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Contesting Land and Identity: the case of Women Cultivators and Fulani Cattle Herders in Wum, Northwest Region of Cameroon

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Dedication

To my Mother: Manyie-Ntoh Esther M.Angwafo III

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Acronyms

ACUDA	Aku Cultural and Development Association
BMRS	Bu/Mbengkas Rice Co-operative Society
CDC	Cameroon Development Corporation
CPDM	Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement
DO	District Officer
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ELECAM	Elections Cameroon
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MBOSCUDA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association
NAB	National Archives Buea
NES	National Engagement Strategy
NHRLC	National Human Rights and Liberties Commission
NTFPs	Non Timber Forest Products
NWO/WOTRO	Science for Global World Development Programmes
PNDP	National Community Development Driven Plan
RAB	Regional Archives Bamenda
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SODELCO	Société de Développement d'Élevage et du Commerce
WADA	Wum Area Development Authority

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Abstract

In Cameroon as elsewhere in Africa, the subject of ownership and access to land among different groups has been an issue of major concern. The arrival of the nomadic Fulani alongside with herds of cattle by the 1920s into Wum Central Subdivision did not only bring about profound changes in the political economy of the area but also introduced new ways of cohabiting, land use patterns and different perceptions about land and resources. This was partly so because the Aghem and Bu people who historically had exclusive ownership rights and access to land were compelled to compete and negotiate these rights and access on the same fertile lands that had abundant pastures for cattle with Fulani herders. With the presence of the Fulani, the issue of equal access and control of land and resources has constituted a contentious and perennial problem. Despite their long presence in the area, they are still considered as ‘strangers’ and/or ‘intruders’. The objective of the research was to investigate why the conflicts between women cultivators and Fulani cattle herders are persistent. The outcome of this research reveals that the conflicts are more complicated than they appear and are embedded in gender relations and cultural practices where respect for tradition is optimal and exacerbated by a weak and out dated statutory land law. The law proscribes customary tenure system and does not guarantee women’s ownership land rights but helps in the alienation and dispossession of women from their ancestral land. In addition, it is also a lever for rich domestic elites who now acquire huge tracts of land at the detriment of the rural poor. Constrained by this, they turn their frustration towards the Fulani by invoking ethnic sentiments as the legitimate strategy for their land claims. With increasing population and competition over diminishing resources and the sedentarisation of the Fulani, this research advocates for a new and more inclusive land law where all stakeholders would have security over their land and property.

Chapter One: Facing Menchum Valley and Dancing the Pilot

1.1 Introduction

The first time I visited Menchum division was in 2006 as a Research Assistant in a project¹ sponsored by the *Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO/WOTRO)*. For two years that I did field work in Menchum, I became fascinated by the beautiful landscape and the huge Fulani cattle herder population that I encountered and a vibrant farming population. At that time, I did not nurse any ambitions of doing research in Wum because I did not come across any conflicts or clashes while in the field. Perhaps the reason is that my research had little or nothing to do with land and conflicts. What attracted my attention to choose Wum for my research were the huge land acquisitions that domestic elites have made in the area. Surprised by this, I set out to research on the emerging phenomenon of land acquisition in Menchum when I had this opportunity. My initial idea was to focus on ‘land grabbing’ and I was not familiar with the farmer/grazer conflicts that have come to constitute the focus of this research. The original research proposal was on ‘land commoditisation and patronage politics in Wum Central Subdivision’. During the process of collecting data in the field, the focus of the research changed and was adjusted towards land conflicts although land commoditisation cannot be excluded as one of causes of these conflicts. I was lured into this because in all interviews and focus group discussions that were organised during field work, farmer/grazer disputes were recurrent. Intrigued by this, I decided to examine this phenomenon in depth. When I arrived Wum for the field work, I went straight to the Divisional Officer (hence, DO) for Wum Central to introduce myself and also to let him know about my research interest. What stroke me at the DO’s office was the huge population made up of farmers and herders who came to complain or were called up because of crops that have been destroyed by cattle. One of the cases that I witnessed involved

¹ Actually, my work was not restricted to Menchum but included other divisions of the northwest of Cameroon where I conducted and recorded interviews on the use of the mobile phone and how the phone serves as a tool that connects and disconnects or bypasses social hierarchies. More on this can be found in De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, and Angwafo (2010).

Idrissou a Fulani cattle herder and Youh Emerencia a farmer² and it was from it that I drew the inspiration for this research.

1.2 The Problem Statement

The dispute between Emmerencia and Idrissou mentioned above appears to be a tip of the iceberg as the northwest region of Cameroon popularly known in colonial historiography as the Bamenda Grassfields (Nkwi 2011: 2) has been suffering from what Kah (2009: 185) refers to as ‘notorious land conflicts’ of different sorts which include interethnic, farmer/grazer and community scuffles (Sone 2012a: 84). Since the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century, inter-ethnic conflicts have become a common currency (Nkwi 2011: 2).³ The arrival of the nomadic Fulani alongside with herds of cattle by the 1920s into Wum Central Subdivision did not only bring about profound changes in the political economy of the area but also introduced new ways of cohabiting, land use patterns and different perceptions about land and resources. Furthermore, the reintroduction of political liberalisation and economic reforms in the 1990s in Cameroon seem to have also exacerbated the issue as it evoked a new wave of ethnic sentiments and gained currency within the public arena in Cameroon (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2001; Nkwi 2011: 3; Ndjio 2009: 84-5), where there has been the (re)interpretation of the notion of identity and belonging (Konings 2001; Geschiere 2003). This has often resulted in the victimisation of people considered as ‘strangers’ in several regions of the country, by so called ‘indigenes’ despite the fact that some have been living in these areas for more than half a century (Ndjio 2009: 84-5).

Wum Central Sub-division is one of such volatile areas in Cameroon where there have been protracted land conflicts of a different dimension. The entire northwest region has the characteristic that favour the co-habitation of farmers and grazers and that is why there is a huge agricultural and livestock subsectors in the region (Ndenecho: 2010). For the past four decades there have been intermittent skirmishes and confrontations between cattle grazers and the Aghem

² Emmerencia is an indigene born in Naikom and is a farmer who is involved in the cultivation of maize from which she raises money to take care of her children and for the up keep of the family. Idrissou on the other hand, is a Fulani whose parents migrated from Bafum, near Founbam. He was delivered in Aghem and he is a cattle herdsman with five children. He is also engaged in the cultivation of food.

³ Some of the long standing disputes include: the Bali Nyonga boundary disputes with the Baforchu, Chomba and Bawock; Balikumbat-Bafanji, Oku have fought the Mbasa; the Bambui have clashed with the Bambili and Finge and Njong-Bamock conflicts just to name a few (Nkwi 2011: 2; Mbah 2008; Sone 2012a: 102).

and Bu people who are predominantly crop cultivators.⁴ Both the increase in the population of Fulani and in cattle numbers naturally had serious repercussions on the political economy of the region, which, until then, had been agricultural (Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 1). The conflict usually begins when cattle have strayed into farmlands and destroyed crops (Diduk 1992). Land disputes are therefore not new in this area and have always been the basis for land claims and for ensuring the source of livelihood in most societies. Why then is the conflict in Wum different from other conflicts in the region?

Contrary to Kah (2009: 190) who demonstrates that these conflicts in Wum are as a result of resource degradation and land scarcity, I rather follow Andersson (1999: 553) to argue that these changes and pressure notwithstanding, land conflicts are not always purely resource driven (Frerks et al 2014: 14) nor automatically attributable to physical or economic land shortage. Consequently, I maintain that the reasons why there are persistent land disputes in Wum are found elsewhere than the mere struggle over scarce resources or crop damages. It should be born in mind that; land, of course, is significant for rural survival, but land conflicts do not necessarily focus on the productive value of land for land has not only economic meaning, but combines multiple meanings. Similarly, Mwangi (2014: 3) notes that ‘conflicts that seem straight forward are in fact intricately multi-layered and have a complex historical nature, in which power and various notions of justice are at play’. Therefore, ‘land disputes cannot be reduced to economically motivated struggles, but have to be understood from a more encompassing, sociological perspective’ (Andersson 1999: 554).

The conflicts in Aghem and Bu are unique in that unlike in other areas where the problem is largely inter-ethnic boundary disputes (rivalries) between groups, in Wum Central, they are between women cultivators and Fulani grazers despite the fact that there is a huge population of other people who live and own cattle in Aghem. Furthermore, they are strikingly different because Fulani herders are also spread in other divisions and parts of the northwest region (Vabi n. d: 13) yet conflicts are not as rampant as in Aghem. Specifically, these conflicts overtly involve

⁴ Previous disputes between farmers and herders were recorded in 1937, 1943, 1951, 1961 1966 and in 1973, Aghem women organised a public protest boycotting all market activity in Wum and in two neighbouring villages. They demanded that Fulbe herders should keep their animals in three demarcated grazing zones or be expelled. They argued that herders continually disrespected farmers' efforts and endangered farmers' livelihood by appropriating more and more land.

women who constitute a majority of food cultivators and Fulani cattle herders with whom they compete over land and resources. Consequently, this research is focused on conflicts between women cultivators and Fulani cattle herders. Generally, the conflicts take on stronger gender coloration because rural women traditionally dominate farming and any measure that touches on land automatically affects their interest (Sone 2012a: 100) and they often respond with violent protests (Nkwi1985; Diduk 1992; Fochingong and Tanga, 2007). Another point worthy to note is the fact that several commissions and strategies adopted by local authorities and government officials in an effort to solve these perennial conflicts have not been successful. The research question which this study is seeking to answer is: Why are these conflicts persistent in Wum? This question has been supplemented by other sub research questions which go thus:

- i. What are the underlying causes of land disputes in Wum Central Sub-division?
- ii. Who are the key actors in those conflicts?
- iii. Why have the measures/strategies adopted by the state and local authorities to mitigate these disputes have persistently failed?

The main objective of this research is therefore to fill the gap in the existing academic literature on farmer/herder conflicts with a particular focus on women and Fulani herders. In most of the existing literature on farmer/grazer conflicts in Wum, little attention has been paid on the role of women as the principal farm cultivators who have usufructs land rights and the customary tenure system in which these rights are embedded (See for instance Pelican 2008;Dze-Ngwa 2014). In most instances, the literatures simply gloss over and only mention women as protesters or agitators against crop destruction or infringement in the sphere of women (for example, Kah 2009; Nkwi 1985; Diduk 1992). Also, a lot of scholars have written on the possible causes of land conflicts/disputes in this area without paying much attention on gender relations and the intrinsic customary and political undertones embedded in these conflicts.⁵

⁵ For instance, Kah (2009) has focused on the role of traditional rulers and government officials coupled with inefficient land management policies that have led to the dispossession of rural women; Davidheiser and Luna 2008 have highlighted the changes in production systems and land tenure regimes that are influenced by western models

In addition, it is also to understand how these conflicts manifest and why the strategies adopted by the state in mitigating them have often failed. The last but not the least, the findings of this research, would be a contribution to academic endeavours that could be exploited by researchers and policy makers. I present some theoretical assumptions that can help us understand conflicts.

1.3 Theoretical Approaches

Conflicts are the hall mark of every society and the causes of conflicts are as complex as there are different interests. In this section, I shall try to identify the different causes of conflict. By touching on various causes of conflict and conflict types it will be shown that labelling a conflict, as for example political or resource based, is not always possible, due to the fact that the intention behind it might be unclear and unknown (Kirchner 2013: 27).

1.3.1 Towards a Definition of Conflict

A lot of scholars have written on conflict using different perspectives in different fields of study (Pelican 2008; Sone 2012b; Kah 2009). However, there is no absolute definition of conflict because of its complexity and different ways that conflict manifests. As some scholars hold, there is no society that is void of conflict of some sort. Sometimes conflict has a social relevance because it is through it that families, organizations, and states (re) define themselves, innovate and ideas emerge leading to social progress (Frerks et al 2014: 28). In this sense, conflict can also be a key driver of change (*ibid*). Yet conflict has led to profound negative consequences in most societies. It is therefore important to first of all attempt a definition of the concept ‘conflict’ in this study in order to situate the reader in context. The concept has been defined variously by many scholars but I follow that of Bavinck et al (2014: 2) and according to them, ‘conflict can be understood as “confrontations between groups or categories of people” regarding a resource activity and its management’. To them conflict may be positioned on a continuum ranging from mild tension to outright violence (*ibid*). It is important to note that a conflict is not necessarily violent or confrontational but confrontation or clash would be considered an extreme point in the continuum. This distinction has also been made by Kirchner (2013: 28) and she stresses that

of capitalist tendencies. Dafinger and Pelican(2008), emphasize on the Fulani(Mbororo) land claims rights of citizenship.

‘violence is a degree of conflict’. Conflict in the sense of confrontations is related to, but differ from conflict in the sense of conflicting interests (Bavinck et al 2014: 5). Conflicting interests may include what Kirchner (2013: 28) refers to as ‘social conflicts’ and constitute the struggle over values, ideas, tastes, fashion or claims of status, power and scarce resources. For instance, diminishing arable land for farmers where their agricultural activities cannot be met will mean that they have conflicting interests. Generally, when the situation has moved from the level of mild tension to that of confrontation, it signifies not only that the different parties are not willing to seek compromise or redress but that the mechanisms for conflict resolution have failed (Frerks et al 2014). What is important therefore is not the presence of conflict but how the conflict is resolved such that there can be peace among the different parties.

Cooperation is often seen as the opposite of conflict. The more cooperation there is, the less conflict there will be, and vice versa (Jeffery and Vira 2001; Bavinck, Mostert and Pellegrini 2014). Yet conflicting interests do not exclude cooperation (in our case among farmers) and cooperation does not exclude conflicting relations (especially when the root cause of the problem is not tackled). Usually, conflict emerges from grievances (latent causes) that one of the parties has been nursing for some time and grievances are more associated with groups suffering from relative deprivation, which in turn fuel conflicts (*ibid*). This is closely linked to the discourses of marginality (Kabiri 2001: 56) which highlights the notion of social exclusion of certain groups or categories of people, for instance because of their minority status and other disadvantages within a larger social and/or political structure (Logo and Bikie 1998). I shall now proceed to analyse the different theoretical perspectives that can help explain conflict.

