stage and retook his seat next to me.

During the lunch break that afternoon, one of the workshop facilitators, Emile, an ILO staff member affiliated with the Yaoundé office, stopped by our lunch table to speak to Bouba. He praised Bouba's efforts as well as that of AJEMBO's to promote education within the Mbororo community. Before leaving our table, Emile handed Bouba his business card and strongly encouraged Bouba to contact him to discuss the possibility of the ILO contributing financial resources to expand the bursary program. Though the project ultimately failed to move forward, the fact remains that Emile expressed interest in providing AJEMBO with additional financial resources due to the ILO's categorization of Mbororo as '*autochtones*.'

Conclusion

Igoe (2006:417) problematizes the application of the term/status of 'indigenous peoples' as an identity and questions whether or not such an identity can be an effective instrument in eliminating inequality. Igoe (Ibid.:403) points out that even access to the indigenous identity "requires an awareness that such fora exist, as well as knowledge of the indigenous category and its implications for local resources struggles. It also requires access to rather substantial monetary resources". Mbororo have unquestionably struggled to acquire political rights and access to natural resources due to their inability to substantiate any recognizable claims to place. It is their experience of displacement and discrimination that has helped Mbororo identify as indigenous. Gbaya have faced similar struggles, yet they find their marginality and poverty ignored by the international donors who are willing to lend financial support and offer material resources to their Mbororo neighbours. As Igoe has argued, it is possible for communities to be marginalized and not be recognized as indigenous.

Over time the international definition of indigenous/*autochtone* has shifted from a focus on historical continuity to one that centers on marginalization and domination. International NGOs have facilitated the circulation of the concept of 'indigenous' or '*autochtone*' from an international to a local scale. NGOs have offered financial support in the hopes to provide indigenous communities with the assistance necessary to overcome their history of subjugation and domination. Mbororo-led NGOs, with the support of international donor organizations and NGOs, have struggled to forge an identity as indigenous which has succeeded, to some extent, in providing an avenue to circumvent the state and gain access to resources.

One of my objectives in documenting Gbaya mobility and showcasing their precarious economic position in the larger market economy in the previous chapter was to highlight their marginal position in Cameroon. Gbaya, I argue, are in a precarious political and economic position,

yet there are no international organizations contributing financial or material resources to alleviate their poverty. Gbaya, unlike Mbororo, do not have the cultural traits and history that would allow them to acquire the recognition of 'indigenous'. International organizations and NGOs involved in the international indigenous movement point to such a category as providing communities with a means by which to address systemic poverty. However, those impoverished communities, unable to obtain recognition as indigenous, are left with no recourse.

Belonging is a concept that is both negotiated and constructed. Identity categories such as race, class, gender, and age are often invoked as a means of structuring belonging. Though not a requirement, belonging can be expressed "as much by actual territorial emplacement as by memories of belonging to particular landscapes whose physical reality is enacted only through acts of collective remembering" (Lovell 1998:1-2). In addition to having a physical expression, belonging can be utilized as "a resource [with which] to draw social demarcations and establish border regimes" (Youkhana 2015:11). The "processes of globalization" have, paradoxically, generated an "obsession with belonging" (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005:386). Political and economic liberalization, decentralization, concerns over diminished cultural and biological diversity are global trends that appear to "converge in a deepening concern about belonging" (Geschiere and Jackson 2006:3). The fixation with belonging is, in part, a response to the "ontological uncertainty of the postmodern/postcolonial condition" (Dunn 2009:115).

Contributing to the fixation with belonging is the fact that one's political rights and access to land are a result of establishing a fixed attachment to place. Belonging is an analytical unit by which the allocation, regulation and distribution of land is measured. Land is an "island of stability in an unstable economic and political world" (Berry 2002). Moreover, land remains a finite (and dwindling) resource that provides financial and material security. Throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa, "land is a resource to which access is ensured not merely by membership of a national community – local citizenship [local belonging] and status are often as or more important" (Lund 2011:10). Considering the value conferred on land and the fact that access centers on one's ability to demonstrate belonging, it stands to reason that establishing belonging will be made a priority.