1.3.2 Historical and Theoretical Perspectives

The existence of conflicts dates back to early times in most organise societies when there was the struggle to acquire land through conquest (Umeh 1973: 2) or absorption of weaker or smaller lineages (Ndege 2012: 9). The underlined assumption here is that, even in pre-colonial period; stronger polities increased their territorial spheres through raids and subjugation. In support of this assertion, Tonah (2002: 44) notes that land did not constitute a problem since it was largely assumed that it was plentiful and anybody could have access to land. Not to say that conflicts did

not exist but to state that people had conflicts of interest. In some instances, as it was among the Dagombas and Konkombas of Northern Ghana, conflicts arose from the struggles over resources such as quarrels over a cow or rights to fish in a river often referred to as the 'fish war' and the 'cow war' (Pul 2003: 42). In Aghem, it was common to find stray goats and pigs in crop farms and women had the right to kill with impunity animals destroying crops. In some instances the goats were caught and the owner sued for compensation (Kaberry 1952: 89). In most areas, men had no right to kill goats or pigs feeding on farms, the correct procedure being to catch the animal and sue in court (*ibid*). Again, refusals to pay bride price or cases of adultery, murder amongst others were preoccupying. In such instances, the conflicts were resolved by the village or traditional councils using appropriate mechanisms which in most cases included the payment of fines (Chilver and Kaberry 1967). The advent of colonial rule brought new impetus in land deals and people's perceptions about land began to change. The discussions below are focused on the colonial land policies which have contributed in no small way to land conflicts in Africa and in Cameroon. I use the literature from Tonah (2012), Fisiy (1995), Mbah (2009), and Sone (2012) to build up the argument.

One of the leading approaches that have attracted a lot of academic attention towards understanding the causes of conflicts was the introduction of colonial land laws by European powers in Africa at the dawn of colonial rule. As Mbah (2009) has argued, the partitioning of Africa into economic and political spheres of influence by Europeans created what he refers to as 'disruptive colonial boundaries'. He insists that the arbitrary division of ethnic groups amongst themselves did not take into consideration the interests of the Africans and the demographic realities. Consequently, contestable boundaries emerged and were left unchanged and to date have proved to be a source of significant conflict. Nkwi (1998, 2011) picks up from there but focuses on the effects of the division of ethnic groups between the newly created African states that separated ethnic conglomerates. To him, colonial land policies arbitrarily demarcated land for the indigenes and also allowed Europeans to acquire huge tracts of land for the establishment of colonial plantations and for white settlers. This did not only split ethnic groups but communities also lost their land rights and were dispossessed from their ancestral lands. The introduction of cash economy by the Europeans had profound consequences not only on land use patterns and

labour but on the notions of land and resources.⁶ Tonah (2002) and Fisiy (1995) have focused on how these colonial land policies led to the dispossession and alienation of indigenous populations and also intensified the struggle for control and access over land. The alienation of ever increasing portions of land for white settlers implied that large numbers of people were resettled onto more marginal land and sometimes eviction was done through force (Werner 1993: 144). To them, this raised the interests of clans and lineages to compete for access to land and it constituted the basis for conflicts. These acquisitions went hand in gloves with the introduction of land laws and ordinances which actually helped in the categorisation of land between the natives and the Europeans.⁷

Fisiy (1992) and Seller and Sellers (1999) attribute the emergence of conflicts on bias and other forms of discrimination that were enshrined in colonial land enactments and inherited by the post colony and which have continued to exclude certain categories of people.⁸ Sone (2012b) has focused particularly on the bias and discrimination against women in the customary tenure system and the 1974 Land Ordinances governing inheritance which favours mainly patriarchal system and do not guarantee women's access to land. Dafinger and Pelican (2008) on the other hand, shift the debate to a different direction and argue that the land law rather favours agriculturalist (including women) at the expense of herders who are often neglected because they are considered as strangers. I argue therefore that the land laws were bias in different respects against women and herders as their land rights have continued to be neglected and so could constitute one of the causes to the conflict.

1.3.3 Scarcity or Abundance of Natural Resources?

By looking at natural resource conflict I came across different views which show that scarcity and/or abundance can cause a conflict. The paradoxes of natural resource as a cause to conflict have become an issue for conflict scholars. Some articulate that conflicts are caused by

⁶ Also see Geschiere 1993; Konings 1996; Erkert and DeLancey 1988.

⁷ For more on this see Fisiy 1996:226-230; Ndege 2012pp19-25.

⁸ Due to the fact that the acquisition of a land title as provided in the 1974 Land Ordinances is very expensive, the poor who are usually women find it difficult to apply for title deeds. Consequently, only the rich-usually men can go for land registration. See Articles 11-15 of Land Ordinances of 6th July 1974 amended and supplemented by Decree No.2005/481 of 16th December 2005.

diminishing or scarcity of resources (Tonah 2002). To them, conflicts become evident when the resource base is threatened as a result of competition which in turn leads to over exploitation and degradation of resources. But increasingly, it has been argued by Frerks, Dietz, van der Zaag (2014: 15; De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005: 70) that scarcity of natural resources can be a cause to conflict just as abundance of resources can still result to conflict. Following this argument, most of the conflicts in the global South are attributed to what they refer to as the ‘abundance-of – resources thesis’ sometimes also known as the ‘resource curse’ concept.⁹ This is closely linked to the ‘greed argument’ where different parties may try to gain control over valuable resources for financial gains (Manson 2013). A good example is the Congo Democratic Republic where military insurgence is highly linked to the mineral mines in the Kivu Province and it is the same scenario in the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria (Ejobowah 2000). The proceeds may be used to finance the conflict that they are involved in, and in this way the conflict may perpetuate itself (Frerks et al 2014: 16; Beek 2011). Linked to the debate on resource driven conflict is the argument that the over exploitation of resources eventually leads to environmental degradation which also leads to the alteration of the ecosystem and brings about mutations in climate regimes (De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005). Kabiri (2001: 45) demonstrates how the upswing in farming activities in the Amboseli ecosystem of Kajiado Kenya have caused environmental deterioration and denudation of woodlands leading to competition over few water wells by farmers and pastoralists. Climate variability and droughts are known to have caused the mobility of herders and farmers from their initial spaces in search of fertile lands and pastures (Niamir-Fuller 2001; De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005), over long distances and in most cases these movements have always resulted to conflicts with sedentary populations (Tonah 2002). But it has been observed by Frerks et al (2014) that environmental issues do not lead to conflict until they are politicised of some sort. This is particularly true in instances where the inhabitants in the area do not seem to enjoy the benefits accruing from the exploitation of such resources. As Ejobowah (2000) has argued, one of the causes of the conflicts in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is the fact that there is no Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which benefits the inhabitants of the area.¹⁰ This premise

⁹ Resource curse is a concept that evolved from an economic interpretation connecting negative economic growth with natural resource wealth .Also see van Beek (2011).

¹⁰ Ken Sara wiwa is the Nigerian environmentalist who was executed in 1995 along side eight others who were campaigning for greater control over oil and gas resources on their land for economic development and autonomy

has been contested by Geschiere (2004) who argues that even in situations where there is corporate social responsibility, conflicts can still occur. Drawing his example from the 1994 forestry law in Cameroon which stipulates that 50% of logging taxes are supposed to remain with the local communities and municipalities, he contends that the allocation of such logging revenue in the community have instead triggered fierce struggles and intense fighting over belonging and exclusion. Put the other way round, usually people start debating on who ‘really’ belongs to the community and is qualified to benefit. Following Frerks et al (2014: 18), I argue that conflicts resulting from environmental issues are always embedded in political and socio-economic factors which are often exploited to arouse feelings of mutual distrust and hate. They may actually be the result of social deprivation, neglect, marginalisation and lack of proper environmental policies than of degradation and depletion (Manson 2013). Although it is reasonable to assume that a declining resource base is an important factor in land –use conflicts between herders and farmers, this fact does not reliably predict or explain these conflicts (Moritz 2006: 7). This is because there are areas in the Sahel with scarce resources and less intense farmer-herder conflicts and in Sub humid areas with a relative abundance of resources but many more conflicts (*ibid*). Moritz (2006: 4) also adds his voice by acknowledging that the environment is simply the arena in which social, political, and economic conflicts between different actors are played out. As has cautioned, there is the need to be careful when describing direct causal links between environmental scarcities, be it imagined or real, and farmer-herder conflicts.

1.3.4 Conflicts Resulting from the Politics of Belonging and Identity

Conflicts also originate from what is generally referred to as ‘identity politics’ or ‘politics of belonging’ (Mostert and Pellegrini 2014: 6; Geschiere 2005a, Konings 2008). Increasingly, there is abundant evidence that indentity politics has become the dominant discourse in farmer/grazer conflicts and used variously by the different groups for their interest. Politics of belonging is a situation where particular groups claim territories and natural resources as their own, to the exclusion of others (Mostert and Pellegrini 2014: 7). Geschiere (2005a, 2005b) stresses that the politics of belonging results from a growing desire to exclude ‘strangers’ (allogenes) from

over their affairs because it was alleged that the oil industry was causing environmental devastation and the community was gaining very little or nothing. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Saro-Wiwa accessed 30/7/2014.

economically resources rich areas. This, to him is often perpetuated by politicians who fear that they would be outvoted by more numerous immigrants who would in turn gain access to these resources or occupy political spaces considered to be the reserve of the host community. It is therefore a strategy to ensure that the economic and political resources are controlled by the 'autochthones' to the exclusion of the 'allogenes'. Taking the cue, Nkwi (2006) lays emphasis on the strategies often used by the autochthones to exclude strangers from these resources and they may include stigmatisation, stereotyping and provocation to outright confrontations.

Just as identity is constructed, (re) negotiated and (re) defined so to be discourse. According to Atanga (2010: 27) and De Wit (2011: 38), discourse is simply different ways of representing aspects of the world, and the way we view the world and talk about it.¹¹ As Boye et al (2011: 102) note, discourse about land claims is usually 'constructed' to convey messages that others would 'find persuasive as grounds for the claim asserted' For example, the (re)presentation of Fulani herder/farmer in a dichotomous manner simply reflects the way we would want to see and talk about the conflict.

The different theoretical approaches analysed above are very useful for the case study of Wum because they give more insights and impetus to understand clearly the basis on which these conflicts emanate. Looking at the different approaches, it is clear that the conflicts in Wum are linked to scarcity and diminishing resources and a weak land law that have ignited the politics of belonging through which contending groups hope to have access to these scarce resources to the exclusion of others. It is within the context of this scarcity, outdated land law and identity politics that the conflicts in Wum should be understood.

1.4 Overview of the various Chapters

The book is organised in nine chapters. Chapter one presents the setting, research problem/objectives and the main theoretical assumptions. Chapter two on the other hand presents the geographical location and the ethnographic information of the groups that make up the study

¹¹ For more on discourse see, Frerks 2007pp 45&De Wit 2011pp39 who see discourse as not merely a speech or a text but a system of representation that gives meaning to things. In the same light, Nyamnjoh (2013: 109) considers discourse as 'a game of perception, power, and strategic positioning, in which what is real is not what is but what we define and impose as real'

area, Chapter three presents the tenure system from a historical perspective and the different perceptions of land by the various actors or stakeholders in the area. The chapter also focuses on the various agents that have contributed towards changes in land use patterns. Chapter four examines the power hierarchies and social exchanges and the different ways through which land is acquired and how alliances and loyalty are switched from one patron to another, thereby leading to mistrust and class animosity.

Chapter five is focused on land governance by examining the loopholes of the 1974 law arguing that the law does not guarantee land rights of vulnerable groups such as women and the Fulani groups who are actually the ones who depend on land for their livelihood survival. I contend that the law lends credence to patriarchal as against matrilineal succession; the latter being the system which in the past ensured women's access to land. In addition, the law favours the rich and political elites who have the power and financial leverage to acquire title deeds.

Chapter six, documents the history of migration of the Fulani and the various strategies and policies that were put in place by the British colonialists to integrate them in the area. By limiting Fulani access only to grazing land rights, the British administration, for instance, *legitimised* the hierarchy between 'hosts' and 'strangers' as customary, and used it as the basis for land distribution within the rural communities, creating the conditions to keep strangers permanently in the position of minors (Bellagamba 2004: 384). This has been the basis and the genesis of identity politics in the area till today.

In chapter seven, I analyse the different forms in which these conflicts manifest and also examine the role that key actors play in them. Chapter eight examines the phenomenon of huge land acquisitions currently being masterminded by the rich domestic elites for the establishment of agro-businesses and for other services. Their economic interests in land deals have further compounded the conflicts as they use the political positions and financial powers to evict rural women from their ancestral lands. Chapter nine presents the concluding reflections from the study.

Chapter Two: The Geographical and Ethnographic Context of Wum Central Sub-division

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and presents an overview of the geography and ethnography of Wum Central Sub division where the research was conducted within the republic of Cameroon. It focuses on the location (land), the peoples, and the social and political organisation of the area. An attempt has also been made to present the history of migration and origins of the different ethnic groups that constitute the main focus of this study. The methodology used in the realisation of this research has also been presented.

2.1.1 Situating the Site of the Research

The research was conducted in Wum Central Sub-division, one of the administrative units of the republic of Cameroon. The republic of Cameroon is situated within the Central African region with a surface area of 475,000km² and a population size of over 20 million inhabitants (IMF 2012). Although the population density is 4.2 per/km,² the actual distribution is uneven as over 52.7% of the population lives in urban centres (UNDP: 2012).The republic of Cameroon has international boundaries with the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the west, the republics of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Congo to the South, the Central African Republic to the East and the Republic of Chad to the North. Cameroon's diverse natural resource base shapes the agricultural, forestry, fishing, oil and gas sectors on which the economy depends (FAO 2012 : 3). Before oil production started in the 1970s, Cameroon's agriculture accounted for 30% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), representing 80% of total exports (Wouonepo1992: 7). Much of the land is still unexploited as only 1.2 million hectares of the 5.9 million hectares of arable land is currently cultivated (*op cit*).



Figure 1 Map of Cameroon within the Central African Sub region¹

Wum is found in Menchum which is one of the seven divisions that make up the Northwest region² of the republic of Cameroon. It lies between latitudes $5^{\circ}40'$ and 7° to the north of the equator and between longitudes $9^{\circ}45'$ and $11^{\circ}10'$ to the East of the Meridian. Menchum is located on latitudes $6^{\circ}30'00N$ and longitudes $10^{\circ}1000E$. The division is bounded to the northwest by the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to the southwest by Manyu and Momo divisions, to the southeast by Mezam, Boyo and to the northeast by Donga Mantung. Kaberry (1952: 3), present day Aghem

¹ Source <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/cameroon-political-map.htm> accessed 26/07/2013

² Also known as the Bamenda Grassfields because of its unique savannah ecology

was formerly one of the 23 Native Authorities that made up the Bamenda Province,³ and was subsequently split into four divisions (Nkwi 2011: 4).

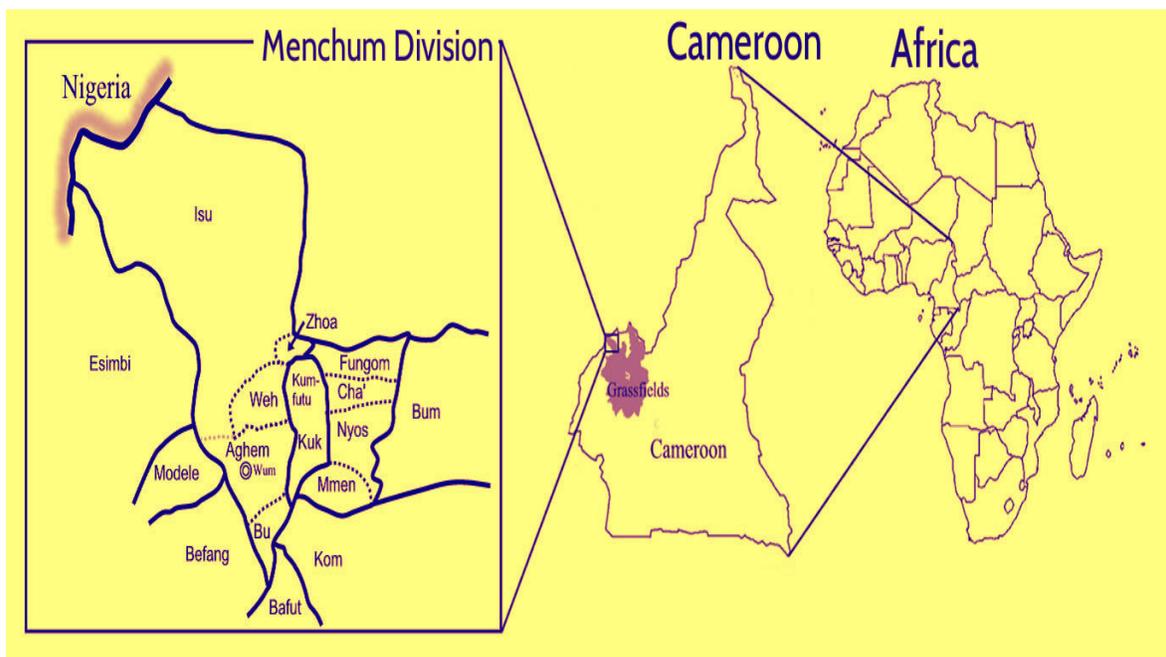


Figure 2: Map showing (Aghem and Bu) Sites for Research⁴

The area is a sub-humid medium altitude zone with 1400mm -1700mm of rainfall per year (Ndenecho 2010a: 57), and falls under the savannah ecological zone which is largely dominated by grass, shrubs and patches of gallery forests. The dominant geographical features of the division are undulating hills and valleys which are favourable for farming and cattle rearing. The division is well drained by River Mezam that flows west to join River Momo. These two rivers form a confluence at lower Bafut and then give rise to River Menchum. The Donga, Katsina and Menchum rivers flow west to join River Benue in Nigeria (Nkwi 1998: 26). Menchum Valley is rich in alluvial deposits that help to enrich the soil especially when the river over flows its banks during the rainy season. The valley and river banks are suitable for rice cultivation, market gardening and also serve as water sheds and water points for cattle.

³ Kaberry, P 'Intelligence Report on Wum and Nsaw in the Bamenda Province 1948' National Archives Buea (hence NAB) No.Ad22

⁴ Source: <http://www.focodev.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/wum-map-color.jpg> accessed 4/8/2014.



Figure 3 Partial view of the Menchum Valley: one of the hotspots for conflicts between farmers and Fulani cattle herders.

Source (Author, 2013)

A lot of importance is also attached to fishing and the production of cash crops especially Arabica coffee and rice (Nkwi 1998: 27). There are two main seasons; the dry season which begins in late October and ends in March while the rainy season takes over from March to the end of September. The highest rainfall of 65 inches is recorded between July and August. The mean annual temperature is between 17.6°C and 30.5°C , while the total annual rainfall per year is about 2,043.7mm (Anjah 2009: 1059). It should however be noted that temperatures rise during the day especially in the dry season and drop at night. The lowest temperatures are however recorded during the rainy season when temperatures fall drastically.

2.2 The Peopling of Wum Central Sub-division

This research was conducted in Wum Central which incidentally is also the divisional capital for Menchum and is situated about 77 Km to the north of the regional capital of Bamenda (Anjah 2009: 1058). Until recently, it took almost the whole day to travel from Bamenda to Wum because of bad road but by the year 2005, most parts of the road from Bamenda to Wum have

been paved thereby reducing the time spent on the road by vehicles travelling to and from Wum. As a divisional headquarters, Wum has witnessed a steady growth especially with the establishment of missionary and government institutions which have led to an influx of people from other parts of Cameroon and beyond.

2.2.1 The Aghem Federation

The Aghem⁵ are a people of the north-western Bamenda Grassfields and by the turn of the 21st century the population was estimated at 6,000 inhabitants (Kopytoff 1981: 371). In 1953, the population of Aghem rose to 9,710⁶ but today it has increased to 67,878 inhabitants'.⁷ With a surface area of 776Km² the population density has increased from 12.5pers /Km² to 88pers/Km². Aghem differs substantially from the other chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields by being a federation of adjacent settlements each with its own tradition of origin (Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 94). They tend to build their dwelling places in close crammed places, but in the past few decades the villages have grown together into a single 'town' of several quarters (NAB/N0.Ad/22), while their farm lands are kilometres away. The Aghem people who are now settled in this lush hilly savannah zone are said to have migrated from Sindong, an area around the Tiv region in Nigeria.⁸ A different source by Kopytoff (1981: 371) points to 'Munshi' as the place of Aghem origin but still from the Benue State of the Middle Belt of Nigeria.⁹ The different trajectories of Munshi and Sindong origin raise a lot of doubts as to whether they are referring to the same or different places and secondly, the Aghem do not show any traits of Tiv customs. The differences between the Aghem and Tiv are more visible as the former appear to be physically tall and huge as compared to the dwarf type of people in the Tiv region.¹⁰ In addition, succession in Aghem is matrilineal while that in (Tiv) Benue is patriarchal. It is likely therefore that for the

⁵ The name 'Wum' is a German rendition of the Kom pronunciation of 'Aghem'. Wum is sometimes used in this literature to refer to the Aghem people. For the purpose of consistency, and also to differentiate, Wum as an administrative unit and people of the area, we prefer to use Aghem when referring to the ethnic group.

⁶ Chilver and Kaberry 1967, pp34

⁷ See *Annexes Wum Council Development Plan 2011* Elaborated with the support of the National Driven Development Program (PNDN).

⁸ They are therefore believed to belong to the Munchi ancestry of Benue State in Nigeria but other schools of thought hold that they originated from the Upper Mbam River area round Rifum and Ndobo of the Tikari ethnic group See *a collection of ethnography notes*, Bamenda archives NW/Aa/1983/1 and also see Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 34 on a comprehensive account on the Aghem Migration and their neighbours.

⁹ Also see RAB No NW/Ac.1960/1/BK.

¹⁰ RAB/Nw/Aa 1983/1 'a collection of ethnography notes: to all Aghem people.

Aghem ‘Munshi’ refers but to a region and not to the people (Kopytoff 1981: 371) and should therefore be taken as mere speculation.

2.2.2 Aghem as ‘First Comers’

According to oral history, the Aghem migrated under the leadership of *Nlom Nnam* regarded as an abled and brave person. The reasons for this migration were attributed to the fact that the ‘Munshi’ considered the Aghem as slaves but most importantly, the Aghem left the place in search of a more peaceful and free land for themselves.¹¹ A different account by Kopytoff (1981) indicates that it was because of chieftaincy rivalries and wars that forced the Aghem to migrate. While Zinchem¹² holds that the Aghem moved together to their present site, Nkwi (1998: 32) however notes that they migrated in waves until they became reunited at the present site defeating the early *U’bwa* settlers and sending some of them to Isu and integrating others in their group. Zongakwo claims to be the first-comer among the present occupiers of Aghem has also been disputed by Tseregha which has a *Batum*-list of 8 and alleged to derive from Isu.¹³

The different trajectories in the history of migration notwithstanding, the Aghem finally settled at their present site. Because the founder of the Zongakwo lineage-*Akwo* soon found out that the family was too big for him alone, he then appointed 4 assistants.¹⁴ Each of the assistants constituted a lineage head but regarded the *Batum* of Zongakwo as the spiritual leader. The several village-heads then came together and formed a federation under the ritual leadership of one of them, the chief of Zongakwo (Kopytoff 1981: 371). When the federation was being formed, and there were six Aghem villages: Kesu, ChereGha, Zongafeu, WaeNdu Waana-Ngwən, and Zongakwo (Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 94). During this period also, the Aghem villages with the exception of Waana-Ngwən developed strong authoritarian chieftaincies (Kopytoff 1981: 372) and the latter was often considered by the Aghem as a foreign lineage (NAB/N0.Ad/22). The Aghem federation extended its influence over the small Beba and Befang villages and the Esimbi

¹¹ See RAB NW/Aa 1983/1.

¹² Zinchem, T is a traditional Notable of the Aghem and also author of ‘ a collection of ethnography notes: to all Aghem people in RAB NW/Aa 1983/1.

¹³ RAB No NW/Ac.1960/1/Bk Also see Chilver and Kaberry 1967,pp.34.

¹⁴ According to the Aghem, Akwo was just a town crier whose duty was to alert the Aghem people when there was need for a meeting or danger. Because he performed his duty so well, the village was named after him-Hence Zongakwo and he became the first Paramount leader of the Aghem see RAB NW/Aa 1983/1.

settlements of the Menchum valley.¹⁵ A significant aspect of Aghem political history was their imposition of the oil-tribute on neighbouring peoples of the forest (Nkwi1998: 32; RAB NW/Ac.1960/1/BK).

2.2.3 Aghem Social and Political Organisation

As we noted earlier, the Aghem federation is made up of six semi autonomous section lineages. Each section of Aghem, under a hereditary *Batum*, the majority of whom follow matrilineal succession, is divided into wards (*akon*) under a ward head *tshokon* appointed by the *Batum*, who acts as ward representative at meetings summoned by the *Batum* for the settlement of disputes, and as his adviser.¹⁶ Each ward is divided into compounds, under hereditary heads, many of whom do not belong to the clan of the ward head or *Batum* (Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 95). Men on marriage frequently reside near their fathers and come under the jurisdiction of his *Batum*. Each *Batum* enjoys some autonomy in the affairs of its section but cooperate with the *Batum* of Zongakwo for ritual, military and judicial purposes (*ibid*). *Batums* are chosen by the members of their lineages, including the *Natum* or queen-mother of his predecessor.¹⁷ The main lodge for crop medicine is the *Ndukenyɛ* presided over by the son of the *Batum* of Zongakwo. 'Its function is to protect and promote the growth of corn by the preparation and distribution of medicines on farms and road junctions during the period of growth and sacrificing in the lodge and on the graves of the *Batum*'s ancestors for a good harvest'(Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 95). It is therefore a hierarchical social structure with the *Batums* at the head and supported by traditional councils made up of quarter heads with women playing a more passive role in village governance.

2.3 The Chiefdom of Bu

The chiefdom of Bu is located some 8.2Km to the east of Wum town and was formally under the protection of Wum until it gained recognition as an independent chiefdom following a petition addressed to the colonial government in 1949.¹⁸ In their petition, the Bu highlighted the fact that

¹⁵ RAB No NW/Ac.1960/1/Bk.

¹⁶ Masquelier (1985).

¹⁷ Fon Mbambi interviewed 12/12/2013 Aghem Palace

¹⁸ See 'Bu Quarter head petition by and others of Bu village Bamenda Division' Addressed to the Chief Commissioner, Eastern Province, Enugu Nigeria on 22nd March 1949 in NAB No.1b/1949/2.

they are a distinct people with different ancestral origin and different history of migration from that of the Aghem. Secondly, the Bu argued in their petition that they were different because Aghem never conquered them in warfare and they have never paid tribute to Aghem in any animal skin as other sub villages did to acknowledge the supremacy of Aghem over them.¹⁹ It should however be noted that under British rule, Bu was part of the Wum Native Authority where the Chief of Aghem was President and had enormous influence and powers. It is likely as a result of this that Aghem continued to dominate the local politics.²⁰

The Bu are said to have migrated from *Ndewum* in the 18th century and the migration was caused by harsh climatic conditions until they finally settled at their present site at Bu. Initially the Bu people constituted part of the Laimbwe people until they split into different polities of Bu, Mbengkas and Baisso as a result of internal rivalry among lineages and the leaders. Generally, the process of migration of the Bu people took them to different settlement sites (Kah 2012: 87). In 1979 the population of Bu was 6,944 with a work force of 2,701. The population is sparsely distributed and nuclear settlement patterns are found along the main road leading into the village.