Autochthony – "to be born from the soil" – is the most commanding form of belonging that gained international currency towards the end of the 20th century. With its reference to soil lending autochthony a natural and primordial quality, it is understandable why Geschiere (2008:2) refers to autochthony as "a kind of *ur*-belonging". The naturalness and authenticity with which autochthony is intertwined are emotionally appealing qualities that lend themselves to being able to mobilize people from a wide array of circumstances. As appealing as autochthony may be and as much as the concept lends itself to notions of security, the identity itself is elusive considering its powerful botanical references. Elusiveness aside, autochthony continues to wield great power. The fear of being excluded from that identity has led to social, economic and political upheaval in contemporary Africa.

As I have illustrated throughout this dissertation, the discourse of autochthony has not only transformed the Cameroonian political scene but also revealed the consequences of being excluded from the status of '*autochthone*'. In chapter 1, I briefly summarized the conflict between Bamileke businessmen purchasing and titling land and the self-identified *autochthones* of Yaoundé, the Betí. When Betí land sellers began to feel as though they were losing their political grasp over the city, they demanded the land be returned. Betí land sellers invoked their status as *autochthones* of Yaoundé in order to nullify previous land transactions with Bamileke buyers, defacto *étrangers*. In the geographical context of Yaoundé, Bamileke are *étrangers*. Yet were the same interaction to occur in the West Region, it would be the Bamileke asserting their status as *autochthones* and it would be the Betí who would be recognized as *étrangers*. Being an *autochthone* or *étranger* is geographically contextual. The issue is that Betí and Bamileke have a place to which they belong and thus a physical location where they are allowed to buy and purchase land.

The research questions that underlie my dissertation emerge from the claim that autochthony has become "the ultimate form of belonging" (Geschiere 2013:42). Moreover, belonging and

exclusion remain the "driving forces in Cameroonian politics as parties, regions, communities, and individuals struggle for access to scarce resources" (Rupp 2011:51-52). In a political context in which the identities of '*autochthone*' in French-speaking Cameroon and 'native' in English-speaking Cameroon center on being recognized as having a long-term attachment to place, how do mobile communities access these identities? Are mobile communities permanently excluded from identifying and being recognized as 'natives' or '*autochthones*'? Mbororo, formerly nomadic, settled over a century ago in the NW. Nevertheless, Grassfielders refused to recognize Mbororo as 'natives' and insisted that as the first-comers to the NW, authority over the access to natural resources (including that of land) must remain in Grassfielders' hands. The challenges Mbororo faced in the NW suggest that mobility, coupled with not being the first to occupy land, are obstacles to establish belonging that cannot be overcome. Yet, as I have argued in the dissertation, Mbororo in the East Region, most visibly in the town of Mandjou, have done just that. In less than forty years, Mbororo settlers have transformed themselves into *autochthones*.

Until the early 1990s, Mbororo residing in the NW remained firmly attached to the identity of 'strangers'. President Biya's decision to support political and economic liberalization, while at the same time permitting the formation of ethnic associations, was the first step in providing Mbororo with the opportunity to claim the status of 'native'. Ethnic associations were vehicles of political representation to the Cameroonian state and the path by which state resources flowed. MBOSCUDA, the Mbororo-led ethnic association advocated that Mbororo be identified as 'natives' of the NW. Their efforts brought about change in the sense that the government permitted NW Mbororo to identify the NW as their place of birth on their national identity cards. Though the national government conceded Mbororo belonging vis-à-vis the national identity cards, this recognition was not sufficient to overcome local customs. Citing their more recent arrival to the NW, Grassfielders refused to adhere to any regulations in which Mbororo would have authority

263

over land and retain the rights to make decisions over land. "Grassfielders' perception of the Mbororo was and still is informed by ideas of historical continuity and political supremacy" (Pelican 2009:57).

The failure to achieve recognition as 'native' from their Grassfielders' neighbors pushed MBOSCUDA to seek support from international organizations in order to address the systematic marginalization of NW Mbororo. MBSOCUDA garnered support from organizations that saw them as indigenous based on a series of factors; their minority status, history of marginalization, engagement in nomadic pastoralism, self-identification, etc. MBOSCUDA's efforts to campaign for NW Mbororo as international indigenous peoples were effective in terms of raising awareness of the social, economic, and political inequalities facing Mbororo residents in the NW. International organizations were more than willing to provide financial and material support to address these inequalities.