Majority of the people are farmers and live on the slopes of the hills while farming is carried out mainly in the valleys. They are also engaged in related activities like hunting, pig and goat rearing, lumbering and fishing (Kah 2013: 59). Livestock serves as food for the home, used for entertainment, a source of income, provides the nutrition needs of rural families, provides manure for the soil, is raw material and also provides social and cultural identity to the population. Livestock is also used for sacrifices, payment of fines, to solicit the services of traditional healers, used during funerals, weddings, thanksgiving and Christmas (*ibid*: 57). The system of succession in Bu is also matrilineal. Most of the hills are used for cattle grazing by the Fulani who entered the area *ca* 1940. There is a government health centre, a government secondary school, a Primary school, and churches belonging to the Presbyterian, Catholic and Baptist Missions. The dominant transport means in Bu is the Motor bicycle commonly referred to as *Benskin*. Motor vehicles go to Bu only once a week –on Fridays which is the day for the

¹⁹ Esimbi-Beba-Befang villages paid oil tributes to Aghem see Masquelier 1985; Chilver and Kaberry 1967pp94

²⁰ NAB, No. Ad/22 'Intelligence Report on Wum and Nsaw in the Bamenda Province by Phyllis Kaberry Lady Anthropologist 1948'

local market. However, most of the indigenes of Bu cover the 8.2Km to and from the town of Wum by trekking.

2.4 Matrilineal Succession as the Foundation of the Aghem and Bu Chiefdoms

The history of origins of the Aghem and Bu are based on a matrilineal genealogy with account of a woman who came to Aghem from some nearby place such as Kom, Kuk, Bum, Mme (Bafmen) Weh, Isu (Kopytoff 1981: 372; Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 94) and this is contradictory to an earlier version mentioned above claiming that Nlom Nnam and Akwo were the founders of the Aghem dynasty. Despite these inconsistencies and contradictions, women seem to play a vital role in the history of origin of the Aghem as they were incorporated into the Aghem society either as wives, 'slaves' or captives from the surrounding area and till today women have continued to serve as founders of new lineages (Kopytoff 1981: 372). The Aghem myth of origin with a woman at the centre seems to be generally accepted since the various ethnic groups in Aghem practice matrilineal system of succession. There is however the exception of the succession to the stool of the chief of Zongakwo which is patriarchal (Nkwi 1974: 288). Here again, it raises a lot of ethnographic issues because succession to the different household heads in Zongakwo is matrilineal and the reason why only the chieftaincy switched to patriarchy remains uncertain.

In a matrilineal succession, in principle, a sister's son will succeed to the social position and inherit the property of the mother's brother (Vabo 2005). When a man in a family gets married and has acquired property and investments, if he dies, the son of the sister is the one to inherit the property and not his own son or the son of his sister. If there is no sister they must trace a successor from the family line. In a case where there are many sisters, one of them will provide the successor.²¹ Writing on gender matrilineal succession in the Laimbwe history, Kah (2012: 116) opines that:

One of the pillars of matrilineal system is male and female inheritance as this system is based on uterine relationship where people born of the same womb derive privileges and rights through a woman. The woman's children therefore inherit her brother's or mother's property. The sisters and daughters on the other hand inherit the property of their late sister or mother.

²¹ Cheng interviewed 20/10/2013. In Kom the rules of succession are clear and based on seniority: the eldest son of the eldest sister inherits the uncle's social position and property for more on this, see Nkwi (1974) .

Different schools of thought explain the practice of this system in Aghem and Bu but the one that holds currency is the fact that in these two communities, oral history points to women as the first ancestors (Kopytoff 1981: 372). Secondly, female influence is reinforced by the belief among the people that men and women came into the world through the woman's womb (Kah 2012), what Kaberry (1952: 17) refers to as the 'buttocks of the house'. The focus is on the buttocks of the woman because she is at the centre of procreation and 'all people come out from there' (*ibid*). However, the practice of matrilineal system presupposes that it is the woman who knows the true father of the child and so keeping family blood and property through the female protects the family lineage.²² Vubo (2005: 157) also argues that women are central to kinship continuity and growth because they constitute the key elements in the definition of clan identity. Kinship relations therefore operate not only towards preserving the memory of a people but also the estate and the continuity of identity. At the centre of these operations is the circulation and protection of persons and property. 'In a form of asymmetrical reciprocity, persons succeed to the positions of and inherit the property of their mother's brothers as their own positions and property are taken over by their own sister's sons' (*ibid*).

According to Kaberry (1952: 8), all the sections of the Aghem federation were originally matrilineal but following a quarrel with a sister's son, the Batum of Zongakwo decided to change the system of inheritance to patrilineal. This assertion is supported by oral tradition which holds that under the reign of Nunyom (about 1880AD), the apparent heir (nephew) of the chief refused to render him services when he was critically sick and the chief got angry and decided that his son and not the nephew shall succeed after him.²³

During the reigns of Akwo, Acham, and Nunyom, matrilineal heritage changed hands with patrilineal heritage. It happened that when Nunyom was getting weaker and weaker in his sick bed, his nephews refused rendering him certain services. These particular nephews, whose names couldn't be recalled, refused running to Weh for a dog which was going to be used in treating the sick Dengkeghem. Because of this disobedience, the sick Dengkeghem sent his son

²² In an interview with Fon Mbambi, he notes that the reason why the Aghem preferred Matrilineal succession was the fact that one's sister or niece is the 'pure blood' of the matriclan which needs to be preserved and this is different from a wife who is usually from a different lineage and in some cases could even be a slave that was incorporated into the Aghem society.

²³ Interview with Fon Mbambi the present chief of the Zongakwo lineage .

Mih who joyfully effected the mission. On dying, Nunyom called his councillors and informed them that at his death, his son was to take over from him instead of his nephews who grossly refused acting according to his orders (RAB/NW/Aa 1983/1)

While the reason for the change in the roles of succession in Aghem chieftaincy to patriarchy is blamed on a nephew who disobeyed his uncle, in Bu, succession instead switched to matrilineal because a man's biological son refused to assist the father and so he decided to will his property to his sister's son (Kah 2012: 90). The common denominator in the succession question in Aghem and Bu is disobedience. This binary opposition of a son and nephew raises series of unanswered questions and (dis)obedience cannot be the only sufficient criteria and condition for the selection of a successor in these chiefdoms. More importantly, sons have continued to disobey their fathers and nephews their uncles till today, and this cast a lot of doubts on the validity and authenticity of oral history because since then; succession to the throne of Zongakwo has remained patriarchal and in Bu matrilineal. This however poses yet another serious problem of historiography in explaining how a group claiming a common origin with patriarchal groups such as the Tiv should possess matrilineal institutions (Nkwi 1985: 182). In the pre-colonial days and even during the colonial period, the lineage was an important economic unit for its members and constituted a big labour force. In the matrilineal system, it was the nephews and nieces who assisted their uncles in varied ways and it was the duties of the uncles to also take care of the sisters' sons. The lineage was a corporate body that ensured the interest of the unit. Throughout this period, Aghem villages have grown in size, absorbing additional population from the culturally and linguistically related Fungom and Kom areas, as well as from the more alien forest peoples.

2.5 The Fulani Cattle Herdsmen

Another important group which is found in the sub division are the Fulani who under the leadership of their late chief (Ardo Umaru) migrated from Jos, Nigeria and settled in Aghem for several decades now.²⁴ While their leader was permanently settled at a location fenced with barb wire on the outskirts of Wum, many of his subjects and later day migrants were usually nomadic. Today most of them have built permanent houses mostly on the hills and reside in fixed localities and identify themselves as indigenes of the same area with other crop cultivators. There are

²⁴ See 'Petition by Fulani residing in Bamenda Province 1933 –Bamenda Archives file No NW/Qf/G.1933/1.

many people in Wum and elsewhere in Cameroon that still have that ‘nomadic’ appraisal of the Fulani engrained in their thinking. To such people, the *Fulani* are ‘outsiders’ that will one day go. The reality is that they have become an integral part of the communities where they reside and the probabilities that more will migrate into the communities are higher than the prospect of any leaving (Vabi n. d: 12).

There are about 16.000 Fulani residing in Menchum and the division is the second highest producer of cattle in the northwest region with over 200.000 cattle.²⁵ The Fulani in Menchum are predominantly grazers and Muslims although due to diminishing size of cattle some are now engaged in other economic activities such as farming, driving, trading amongst others (Dze-Ngwa 2013: 18; Nyamnjoh 2013a: 119). As Tonah (2002: 43) documents in Northern Ghana, the Fulani are generally attracted to areas that are more favourable to cattle herding: pasture more readily available; rainfall is reliable and consequently crop yields are better. Wum seems to have provided all these conditions as the low population density and the initial hospitality of the host population attracted them to settle in the area. As Njeuma and Awasom (1988: 1) note, ‘less than twenty years after its introduction, pastoralism has made significant inroads into the economic mainstay of the Bamenda Grassfields’. Wum Central Subdivision has therefore become a cosmopolitan area with people from different ethnic groups co-existing with the Aghem indigenes. Because of the nuances and different nomenclatures that are used when reference is being made about this group, I have adopted one of the names. To put it clearly, I have decided to use ‘Fulani’ in this research as a generic name to encompass and refer to all the nomadic pastoralists in Cameroon and who have acquired permanent abodes including the Aku group.

2.6 Methodology of Data Collection

The six months field research started effectively in July 2013 after a reconnaissance visit to the area where I met the chiefs of the various villages and also acquainted myself with the area, and created the necessary social net works. To achieve these objectives, primary and secondary sources were used to collect the data. In the former, impromptu conversations, interviews, focus group discussions, observations became very relevant. Contrary to ‘hard core’ methods often used

²⁵ See ‘Annual report of the Divisional Delegation of Livestock and Fisheries for Menchum (MINEPIA)2009

by anthropologists, impromptu discussions became a very useful method to gather information which otherwise would not be possible using 'traditional' methods. That is why note taking became an important tool in the data collection process and through this the problem of missing links from group discussions and interviews were closed up.

Five focus group discussions involving members of the various communities were organised.²⁶ At each meeting, the purpose of the research was made known to members and this was followed by a lead question in which the data came from dialogue and general discussions among participants. The discussions were tape recorded and salient issues raised were noted and as the main facilitator, I made appropriate interjections and probes which helped to sustain the discussion on a particular question. This method was useful because I discovered the range of views and attitudes present within the various communities and offered an opportunity to observe the processes by which people interact, and hence I could made inferences as well. Because of the sensitivity of the issue I did not mix farmers and grazers as they could be inhibited in what they would have said (Bernard 2006: 215-288; Jankowicz 1995: 172). Data collected from these discussions have helped in the verification and corroboration of facts gathered through interviews thereby enhancing the quality of the data.

Structured interviews were also used to gather data from key persons.²⁷ Initially an interview guide was designed but as the research progressed; it became clear that I could not follow the questions strictly. This was partly so because respondents were of different social strata and play different key roles in land deals. Consequently, the questions and issues raised during interviews were not necessarily the same to all the respondents, though were in context. For the purposes of reliability and to achieve the objective of this research, mostly persons between the ages of 45 years and above were chosen (both men and women) through *snow balling* techniques. It was hoped that this age category knows the land tenure system, and have good knowledge of the ethnographic and historical accounts of the communities than the youthful population. More so, they are users of the land and understand land deals in the study area. The sample population was

²⁶ Two focus group discussions were organised for women (one in Aghem and another in Bu). In the same manner, I organised a focus group with men in Aghem and also one with men in Bu. The last group was organised with Fulani cattle herders.

²⁷ For instance key persons include, chiefs, state officials, women leaders, prominent farmers and herders.

made up of the administrative, traditional, and selected members from the different ethnic groups including Fulani pastoralists and farmers. This sample population was relevant because it constitutes the power hierarchy in the area and is directly linked to land issues either as users or controllers and managers. The final research is based on information that was collected at different levels.

Primary sources included the collection of research material from the National Archives in Buea (NAB) and the Regional Archives in Bamenda (RAB) and this was basically data dealing with ethnographic accounts on the history of origins, customary tenure, migration and settlement in the area and previous conflicts. The use of Archives in this research was very useful because they provided first hand historical accounts which are very reliable and authentic. It is on the basis of such data that I have been able to identify the various ethnic groups, the histories of origin which also constitute the *raison d'être* for land claims and power relations in the area. This was also useful for both theoretical and empirical analysis of the data to be collected.

Another method that I used was *observation* and both participant and non participant approaches were adopted and this enabled me to engage and participate in community activities as the opportunity arose. Here, I observed on a daily and routine basis (for at least one month) the various aspects of social life and participated at cultural events.²⁸ I participated and also observed the electoral campaigns during the Municipal and Parliamentary elections of 30th September 2013 which added impetus on the local social dynamics and how patronage is being used to mobilise resources and political support.

The main language used for the collection of data was English, however, 'Pidgin' which is a lingua franca and spoken by many people in the research area was also used especially during focus group discussions. Ali and Mohamadou, my research assistants contributed immensely towards the organisation, mobilisation of both material and human resources during this research endeavour. All interviews and focus group discussions from the field work have been audio recorded and transcribed; and the analysis are based on the data collected.

²⁸ For instance, I participated at the Funeral of chief Eboa, of Zongafu and was able to observe some of the cultural manifestations which enhanced the data on the social organisation of the Aghem.

Chapter Three: Changing Land Tenure and Shifting Patterns of land Use in Wum Central

3.1 Introduction

The growing hostilities and skirmishes between women cultivators and Fulani cattle herders in Aghem have been attributed partly to changes that have occurred in land tenure arrangements thereby compromising access to land for rural farmers and other land users (Sone 2012b). These changes have not only influenced people's perceptions about land but also brought about alterations and shifts in land use patterns. This chapter therefore makes an introspective analysis of the factors or agents that have contributed to these changes from the pre-colonial era till today. Like it is with the growth of other urban centres in Cameroon, Wum Central Sub-division is currently undergoing a dynamic and distinctive transformation within the framework of land possession and attitudes towards it. The main question that this chapter seeks to answer is: what are the major changes and how have they influenced land use patterns and perceptions about land? One of the areas largely affected is the customary tenure system which hitherto existed in Aghem and Bu and I pay special attention on women's rights and access to land. Another factor has been the influx of Fulani and cattle in the early part of the 20th century. Other factors that have also brought about profound changes and affected women's access to land include; colonial land laws; the introduction of cash crops which changed the value of land, government environmental and land policies and agricultural innovations. I argue that the manner in which most of these policies were made and implemented have contributed in different ways to the persistent land conflicts in Wum.

I consider this chapter to be very important in this study because it serves as the gate way and provides a snap shot from which the entire research can be mirrored. Secondly, it is the node around which the other themes of the research have been formulated. Thirdly, it constitutes the basis from which I can interpret the multiple and competing images that make up the Wum Central Sub-division past and its history. From a historical perspective, I start by examining the customary land tenure and the traditional agricultural economy that existed in the area during the pre-colonial era substantiating with examples from other areas in Cameroon and beyond.

3.2 Overview of Customary Land Tenure and the Traditional Agricultural Economy

In the pre-colonial era, access to land in Aghem and Bu was acquired through customary tenure. By customary land tenure system, I mean processes and rules of land appropriation and expropriation that are based on customs and traditions of the indigenous¹ community considered to have been handed down from one generation to another because of their ancestral links to the land. This is however different from statutory (state) land law which refers to the legal provisions that Cameroon inherited from the colonialists at the dawn of independence and which are being enforced till today (see chapter 5). Land has different meanings to the different communities and I try to find out from the Aghem and Bu communities what land actually means to them. According to chief of Aghem:

The land is actually for the community and we acquired it in those days when we fought for the land from the Beba after migrating from Nigeria-from the Munchi tribe because of leadership crisis. Till today people still fight over leadership. We by-passed the Beba people and came to where we are now. Land was (and still is) a communal property and that is why we have settled in one place and then go out to cultivate crops on communal land far away from the settlements. We have common customs and traditions. We do everything in common. Land is actually divided according to the lineages, Waindo have their land, Kesu has its own land and we also have our own land in Zongekwo where I am the leader.²

Following the above narrative by Fon Mbambi, Larsen (2007: 79) sees customary land as being defined by particular communities who generally link rights with residence and perceptions of origin. This means that land and water rights are ascribed with reference to ancestral origin and that only persons associated with a particular origin-based identity may, in principle, live and use the land and water resources within a defined area. Customary claims have usually been based on first settlement and clearance of bush land, converting it into farmland and establishing some kind of covenant with the spirits of the area through regular offerings and sacrifices (Toulmin 2007: 96;Lund 2008: 49). As the chief of the village narrates, it is also land that the people acquired

¹ The term indigenous should be taken to simply mean indigenes and not the definition adopted by the UN in 2007 on the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People .Considered as tribal people in independent countries with social, cultural and economic conditions whose statuses are belated wholly or partially by their own customs or by special laws or regulations or who are seen as different and then marginalized.

² Chief Mbambi is the Traditional Ruler of the Aghem (Wum) ethnic group interviewed 12/12/2013.

through some sort of warfare and conquest before settling on the piece of land. Following this logic, rights in land are frequently intimately associated with rights in people.

According to the Aghem and Bu traditions, land was owned by the community but held in trust by the chiefs. In Aghem, the land was actually divided according to the sub-clans and each *Batum* controlled unused arable land and granted it to residence in his clan (Kaberry 2004: 52). Since arable land was the basis of a farmer's livelihood, the distribution of land was extremely important. In Bu, the responsibility to undertake the task to distribute the land rests with the chief (*Fuai*) but in consultation with his quarter heads while in Aghem it is the *Batum* of each section as earlier indicated. The central role of the *Batums* in the distribution and control of land reflects the power relations which emerge from the structure of land tenure regulations (Goheen 1996: 108). Communal land control and management during the pre-colonial era has been summarised by Mbapndah (1994: 47) as follows:

In the Grassfields, chiefs were the custodians of land in their respective chiefdoms and enjoyed the privilege of exercising proprietary rights to land. In principle, all land was controlled by the chief. He was the only one who could give out land, and it was usually attributed to family heads.

Though women did not own the land, they had usufruct rights over the land they cultivated. The right to a plot was acquired through cultivation. Such a plot could be handed over to one's successors (Goheen 1988: 93). The same principle applied for plots designated for dwellings (Buchalik 2013: 208). A similar study among the Ide of Menchum by (Masquelier 1985: 111) reveals that in the economic sphere, for example, a woman retained full control over the products of her labour, which were mostly food crops. She stored them in her own house where she and her children dwelled (Kaberry 1952: 94). In order to gain access to farm land a woman did not need to be attached to a husband; as resident in a village, she enjoyed the privilege of using communal land, and she could always exercise the rights to farm plots (Masquelier 1985: 111) and the demarcation of boundaries was left to the women cultivators, usually under the supervision of his *Natum* or titular mother and not the *Batum* (Kah 2009; Kaberry 2004: 44-52). In sum, the land belonged to the community, but the proceeds accruing from the field was owned by the cultivators and in the case of fruit trees the men. In Aghem, all the Section heads with the

exception of two that are of foreign extraction have a monopoly of raffia (Kaberry 2004: 52). The following excerpt reinforces this notion of communality and the custodianship of the land by the chiefs which is still held by the Aghem and Bu chiefdoms today.

The chief is the controller of the land and when you want a piece of land to build, you consult him and he will send a commission to demarcate an area for you. When you want a piece of land you see the Quarter head after you have identified an area that you like. When the council gets there they measure the land and put it in the council ledger. Actually nothing is paid for the land and there are no given dimensions. The council must measure the land in order to make sure that they know how much land has been given to you so that you should not claim all the land. The quarter has a small commission and it is made up of the representatives of all the families in that quarter. To show gratitude for the gesture, you are expected to give at least a bottle of beer to the Quarter head. You will also prepare 20litres of *Sha* for the members of commission (Kpwa Kennedy Interviewed 12/10/2013).

From the foregoing, the day-to-day management of the land was entrusted into the hands of the quarter councils under the headship of the village chief. Land was therefore seen not just as a resource for the cultivation of crops but also as a natural gift and asset created by God and put at the disposal of the community.³ In short, it is still considered as something given by God to the people to use, keep and pass it onto future generations.⁴ Land comprised not only of the soil but all that which is found in the biosphere (water, forest, animals, etc). Among the Aghem and the Bu chiefdoms, land is still considered as a source for the spiritual identity and belonging. That is why the chiefs intercede with their ancestors through ritual practices at the shrines of the chiefdom in order that the ancestors can ensure fertility, abundance of food and good health for the members of the community. The issue of land as it concerns the indigenous people is that the land is being regarded as ancestral land,⁵ it is not just land they occupied recently but land where the ancestors had settled definitely before the Europeans arrived for the purpose of colonisation (Socpa 2010: 556). Each person therefore needs only an ancestral land; the place where he would like to 'rest' at the end of his earthly life, where he would like to join with his/her ancestors (*ibid*).

³ Cheng interviewed 20/10/2013.

⁴ Walo Richard Interviewed 12/ 10/2013.

⁵ Interview with Lawyer Nsoh Robert 23/11/2013 (Morning Safari 2013).

Aghem and Bu people also attach a lot of importance to the forest because that is where the village shrines and groves are located. The presence of these shrines, what Postel (2013: 247) refers to as 'land shrines' reaffirms the security of the people and their land rights. That is, the availability of the village shrines and the performance of annual rituals at burial sites have therefore become a legitimate way of reinforcing their collective history, landscape memories and claims to their land rights. By implication, the graves of ancestors have become simple monuments offering an alternative for official writing and legal land rights. At their graves the ancestors are honoured and they are people who had once conquered and developed the land that is now inhabited. They represent the continuity of human life and offer, just as in earlier days, a home and a past, i.e. a territory in both space and time. The authority of the Aghem over the land is also ingrained in the four pillars erected in front of the palace of the *Denkeghem* of Zongakwo where the oath of loyalty is taken annually by the four senior Batums (Kaberry 1967).

Among the Bu, the land is still seen as the source of origin and of one's birth, where their parents originated. There is therefore a strong link between land and traditions of origin in the Area. According to Bu people; the land they occupy belongs to the sons and daughters of the chiefdom. 'It is the source of life and even the Bible says that we came from the soil and we shall all end there'.⁶ Land is therefore not just the final home but the place where one will be buried. 'You know home is home and each one of us has land that is the final home. Since we work out of our homes we need to build at least a house back in our homeland. As one writer puts it,' we endeavour to live with the land but others live off it'.⁷ Not being able to have a house in the homeland is generally considered a disgrace. This is how Cheng sizes up the situation:

I know of villages here in Menchum where there are rules that if you have not constructed a house in the village, and you die elsewhere, your casket should not be brought into that community. Or if they have to bring your corpse, a fine must be paid to the chief of that village'.

In these societies, land is and was never considered a commodity and members of the community had only usufructs rights. Land was regarded as something that was to be exploited by members of the community. As one informant narrates, 'according to our tradition, any Aghem man can

⁶ Shiefu Ngala interviewed 8/11/2013 (Morning Safari 2013).

⁷ Enonchong Tabey interviewed 8 /11/2013(Morning Safari 2013)

exploit an unoccupied piece of land and when he becomes tired, another person can take over the exploitation of that piece of land'. In Bu land is neither sold nor bought and nobody in Bu has obtained a land certificate.⁸ According to Bu tradition, land cannot be sold, but a family can lend someone the right to use their plots. Such arrangements do not involve fees, lease payments or voluntary gifts (Buchalik 2013: 209).⁹

To Fon Fobuzee,¹⁰ land was and has remained the basic ingredient in the development of the community. It is used for the construction of houses and other economic investments. 'It is the source of our livelihood and the centrality of everything.' The Fulani consider land as the finality of everything to them and the source of life. 'Land is very useful for the rearing of cattle and our forefathers were born into this, so a Fulani man may not survive without land and rearing cattle'.¹¹ The land is where the cattle are kept. 'It is a source of income that enables us to send our children to school, buy food. We use it to cultivate food and we have depended on land for all our lives. This land is all and all for us'. There is the central role of cattle in the way the Fulani conceptualize land and this shows how much importance they attach to it. Both the locals and the Fulani consider land as an indispensable asset on which all life revolves and God is at the centre as the creator, the giver and the controller of land. Definitely, this is reflected in their cosmic relations and constructions of the world and existence. In sum, Ndege (2013: 7) opines that 'landscape forms a larger entity as it refers to nature, cosmology, experience, life, being, and the totality of a people's history'. Despite the fact that land is still considered as belonging to the community, several factors have affected the land use patterns and also influenced their perceptions as well. In the following sections, I shall proceed by examining some of those factors.

3.3 The Introduction of Colonial Land Laws and Policies

In colonial Cameroon, as everywhere in Africa, the land problem was central to the politics of the European administrations. The chief endeavour was to obtain the right of disposal for one of the

⁸ In a conversation with Kpwah Kennedy of Bu just before the start of a focus group discussion in Bu 12/10/2013

⁹ Also see Pul 2003, pp.62 on the same concept about land among the Dagombas and Konkombas of Northern Ghana.

¹⁰ Fon Fobuzee is the Traditional Ruler of Chomba, and I interviewed him because he is a member of the National Land Commission which is working towards a new land reform in Cameroon. His opinions provide insights on the work of the land commission interviewed 8/11/2013.

¹¹ Mallam Suleiman Guizo interviewed 7/10/2013.

most important means of production, namely land (Eckert 1996: 190). The inception of colonial rule brought along colonial land laws which facilitated European appropriation of land which altered customary tenure and introduced the notion of private land ownership. This rapidly replaced communal land utilisation and for the first time introduced rigid land boundaries (Werner 1993: 138). This also brought about the increasing role of the state in the control of land which also influenced local perceptions and reinterpretations about land ownership.¹² First, land rights and ownership that hitherto were entrusted in the local chiefs were in principle transferred to the state.

3.3.1 Dividing the People, Sharing the Land: Colonial Land Expropriation Policy

The phenomenon of the state expropriating and appropriating autochthonous peoples' land for 'reasons of public utility' goes back to the colonial period and has continued till today (Ayee et al 2011: 6). Before this period, no fixed boundaries existed among different communities although loosely defined areas of jurisdiction by chiefs were generally recognised (Werner 1993: 137). Drawing from studies carried out in Kenya, Boas and Dunn (2013: 57) note that with the advent of the British administration in Kenya, 'nature started to be demarcated as 'territory': divided by international, regional and ethnic borders. Space became tamed, fixed and stabilised; immobile closed system in which land was both a material resource and part of ethnic identities'.

In a similar manner, when the Germans gained sovereignty over the Cameroonian territory in 1884, they built the first military station in Yaoundé (Socpa 2010: 554).

They immediately effected the first partitions of the land. They only recognized the indigenous peoples' property rights on the plots of land where they had their villages and plantations. The remaining territory was considered, according to German legislation, to be 'empty unoccupied lands'. In reality these lands would be incorporated into imperial property, and it would be the German state that would be responsible for administering them. The distribution of the 'empty unoccupied lands' was arranged quasi-exclusively to the advantage of German agricultural and forestry companies.

¹² See 1974 Land Ordinances. More has been discussed on this in chapter four.

Embedded in the idea of incorporating the ‘unoccupied land’ into imperial property was the desire to set up colonial plantations and to do that, they needed suitable and fertile lands. In most cases the ‘unoccupied lands’ were used for colonial economic interests and for the construction of European living quarters far off from the natives. As Geschiere (1993: 159) demonstrates about German incursions on the Bakweri¹³ lands in Cameroon; ‘the fertile volcanic plain between the coast and the mountain proved suitable for the establishment of large-scale European plantations, and the best land of the Bakweri was rapidly expropriated’. In another case, Joseph (1974: 671) notes that in 1911, the Germans took the decision to expropriate the Douala people from their coastal lands and to resettle them further inland and the purpose of this plan was clearly to create an area for European settlement on the increasingly valuable land adjacent to the port. To ensure their effective control of the port, they needed to send the natives to marginal lands. Some of the indigenous communities that were evicted from their ancestral lands include the people of the Joss plateau in Douala, Bali and the Douala Bell clan that were relocated into a new quarter known as ‘New Bell’ (Joseph 1974: 671; Schler 2005: 93). As it was all over colonial Africa, the alienation of ever increasing portions of land for white settlers implied that large numbers of people were resettled onto more marginal land. For example, Werner (1993: 144) in a similar study in Central Namibia demonstrates how the Herero pastoralists were forced to give up land east of Windhoek only to be relocated in more marginal areas in the east of the country. In the example cited above, the colonial administration had to resort to violence to force communities to move to the eastern reserves (*ibid*).