Educating NW Mbororo about the 1974 Land Ordinance was a priority for MBOSCUDA since the new land legislation provided Mbororo the opportunity to acquire legal and permanent ownership over land through the state rather than depending on the generosity of Grassfielders to access land. The formalization of land titles had the objective of securing the land rights of "strangers" but the extent to which local communities adhered to the 1974 Land Ordinance varied. Grassfielders were unwilling to cede authority over land to Mbororo. Consequently, few Mbororo succeeded in acquiring land titles in the NW. In the East Region, however, Mbororo took advantage of their knowledge of the 1974 Land Ordinance and titled land with great fervor.

Armed with their knowledge of the 1974 Land Ordinance, Mbororo relocated in waves to the East Region, with many choosing to settle in and around Mandjou. Several factors facilitated the relocation. Gbaya residents in Mandjou had little to no confidence in the *chefferie* and were unlike to modify their behavior due to the words of the chief. Furthermore, Gbaya residents were eager to

264

supplement their income generated from their agricultural yields, which rarely went beyond that of subsistence, with money from land transactions. Secondly, the Cameroonian government had a limited presence in the East since there the region was considered to have little value in terms of extractable resources. Gbaya were confident that Mbororo relocation and resettlement to the East would draw the attention of both the state and potentially international development agencies. Eager to acquire land, Mbororo were more than willing to relocate to a region in which the *autochthones* were welcoming and allowed them to buy land. In the East Region, the absence of the '*autochthone*' status did not prevent Mbororo from purchasing land as it had in the NW.

It would be the ease of buying and titling land and the subsequent spatial organization of the landscape that provided Mbororo with the means of substantiating their claim to '*autochthone*' status. Effectively, Mbororo began to assert status after the physical transformation of Mandjou was underway. Mbororo settlement in Mandjou resulted in the reduced visibility of Gbaya residents, most of whom relocated outside of the town's perimeter. Further limiting Gbaya visibility was the spatial transformation of Mandjou. Modifications to the physical landscape, coupled with the implementation of new business regulations (i.e. prohibition on the selling of bush meat) made it harder for Gbaya to circulate in Mandjou. For Mbororo residents, however, decisions on how to spatially organize Mandjou focused on constructing built forms that served as both as visible testimonials of their engagement with Islam and to encourage greater piety. Though Mbororo motivation to build these structures was not to permanently exclude Gbaya from the landscape, the limited appeal of Mbororo built forms (i.e. high walls, madrasas, milk bars etc.) and the elimination of Gbaya spaces (i.e. Gbaya bars) did little to encourage Gbaya to retain a presence in town.

Material culture and the built environment "are powerful forces in people's lives" (Pellow 2008:6). Built forms carry meanings that impact, modify and alter human behaviors. One of my objectives in the writing of the dissertation was to take a closer look at the spatial organization of

Mandjou as a special problem rather than regarding the built environment as merely the setting for my research. It is through a detailed analysis of the changes to the physical landscape that the social, economic and political inequalities between Mbororo and Gbaya residents emerged. Furthermore, I argue that the examination of Mbororo spatial modifications in Mandjou illustrates the shift that has occurred in terms of the parameters of local autochthony. For decades, Grassfielders rebuffed any attempts from NW Mbororo to lay claim to the status of 'native'. Their justification centered on the argument that Mbororo were late-comers to the region; Grassfielders' settlement preceded that of the Mbororo. Grassfielders claim to the status of 'native' made them the defacto owners of the land.