By early 1900s, land began to be expropriated by the German colonial administration as ‘crown lands’. The German national government hoped to exploit local resources like rubber, palm oil, ivory and cocoa for European consumption (Diduk1992: 210; Clarence-Smith 1988). It was in this manner that the Germans were able to secure land for the establishment of European plantations in the colony.¹⁴ The appropriation of land for cash crop production by the colonisers through land concessions brought the colonised into a money economy and fostered the creation

¹³ Also see Clarence-Smith (1988: 2-3) for details on the Bakweri rebellion of 1884-5 when the Germans attempted to exploit land concessions. Following this expedition, the German officer in charge was killed and it was until 1891 that Bakweri was subdued. ‘the Bakweri are a small group. They live on the slopes of Mount Cameroon, a huge active volcano which rises steeply from the coast to the height of more than 12,000ft’ (4100m) above sea level.

¹⁴ Also see Boye, S.R and Kaarhus (2011: 105) on a similar policy by the British in the Isiolo District of Northern Kenya.

of a wage labour force available to the plantations, mine, and factory (Merry 1991: 896). When German entrepreneurs first arrived in Cameroon in the mid-1800s they recognised quickly the fertile and productive potential of the land. Some Europeans did purchase land from local chiefs but generally for very little money.¹⁵ By the 1906 “all unoccupied land was declared crown land and commissions were appointed to explore and delimit these ‘unoccupied’ lands, and transfer of land to Europeans had to have the assent of the Governor”. “Occupied land” was considered that on which people built their compounds and cultivated. Fallow lands, between compounds, and lands intended for future community use were officially considered “unoccupied” (Diduk1992: 202; Fisiy 1996: 226-9).

Following the defeat of the Germans by the allied forces in 1916 when the First World War broke out, German Kamerun was divided between the French and the British as Mandated territories (Ngoh 2004:1;Jua and Konings 2004: 4). After the French took possession of their own sphere of Cameroon following the defeat of Germany, they made considerable efforts to establish a regime of land registration.¹⁶ The Minister for the colonies, Albert Sarraut, wrote in a report to the President of the French Republic on July 27th 1932;

As indicated in the previous report of 31st October 1931, which reintroduced into Cameroon the provisions of the local decree of 5th September 1921 pertaining to organisation of land ownership in the territory, the transcription regime would be replaced by a system of registration as soon as some stability in property transactions could be achieved. The document [...] authorizes, through the registration procedure, a complete purge of all actual rights and occult powers that are harmful to property and lead to precarious transactions(Socpa 2010: 554).

The major concern of the French administration was to impose its laws and the rights of French citizens on the colonial land heritage. Implicitly, customary land rights that they created and

¹⁵ As Clarence-Smith (1988: 4) notes, African chiefs were persuaded to part with vast and ill-defined tracts of land for the sake of some alcohol and assorted trade goods. The average price paid in the second half of 1880s was between half a Mark and a Mark a hectare (a Mark being worth roughly a British shilling. Also see Atangana 1997,pp.87 on details on land sales between the chiefs of Douala and the Germans in the 1900s.

¹⁶ For details on French land registration policy, see Eckert (1996: 192),regarding land questions during the colonial period, profound transformations took place in Douala following the ‘Decree of 21st July 1932 instituting land titling regime in Cameroon under the French law. Between 1934 and 1959, more than half (2818) of the 5652 registered land titles were made in Douala alone.

entrusted in the chiefs were not more recognised and land heritage was considered to be ‘empty unoccupied’ land. While the French tried to incorporate the colonial state into the French system of administration by assimilating the people, the British administered its own territory through *indirect rule* using the chiefs.¹⁷ Between 1932 and 1972, a series of administrative (texts, decrees, orders, edicts) regulated the organisation of land and estates in Cameroon (Socpa 2010: 555). The sharing of land brought about a completely new conception about land rights and as each ethnic group was assigned a particular land area with fixed boundaries, kinship system and social affiliations on which local communities relied were weakened.

In the wake of independence in 1960, the expression ‘empty unoccupied lands’ was gradually abandoned in favour of the preferred term ‘national ownership’ which was later on enshrined in the 1974 land law. Declaring national ownership of the land by the Cameroon state was considered an aberration and tantamount to seizing the populations ‘ancestral lands’ on the grounds of the principle that the lands were empty, indeed unoccupied and therefore without rulers or owners for the people thus expropriated.

Different perceptions about land started occurring in Aghem and Bu when the 1974 land law was introduced and the state was now at the centre of land management (see details in chapter 5). Following this logic, one of my informants (Cheng), notes that ‘all land now belongs to the state but it is managed by the traditional ruler in collaboration with the administration. She notes further, that the traditional ruler of the village is part of the state and works in close collaboration with state authorities.’ Implicitly, it was not only the authority over land that was transferred to the state but the chiefs were also co-opted into the state machinery as auxiliaries of the government (Geschiere, 1993). We already see the shift and the emergence of a different notion over the control of land as influenced by state land ordinances and an imminent clash between chiefs and state officials. By implication, the chief who hitherto had the monopoly as the custodian of the land has been pushed aside in the current dispensation of land governance. Another economic activity worth mentioning was the introduction of extensive cattle rearing by

¹⁷ Indirect rule was adopted formally or de facto by most colonial powers and continued by most independent governments in various forms. It operated with an administrative hierarchy wherein villages make up the lowest unit answerable to statutory administrative units at higher levels. This form of nested territorial authority has taken a variety of forms, from chiefs being formal auxiliaries of administration to secular village administrators. Also see Lund and Boone (2013, pp.5).

the Fulani during the advent of the British administration (Kaberry 1952: 89). The policies and strategies that were used to integrate the Fulani and their herds of cattle have been discussed in details in chapter six.

3.4 The Introduction of Cash Economy

The major economic change of the colonial period was the development and expansion of the production of agricultural produce for sale in world markets (DeLancey 1988: 2). Although plantation agriculture, usually under European control, was important [...] the most significant changes occurred in peasant agriculture (*ibid*: 2). Coffee¹⁸ is one of the main cash crops that was introduced in Aghem and Bu by the 1950s and it provided an opportunity for the people to generate income (Kah 2012: 289). Subsistence economies that were largely self-sufficient were altered into mixed subsistence and export economies tied to the international economic system as inferior partners in a division of labour that largely defined Cameroon as a producer of raw materials, mainly agricultural, and France and England as the suppliers of finished goods (DeLancey 1988: 2). It was the export crop, Arabica coffee, which finally took off. It is said to have been introduced to the Bamenda plateau by a returned Bali migrant worker from a French plantation in 1923 and by the 1930s; coffee became quite popular around Santa¹⁹, very close to the border with French Cameroon, and at Bali (Chilver 1988: 6). As DeLancey (1988: 12) notes, due to the close contacts with the coffee farms in these areas and motivated by the money that this crop provided, coffee cultivation started in the Bamenda Province. By the end of the British period, coffee had become a major cash crop, not only along the border areas of Bamenda (and Mamfe) where it began with African initiatives, but over widespread interior areas of the territory.

By 1959, at least 1300 tons of Arabica were exported, and this was produced almost entirely on peasant farms in Bamenda. In addition, 1000 tons of Robusta were exported, mainly from peasant farms in the Mamfe and Victoria areas. Cooperative growth paralleled the expansion

¹⁸ For other cash crops that were introduced in the South and French Cameroon ,such as cocoa, rubber, banana see Geschiere 1988; DeLancey 1988; Henn 1979; Konings 2012), The climatic conditions of the Grassfields did not favour the cultivation of these crops.

¹⁹ A 1942 survey indicated almost 300 planters with some 231,000 trees in the Bamenda area see DeLancey 1988,pp 11. Also for more on coffee cultivation in French Cameroun see Mbapndah (1994).

of coffee and after repeated demands by growers, a cooperative milling society opened in 1950. By 1979 there were 24,000 members of coffee societies in Bamenda (Delancey 1988: 12).

Coffee cultivation was regarded as the men's crop while women were more concerned with food cultivation. Its production actually flourished throughout the Bamenda division and it was a source of revenue for men (Teboh 2002: 171). In the 1980s, Cameroon was facing an economic crisis due to a fall in the prices of export crops in the international markets. This affected the production of coffee adversely as most farmers became discouraged (Awung and Atanga 2011: 95). Fonjong (2004: 22) notes that both Arabica and Robusta coffees, for example, which was the principal cash crop in the Province, saw a drop from 3.417 tons in the 1996/1997 to 1.287 tons in 1997/1998 farming seasons; thus representing a 62.3% drop in production within a year. Walo²⁰ who was a coffee farmer in Bu notes that coffee cultivation was a lucrative business in the 1960s and it is from coffee that he was able to raise money for the bride wealth of his wife, educate his children and also pay his way to the cocoa plantations in the coast. Most of the farmers of his era in Bu he said, abandoned their farms in the 1980s to seek for greener pastures in cocoa and rubber plantations in the southwest region of Cameroon once coffee became unproductive. He states further that, the cultivation of coffee took about three to four years before the crop was mature and so needed a lot of time and patience and this were discouraging to many farmers. Consequently, coffee production was given little or no attention once rice was introduced in Bu. Apart from the fact that coffee cultivation was time consuming and could not provide for the immediate needs of the people, the prices were always fluctuating and so many farmers became discouraged (Kah 2012: 289). In fact, only vestiges of coffee farms can still be found in Bu and Aghem today as most of the farmers have resorted to the cultivation of rice and other food crops.

3.4.1 The Introduction of Rice Cultivation in Bu

Apart from coffee, rice was also introduced as cash crop and till today, it has become the mainstay of the Bu economy. The introduction of upland and swamp rice cultivation in 1953 and 1957 respectively transformed the economy of the Bu chiefdom in a more significant way.²¹ The

²⁰ Pa Walo is about 90 years old and is Presently a member of the Bu traditional council interviewed 12/11/2013.

²¹ Rice was introduced from Abakili, Nigeria see Kah 2012,pp288 but it is not clear who introduced it in Bu.

climatic conditions in Bu favour the cultivation of rice such as the availability of water and swamps for inland rice cultivation. The Bu rice fields also served as experimental farms for the Wum Area Development Authority (WADA).²² It did not only alter the land use pattern but also the land rights, as men now claimed ownership of the rice fields and used the money accumulated from its sale the way they wanted (*ibid*). ‘Rice cultivation made [...] people to own permanent pieces of land and a farmer, previously considered to be the user of the land, now became its owner (Kah 2012: 288). Prior to this, they were used to shifting cultivation of food crops and people did not have claims over land. As it was in most of the Grassfield, developed land was acquiring value as a commodity (Chilver 1988: 10) especially where coffee and rice farms were established. The changes were accelerated by the introduction of the monetary economy e.g through taxation and the introduction of these cash crops (Buchalik 2013: 211; Chilver 1988: 8).²³ Rice cultivation became a status symbol and the way to get money for investments in other sectors like livestock and establishment of small scale businesses (Kah 2012: 289). ‘At first, the cultivation of rice was considered a man’s work but today its cultivation is undertaken by both men and women because of the importance of the crop for domestic consumption and its market value’.²⁴

The cultivation of rice in Bu has transformed the lives of the people and has also improved their living conditions. ‘Money generated from the sales of rice has enabled the people to construct better houses and also to sponsor their children in school. Some farmers have been able to established lucrative businesses in the Bu community, thereby making available articles that ordinarily they would have bought from Wum town.’²⁵ Most of these items include basic needs such as matches, candles, kerosene, beer, and corn mills. ‘It is from the cultivation of rice that I have been able to raise money to renovate and operate this store. In the past, it was difficult for us to have the basic things here in Bu but with the store life has become easy.’²⁶

²² WADA was an agro-industrial plant established by the government of Cameroon see Fonjong 2014

²³ Also see DeLancey 1988 ‘the expansion of coffee production in Bamenda and Bananas in the Southwest’ in *the political economy of Cameroon: historical perspectives*, African Studies Centre, Leiden

²⁴ Kpwa Kennedy, interviewed 12/11/2013 in Bu.

²⁵ Toh Josaiah, interviewed 12/11/2013, Bu.

²⁶ Koi Dorothy, interviewed 12/11/2013 Bu she owns one the few off licenses in Bu and is also rice cultivator.



Figure 4 View of Bu Rice fields

Photo: *Courtesy, De Bruijn 2013*

Towards the end of the rainy season, farmers prepare the low land fields for rice cultivation by ploughing and tilling the rooms. Rice seeds are planted in September and October just when the rains are about to cease. The swampy area is drain by River Menchum which forms a confluence with River Mezam in the Bafut area. When the river over flows its banks, the soil is enriched with alluvial deposits. The river valley is therefore very fertile for market gardening and for rice cultivation. 'The planting of rice seedlings may take a day or several days depending on the size of the farm and the labour force available. Weeding is the most exhaustive and labour intensive work. The cultivation of rice in Bu is also a very strenuous exercise owing to the fact that the fields are located right down the deep valley (about 3Km from settlements) with no access motorable road'. Access to the farms is by trekking using footpaths through very steep hill slopes and this also makes the transportation of farm produce and harvested rice very tedious since all of it is transported by head load or sometimes in canoes through Bafut.²⁷ The weight of 50Kilos of a bag of rice is sold at 18. 000Fr and the amount of annual revenue generated from rice depends on the farm size, labour and the application of farm inputs. Generally a good harvest is considered to be anything between 100 to 150 bags of husked rice and anything below that is considered poor

²⁷ Towah Jonas, interviewed 12/11/2013 in Bu.

harvest.²⁸ Rice is harvested during the dry season with December and January being the peak periods. The increase cultivation of rice began in 1973 and led to the establishment of a rice co-operative in Bu known as the Bu/Mbengkas Rice Co-operative Society Limited (BMRS Ltd) by 1979 (Kah 2012: 289).²⁹ The machines that were offered to the Bu/Mbingkas Rice Cooperative Society by the Wum Area Development Authority (WADA) are all bad due to poor maintenance and the unavailability of spare parts and ever since the WADA project collapsed.³⁰ Nowadays, the husking of rice has become very difficult and farmers have to travel as far as Wum town or to (Tingoh) Bafut where there are rice husking mills.³¹

To conclude, this chapter sets out to examine the various factors that have brought about changes in the perception of land and patterns of land use. One of the fundamental changes was the introduction of colonial land laws which affected customary tenure arrangements adversely by introducing private property rights as opposed to communal land ownership. Land was therefore not seen as a communal asset but as a commodity. It is the introduction of cash crops that also increased the value and the scramble for land by individuals. The introduction of cash economy did not only create an opportunity for people to generate revenue from their produce, but equally let to wealth accumulation through land acquisition. Another factor that also influenced land use patterns in the area was the introduction of extensive cattle rearing by the Fulani. Cattle rearing did not only change the political economy of the area but brought about a different mode of production which was at variance with the traditional agricultural economy system.

Following Goheen (1996: 118), I conclude that the greatest force of change in land tenure system and conflict in Aghem and Bu have come from, i) Colonial land laws and policies, ii) increase in herds of cattle and population iii) the introduction of cash crops and v) government land and environmental policies (vi) the commoditisation of land.

²⁸ For instance, Kpwah Kennedy makes a profit of about 450. 000Fr from rice production during a good harvest in a season.

²⁹ Presently, there are three rice mills in Bu unfortunately due to poor maintenance, none is functioning and farmers have to transport harvested rice to Bafut or to Wum town by head load in most of the instances.

³⁰ WADA is an agro-industrial plant developed established by the government of Cameroon in the 1960s to boost agricultural production and also to assist local farmers with farm inputs and also to empower local farmers. In the mid 1980s and 1990 that Cameroon was in economic crisis, WADA was closed and automatically, the assistance that farmers got from them equally ceased. For details on W.A.D.A, see Fonjong 2004.

³¹ Koi Delphine, interviewed 12/11/2013 in Bu.

Chapter Four: ‘We are Strangers in our Land and our Chiefs now belong to the Fulani ’: The Paradoxes of Changing Patron/Client Relationships in Land deals

4.1 Introduction

For most rural communities, the control and management of land was the power base of the chief and was at the heart of control over people [...] where such control over land has been whittled away, they have lost their grip over the people. As paramount, the Fon could exact from his subjects allegiance and tribute as a sign of their submission to him. This submission was clearly manifested by the payment of a tribute of allegiance that included surrendering all ‘royal game’, such as python, leopard, and buffalo to the Fon. All these practices are now on the decline (Fisiy 1995: 50-52).

The upsurge of inter ethnic boundary disputes in Cameroon (Nkwi, 2011) and the persistent land conflicts in Wum Central Subdivision have brought to the fore the debate about power struggle over access to land and control between local authorities, the state and the communities. These struggles have been attributed to the legal and social transformations that customary tenure has undergone from the pre-colonial period and have resulted in the co-existence of different institutional frameworks from which contradictory discourses and agendas have emerged (Fisiy 1995: 5). The issue is not just over the control of land but contests for supremacy and who the competent authority to handle land matters is. As we have seen in the previous chapters, before the introduction of colonial land laws, it was the chief who was the custodian of the land. The chief constituted the nucleus of political activities within the society (Bejeng 1984: 267). All the land in the chiefdom was under the custody of the chief who ensured its protection and distribution to members of the chiefdom. He was the force that united the final authority of the chiefdom being the final authority in the settlement of litigation and gathering the people around him through frequent acts of generosity (Chilver or Kaberry 1967; Bejeng 1984: 268). Through his generosity, he enjoyed a lot of support from his people in so many ways and also considered everybody in his chiefdom as his people. Land was therefore not considered a major determinant to ones identity and belonging, but was also a situation in which wealth and power of the chief depended on rights in and control over people (Merry 1991: 899). The social networks of

obligations, expectations and privileges that existed between a chief and his people were based on patron/client relationships.

For several decades, customary tenure has undergone dynamic transformations and these have tended to erode the power based of chiefs that was rooted in the control and management of land and their influence or authority over their people has been on the decline. This shift in authority over the control of land also has implications on the social networks, trust, expectations and obligations and royalties those chiefs enjoyed in their communities in the past. In most instances, loyalty has switched to state bureaucrats as they have become the new patrons with chiefs playing a peripheral role in land issues now. The chiefs are contesting the transfer of power to manage land from them to the state and have continued to forge ahead with customary tenure on grounds that they are the 'rightful' owners of the land.

In this chapter, I focus on chiefs and state bureaucrats who are considered as patrons and the different ways in which they negotiate their control and management of land and how their clients switch alliances and loyalties from one patron to another and the implications on access to land and conflicts in Wum. The chapter therefore explores the relationship between patrons and clients and how these relationships are created, endured and used within the changing historical contexts of land rights and politics in Cameroon. I try to show and argue that farmer-herder conflicts are not only about crops destroyed by cattle and access to land but also a reflection of local power relations and the role governmental agents and local chiefs play in them (Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 134).

Rather than focusing on land patronage alone I argue that in modern day Cameroon, it is difficult to separate land from political patronage since land in itself is politics. I therefore try to show the interplay between land and politics in patron-client relationships and how these are used to serve different interests. The following questions are therefore relevant for this chapter: Who is a patron and who is a client? Secondly, how are patron- client relationships established and sustained? Thirdly, how are they utilised in the politics of land and despite the political and socio-economic transformations that Cameroon had undergone why does patron-client relations continue to exist? This chapter therefore attempts to provide answers to the above questions by examining the

continuity and transformations of this practice into the post-colonial times and contexts (Bellagamba 2004: 385). I therefore adopt a socio-historical approach to give account of the shifts and changes within the present context of land patronage in Wum Central Sub Division.

4.2 Understanding Patron-Client Relationships

A lot has been written on the relationships that exist between patrons and clients by Africanist scholars within the past several decades (see for example, Onoma 2008; Olumuyiwa et al 2010; Albert 2005; Gabriel 2007). Yet, understanding these relationships are as complex as the social structures and networks that shape them and from which they are rooted. While there is no common or agreed definition to these key concepts, the basic elements that revolve around the phenomena have always been highlighted by different scholars though sometimes taking different angles. In a study on political patronage in Nigeria, Joseph (1983) examines the social exchanges that exist between patrons and clients in terms of allowances in kind or rights to use of land in return for services, where these allowances or rights are not granted on hereditary principles, a situation he refers to as *Prebendal politics*. At the state level he focuses on the social networks which provide the link between ethnic groups and villages a phenomenon he calls *ethno-clientalism*. 'Central to these relationships is the exchange of various kinds of patronage for assistance, support, and loyalty'. He contends that these patterns of political behaviour justify the principle that the offices of the existing state may be competed for and then utilised for the personal benefit of office-holders as well as that of their reference or support group. Clientilistic relations to him have 'served in Africa to reinforce and even promote ethnic clustering as individuals provide the conduit for the transmission of resources from their own patrons downwards while ensuring in exchange the support of a reliable constituency' (Joseph 1983: 29). He goes further to note that this is often done through ethnic competition and he demonstrates that the politics of competition is the means through which part of state resources 'a share of the national cake' are attracted to one's community. Szeftel (2000: 437) moves in the same direction with Joseph but focuses on the factions that exist within the party and how they compete against each other to gain control over public resources and that this is often transcended and articulated through the language of ethnic and sometimes religious identities. Intra-party and inter-party competition for political power is therefore, in most instances, based on inter-ethnic competition,

as different ethnic groups compete for or retain political power in a bid to have access to resources for political patronage (Mwangi 2008: 269;Nkwi 2006: 123).

Albert (2005) has developed the syndrome of ‘godfatherism’ that permeates Nigerian politics and considers godfathers as ‘men who have the power personally to determine who gets nominated and who wins an election’. He gives a succinct analysis of how godfathers (patrons) use their clients for selfish aims. Put the other way round, it is a relationship based on exploitative tendencies of patrons whom he refers to as ‘godfathers’ over their clients. He aptly puts it as follows:

Their main goal is to use their client to attain selfish goals; the latter too do the same. The relationship between the two of them thus has little or nothing with the larger society the two of them claim to lead. The relationship between the godfathers and their clients has little or no enduring purpose that could hold both of them together. It is thus common to find them going in separate directions shortly after a ‘contractual agreement’ is reached between the (Albert 2005: 81).

Kea (2010: 5) concentrates on the incorporation of strangers or ‘late comers’ in communities and examines the reciprocal rewards that patrons (host) and clients benefit from each other, stressing that in most cases the hosts have the duty to integrate strangers into the community from whom they expect all forms of support including labour recruits for the cultivation of the farms of their host for some days a week. Hosts in turn, acquire political support and /or an extensive following from their clients. ‘In those days the people were called upon to cultivate crops for the chief once a year. In return he provided food to the villagers’ (Ebua Amisen interviewed 30/10/2013).

During the pre-colonial era when chiefs still had a lot of respect, each quarter had to tilt the farm of the chief and even harvested maize for the chief. The men did the clearing and the women cultivated his estates for free. All he gave to us was food and the people were very happy with such gestures (Emmerencia, interviewed 7/10/2013).

Bayart (2009: 228) and van Velzen, on their part see patron /client relations as essentially social networks of unequal relationships and involve a sort of social relations in stratified socio-political systems whereby valued resources are exchanged between the ruling and the ruled. Most often, these systems are themselves producers of inequality. Frequently the literature on patron-client

relations assumes that the balance of exchange inevitably favours the patron, the stronger party in the relationship (Ravenhill 1985: 32). Valued resources may be material resources such as land, gifts, money and other forms of wealth and immaterial resources may include prestige, rights, power, trust, privileges, alliances, titles, and positions among others. What are important to note is the various forms that these relations and social exchanges take and are being (re) negotiated between the Patrons (rulers) and the clients (ruled). Irrespective of the context and situation, patron/client relationships are always fluid, not constant and subject to changes, renegotiations and even contestations.

4.2.1 People as the Source of Authority of the Chief

In the introductory paragraph of this chapter, I stated that in the pre-colonial period in most of the Grassfield chiefdoms, the power and wealth of the chief was in people and not in land but also based on the magical powers that he wielded and this was a source of prestige, wealth and also gave him control over his people (Merry 1991: 899, Fisiy 1995). In pre-colonial Kenya (Boas and Dunn 2013: 57), people's communal identity was shaped by their subsistence-farming, herding or a mixture of the two and loyalties were constructed at the micro level through marriage alliances, age groups, trading partnerships and so forth and not in land. In a study carried out among the Nso' of Cameroon by Chem-Langhee (1995: 179), he demonstrates that:

[...] people counted wealth and measured prestige in terms of the number of mouths one could feed or in terms of the number of persons under ones control or authority: the larger the number, the wealthier one was said to be, the higher the prestige, the easier it was for one to acquire a title or a higher status in society. Such a concept created avenues for the acquisition of slaves as a means of increasing one's followers in order to be considered wealthy and thus gain a higher status and prestige in the society.



Figure 5 Fon Mbambi of Aghem and Researcher in his palatial Reception hall.

Courtesy, De Bruijn 2013

In most African societies, the easiest means to increase the number of persons under ones control was through slave trading and raiding since slaves were exchanged for money and this was also a means of wealth accumulation. Aghem raided for slaves and was also involved in the trading of

palm oil. Its most powerful rival to the south was Bafut with whom it competed for control of the middle Metcham valley. With Kom it traded oil for kola, with Kasimbila it exchanged slaves and oil for guns, gun-powder, salt and the blue and white cloth; and also had trading links with Takum.

Although the Aghem were not aware of any large-scale slave trading, people (usually children and young women) were bought and sold on an individual basis (Kopytoff 1981: 377). Most of the slaves were acquired from the direction of Kom and some of Aghem are said to have traded on this as middlemen, using oil to buy a child or woman in Kom and immediately selling them in Isu or *Munshi* for goats, salt, or ammunition (*ibid*). 'A number of villages in the Beba-Bafang and Esimbi areas were also in loose tributary relations to the *Batums* as slave and oil-providers: the Su *Batum* had the largest number' (Chem-Langhee 1995). During slave raiding most of the war captives were women and young boys and girls whom the chief (*Batum*) disposed of as he saw fit. While most of the boys were retained to assist the palace attendants in keeping custody of the property of the chief, most of the women and girls were distributed to deserving persons as wives. Furthermore, the first children of such slave wives belonged to the chief; who either married the girls himself or gave them out in marriage (Chem-Langhee 1995: 182). Slaves played an important role in the agrarian system since they constituted the labour force in most societies. As Amanor (2007: 34) demonstrates in the situation of most pre-colonial African societies, 'powerful states raided neighbouring peoples or established tributes in slaves, who were put to work in the farms and in land colonization'. The labourers were more important than the land itself because the people were often expropriated to the land as slaves and then incorporated into society as part of the agricultural labouring people (*ibid*). However, a slave could migrate from his slave hood and become integrated especially if he was of good behaviour or achieved success.

By implication, what was important in the pre-colonial setting as demonstrated above, was one's membership, community, trust, social networks, social relations, commitment amongst others that kept the community together; but not land. Although no slave descendants can still be identified in Aghem and Bu, their involvement in slave trading and raiding also contributed to the expansion of the Aghem and Bu chiefdoms and constituted a source of wealth. As Kaberry (1950: 370) notes 'the Fon often says: what is Fon without people? I am in the hands of my people'...the Fon

has everything; the Fon is a poor man' and the Fon rules the people, but the people hold the Fon'. The authority of the Fon was determined by the number of people he had under his control and this was the parameter in which the might of the chiefdom was measured. This is the principle on which the Chieftaincy Law in Cameroon was formulated.¹

4.2.2 The Changing Context of Authority of Chiefs: From Wealth in People to Wealth in Land

The inception of colonial rule in Africa introduced the notion of customary law and tenure system and this brought about changes in power relations as local chiefs were bestowed with the rights to control land. Customary land tenure did not only emerge through the economic changes brought about by the colonial system, but also through the political alliances through which colonial administration was established. This delegated rural administration and regulation of natural resources to chiefs, who in return for their participation in the colonial administration were recognised as holding customary ownership of land as well as rights to royalties, fees, taxes and labour services of their subjects. To maintain control over land the colonial administration formed an alliance with chiefs under the Native Administration system and invested trusteeship and ultimate ownership of land rights in chiefs (Amanor 2007: 36). In societies where chiefs did not exist, chiefs were invented and imposed by the colonialists on their subjects (Geschiere 1993: 152, Ranger 1994).