In contrast to the situation confronting NW Mbororo, Mbororo residing in Mandjou have referenced their modifications of the built environment to substantiate their claim to the status of '*autochthone*'. My dissertation contributes to the conversation on autochthony by way of illustrating a radical shift in terms of identifying who is and who is not an *autochtone*. Rather than making claims based on first arrival or occupation, Mbororo settlers in Mandjou have justified their claim to the local '*autochthone*' identity by way of material expression. Whether it be the high walls surrounding homes or the madrasas, Mbororo-led efforts have led to the construction of the most visible structures in Mandjou. The expansion of these built forms has led to Mbororo establishing a stronger affiliation with the town of Mandjou and receiving recognition as being local *autochthones*. Furthermore, these same built forms have played an important role in shaping the ways in which Mbororo residents within the town are perceived by outsiders; no longer pagan nomadic pastoralists but pious Muslims.

Another of my objectives in writing the dissertation was to illustrate the ways by which Mbororo -- a marginalized community historically engaged in nomadic pastoralism – established themselves as local '*autochthones*'. Acquiring recognition as indigenous peoples (vis-à-vis the United Nations, International Labor Organization, and the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issue, etc.)

266

has proven to be instrumental for Mbororo in the East Region seeking to become local '*autochthones*'. For nearly a century, NW Mbororo struggled to achieve social, economic, and political parity with the Grassfielders. The recognition from the international community as 'indigenous' did not lead to NW Mbororo achieving total parity with the Grassfielders in terms of political rights and access to land. However, the international indigenous identity provided Mbororo in the NW with an avenue for seeking redress for historical wrongs and to challenge their exclusion from the accessing the same rights allocated to their neighbors. "[B]eing indigenous stands as one of the best strategies of extraversion available for self-identifying numerically small and marginalized communities that face under-development and limited democracy at a local level" (Lynch 2011:156).

My research in the East Region illustrates the extent to which Mbororo settlers have successfully challenged their exclusion from the 'native' or '*autochtone*' statuses. Their efforts to modify the physical landscape of Mandjou have provided Mbororo with greater visibility. Furthermore, Mbororo in the East Region have referenced the physical transformation of Mandjou as a means of substantiating their claim to the '*autochtone*' status. Though Mbororo were responsible for the radical spatial transformation of Mandjou, their international recognition as indigenous has provided them with the means of initiating the physical modifications of the landscape. Recognition as international indigenous peoples has fueled Mbororo transformation into local *autochthones* in East Cameroon.

As I have illustrated in the dissertation, Mbororo residing in the East Region have become economically, politically and culturally dominant. Yet they continue to receive aid from international organizations based on their international recognition as being 'indigenous'. Mbororo **residing in the East Region have two strategies of extraversion, they are both international *autochthones* (indigenous) and local *autochthones*.** Ostensibly, Mbororo residents in Mandjou have altered the parameters of local autochthony in order to benefit from resources of the state whilst continuing to

utilize the international indigenous identity as means of circumventing the state to access resources. What I have found troubling is the extent to which international NGOs provide support based on a community's indigenous status without interrogating the context of those claims. MBOSCUDA and AJEMBO are Mbororo-led associations that are comprised of educated Mbororo who recognize the need to project a "cultural profile" that coincides with the expectations of donor agencies. The continual recognition of Mbororo as marginalized through being indigenous without any consideration of the possibility that their status has changed is problematic.

As noted by some anthropologists, the claim to being 'indigenous' is often perceived as one of the only legal and political avenues that provide a marginalized community with the tools to eliminate the power and authority dominant groups have over them. If the indigenous identity is to be a means of addressing social, economic and cultural inequalities, then the question emerges as to why a marginalized and vulnerable community such as the Gbaya are excluded from the identity. Gbaya, unfortunately, lack the "cultural profile" donor agencies have come to recognize as evidence of being indigenous. Though there is no hard and fast definition for indigeneity, international organizations are more likely to recognize a community as 'indigenous' should they retain some form of engagement with non-traditional economic livelihoods (i.e. hunting-gathering and pastoralism). Exclusion from the international indigenous identity would not be as problematic were it not that their status as local '*autochthones'* remains the only strategy for Gbaya to use in order to access natural resources and political power. I argue that the international indigenous/*autochthone* identity has, in fact, exacerbated the power differential between Gbaya and Mbororo. Indigeneity that provides security and means of "by-passing the state" has, effectively, contributed to Gbaya impoverishment.

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