During this period, rights and access to land that were determined by membership of a social group; were now under the control of a hierarchy of patrons and distributed to clients (Kea 2010: 10; Beekers and Gool 2012: 7). In such arrangements, 'less resourceful individuals were able to secure access to pieces of land to cultivate, have a steady job, material goods, wealth, physical protection or direct assistance in times of scarcity or illness' (*ibid*). Clientelism therefore offered the weaker parties the opportunity to claim special advantages in the relationship on account of their weakness (Ravenhill 1985: 23). While clients depended on their patrons to acquire necessary services, social insurance and resources, patrons in their turn needed a clientele to maintain labour, security and thereby secure their status and power. This social network of patrons-clients

¹ See Decree No 77/245 of July 1977 which provides the framework for the recognition of genuine sources of Traditional rule. According to the law, chiefdoms are classified into three categories 1st, 2nd and 3rd class with population amongst others as the main criteria used for this classification.

created an imbalance over land management and the resources although it ensured mutual trust through which even strangers and new comers were integrated in the community by the 'hosts'.

Within this backdrop, land was conceptualised as consisting of a number of domains: Allodia rights that were vested in chiefs (*Patron*) and usufructuary rights invested in peasant farmers (*clients*). This meant that the 'patrons' had powers as trustees of the community to regulate and allocate land to community members who were their 'clients'. At the level of the ethnic group the king or chief served as the trustee and the control of land was entrusted in him who allotted unoccupied lands at will, but was not justified in dispossessing any person or family who was using the land except for crime or treason or for public purposes, such as the building of a new capital (Goheen 1988: 93).

4.2.3 Being or Becoming a Patron or a Client

There are several ways of becoming a patron or a client but for the sake of this chapter, I shall focus on patrons that emerge as a response to their links in land ownership, control and the capacity to distribute the land and resources to their clients and the expectations and obligations arising from that. Furthermore I have included state bureaucrats (patrons) who are the main actors in the neo-patrimonial state of Cameroon at different levels. Within the African societies, land patronage is generally acquired through inheritance or succession. Since inheritance and succession are the social norms and rites through which property is handed down from one generation to another, becoming a successor is the surest means to climb the social strata and become a patron. In this way, patronage is acquired through ascription following normative rules which are peculiar to a given environment or the society in question. Unlike in most societies in Cameroon where succession is patriarchal, in Aghem and Bu it is matrilineal with the exception being that of Zongakwo where patriarchy is practiced. It is in this kind of social arrangement that the *Batums* of the six sub clans that make up the Aghem chiefdom and that of Bu inherited clan lands and their resources. Like other chiefdoms of the Western Grassfields of the northwest of Cameroon, Aghem is a state-like society headed by a hereditary Fon who is recognised as the senior title-holder in the highly stratified social, political, economic and religious systems which constitute the social organisation of the village (Simo 1995: 82). The *Batum* enjoyed a lot of rights

and privileges such as the control and dispossession of clan land and also the prerogative to keep a hunting reserve which other commoners could not. In the old, during hunting expeditions on his reserve special parts of the game (booty) were reserved for him alone. In fact the superior status of the senior *Batum* was recognised by the formality of rendering the skins of slain leopards to him (Bejeng 1984; Fisy 1995). For example, see figure 5 (page 48) showing the pelt of a leopard on which Fon Mbambi places his feet on as a carpet.

Within the neo-patrimonial state of Cameroon today, where land rights have been formalised through the acquisition of land title deeds, a new breed of government administrators (patrons) charged with land management have emerged. The chief has not only lost his rights over hunting grounds but is even forbidden from killing such voracious animals or possessing parts of the game. Hunting and the killing of animals is now regulated by the state.² Land acquisition has also come under the ambit of the state with different modes of access to land. In this way, patronage can be acquired through title deeds from the state, achievement or purchase and not based or restricted to inheritance. Although the powers of the chief are declining, they have adopted different strategies in land management especially as they have been co-opted as members in the land commissions (see details in chapter 5).

Clients on the other hand are those who are within the lower strata of the social rank and can only have access to these valued resources through established networks and social exchanges with their patrons. In most cases access to these resources goes with certain obligations, expectations, respect, obedience, allegiance, trust, and provision of services to their patrons amongst others. Clients may be 'free born' (commoners) in the community or may be 'strangers' or 'slaves' that have been assimilated or integrated into the society. Following this presentation, the chiefs, lineage heads and state bureaucrats constitute and are herein referred to as 'patrons' while members of the community and 'strangers' constitute 'clients'. Irrespective of the means through which one becomes a patron or a client, patron/client relationship is a hierarchical structure in which power and dominance reside in the hands of those in control of valued resources. Two trajectories of patron/client relations can quickly be distinguished, those based on land and political patronage. I now proceed by examining how patron/client relationships operate and how

² See Cameroon forestry law of 1994.

they are used to consolidate the political and power base of the patrons while subjecting the clients under their control.

4.3 Attribution of Land to Strangers and the Different forms of Social Exchanges

In the chiefdom of Aghem, there is a social structure and laid down procedures on how to receive and integrate strangers. The use of the word ‘strangers’ is not limited to the Fulani but include Cameroonians from other ethnic groups or regions of the country who have migrated and settled in Aghem and Bu. This is what Eboa Amisen has to say about the process of integrating strangers in Aghem.

At moment, we have a village council and if anybody wants a piece of land the council will demarcate the land but he has to ‘follow the tradition’. That means he has to feed the Council, pay the development levy about 25.000 FRS and then Zinc to the Chief of the village. If he likes to be part of us there is no problem. But he has to be initiated into the various secret societies if he gives ‘food’ to the members. In that way we will consider him an Aghem man.

Land acquisition takes different forms (purchase, leasing, borrowing, gift, inheritance) but definitely go with certain obligations as we find in the narrative below. I add to the list of patrons, the members of the Aghem and Bu Traditional Councils that constitute networks of patrons who work in collaboration with the chiefs. Incorporation of strangers is not only based on ‘following the tradition’ but also involves integration through ritual initiations. As Kea (2010: 5) demonstrates, in patron/client relationships, clients give gifts to local rulers, which in turn increase the latter’s power and wealth *and* facilitate a relationship of reciprocal obligation in which hosts provide material support and help strangers to establish themselves in new communities.

Reciprocity refers to the exchange of non comparable resources, usually effected by means of a package deal. For both parties the objective is to obtain resources that they perceive as being valuable and that would not otherwise be readily available to them (Ravenhill 1985: 32). In the case of Aghem, material and social exchanges enhance the relationship between patrons and clients. For instance, the Fulani make regular assistance to the Fon as a sign of respect and submission by donating cows and fowls to him on special occasions and the Fon enjoys the

privilege of also being recognised by the Fulani as their leader. In exchange, they receive an allocation of land (Bellagamba 2004: 389). Social exchanges have always been used by chiefs to enhance their prestige and also increase their sphere of political influence. The strangers do not only increase his population but are also used as the basis for political lobbying. These social exchanges also include visitations and celebrations during feasts such as *Sallah*, or *Ramadan* where Aghem people usually take part at such festivals in huge numbers and the Fulani also ‘pay back’ during Christmas. During occasions such as Christmas, the Fulani present their problems to the chief. ‘If we also have problems on this land, we will tell the chief. I once had a problem on this land and he intervened and the matter was solved. A certain Peter who was a fish seller came and took a large portion of my farm and wanted to establish a palm plantation, luckily through the intervention of the chief, the land commission drove him away and since then he has not trespassed on the land again.’³ In receiving new arrivals the chief who is also the political leader of his community considers them as his subjects since he is not only a political figure but also the *custodian* of the land. This has been explained by Fisiy (1995: 54) as follows:

It is in his political capacity that the chief can rightly claim ‘this is all my land, and these are all my people’ in this capacity, the chief welcomes all new arrivals as his ‘strangers’. They in turn, are expected to pay tribute to him as their Fon and as a sign of their respect and submission to his authority. Even though these new arrivals might be given land by any of the land-owning lineages, they are still accountable to the Fon as his people. It is also in that capacity as political leader that land attributions, such as for a school or other development project, are made by the Fon in consultation with the land-owning lineage.

In the Bu chiefdom, the Fulani were settled on a specific piece of land offered by the village chief -Chu. The piece of land allotted to the Fulani by the chief of Bu was given for ‘free’ but has always gone with certain obligations, expectations and reciprocity. Each year, the Fulani are obliged to send a cow to the chief of Bu and also make annual levies for the up keep of the palace. As a reward for giving the cattle to the chief, the Fulani have been recognised and integrated as members of the host communities and given all the protection that they need. For instance, the national identity cards issued by the state of Cameroon to the Fulani carry Aghem and Bu as their villages of origin. Today, the Fulani have been integrated into the Bu community and are now

³ Suleiman Guizo, interviewed 7/10/2013, Bu Road

considered as Bu people. Some have even been co-opted as members of the Bu Traditional Council and other social groups.⁴

In Aghem the Fon does not recognise the Fulani as Aghem people, but he however values the presence of the Fulani in his community as very useful because of the mutual benefits (symbiosis) that each of them stand to gain. Fon Mbambi has this to say:

You cannot eat only food (maize) without meat, we also need meat from the cattle owned by the Fulani' The Fulani have lived here for more than sixty years and you cannot drive them away because they are now your brothers and sisters. You do not only have to eat meat always or Corn Fufu but have to mix the two. I advised them to allow the Fulani and then adopt shifting cultivation method of farming. You can farm here today and allow the cattle on the other piece of land. After four years the cattle return to that piece of land.

This statement made by the Fon of Aghem comes from the backdrop of agitations from the Aghem people who have persistently seen the Fulani as strangers, but Suleiman thinks that this attitude has changed and a symbiotic relationship is being established. He sums up his views in the following excerpts:

At first it was difficult living with them because they felt that our place was in the hills. Today their attitude towards us has changed. We now live peacefully with them. Initially they were suspicious of us and they considered us as strangers but the situation has changed. They wanted us to go to the marginal lands up the hills and not to settle around the valleys or fertile spots. Today they have come to consider us as indigenes because since we arrived here, I delivered all my children here and I have nowhere to go to. My parents were all buried here. This is my place and even Ngoundere where we came from is Cameroon so we see ourselves as Cameroonians that can settle anywhere. Some of them also have cattle and so they see us as one.⁵

They also send their children to public schools and use other state institutions such as markets, health centres and public utilities such as water and electricity with the Bu people. The Fulani and the Bu people have established long lasting social networks be them at the social, political and economic levels. For doing this, the Bu people are also allowed access to cow dung from cattle

⁴ For instance, the President of the Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A) of Government School Mujang is Dabu- a Fulani herdsman.

⁵ He owns a large herd of cattle and the parents migrated from Ngaoundere about one hundred years ago. He and his two brothers have about 75 cattle and are also involve in the cultivation of food crops notably pepper.

owned by the Fulani for vegetable production. The people of Bu are predominantly engaged in the cultivation of upland rice and the Fulani constitute the first category of their clients who purchase much of the rice. The relationship is therefore not only reciprocal but also complimentary. In Aghem, farmers and grazers exchange gifts when they meet in the fields. Fon Mbambi insists.

4.4 The Nexus between Land and Patronage as Instruments of Political Mobilisation

The use of land to generate political support has received considerable attention, since the (re)introduction of multiparty democracy in many African countries (Konings2001; Onoma 2008: 148). Clientelism has widely been employed as a mode of political mobilisation in most of neo-patrimonial Africa where politicians use land rights to reward followers, buy the support of would-be opposition members and punish opponents. Like elsewhere in the continent, clientelism is nearly always based on the politicization of identity and landed class relations do play a part in compelling the loyalty of tenants and farm workers (Szeftel 2000: 437). In particular, it has been a feature of societies in which peasant populations or migrant or otherwise excluded communities have been mobilised or organised politically (*ibid*) especially groups such as the Fulani and landed migrants from other parts of Cameroon (Geschiere 1993; Konings 2012). For being integrated in the host community, ‘late comers’ or ‘strangers’ are expected to support their hosts through votes. The tendency for individuals in the public sphere has always been to identify themselves or to be identified with a specific ethnic group and this has resulted in ‘identity politics in the public sphere (Orji 2010: 168). Usually, political parties recruit supporters directly through the politicization of kinship, ethnicity, religion and other forms of identity and political parties then build coalitions of these competing factions in order to gain power and have access to state resources. I use the September 30th 2013 elections that took place in Cameroon to show how patron/client relationships manifested and influenced the outcome of elections.

4.4.1 The September 30th 2013 Municipal and Parliamentary Elections

During the period of my field research, municipal and parliamentary elections were organised in Cameroon on 30th September 2013. I use the conduct of the campaigns and the results of the elections that I was involved as a participant observer to show how the various competing

political parties recruited militants and voters through land patronage. I also try to show how land politics can also be used as a political tool to drum support and to create conflicts. It is important to note that in Aghem and Bu, there are two main political parties-the ruling Cameroon Peoples' Democratic movement (CPDM) and the main opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF). According to Cameroon's electoral calendar, the elections were supposed to have taken place in 2011 but this time table was not respected for reasons that this researcher cannot explain.

The elections started with the selection of candidates to constitute the municipal lists and parliamentary seats by the competing political parties in each constituency. The compositions of the various lists were configured along ethnic lines which enhanced out right political ethnicisation.⁶ The lists and choice of candidates were dominated by 'sons and daughters of the soil' who could easily determine the outcome of the results.⁷ Generally, in order to ensure victory, each political party puts an 'influential', rich, candidate or popular 'son of the soil' as the list leader who is also a 'crowd puller'.

In a similar scenario in Nigeria, Joseph (1983: 29) underscores the fact that party formation or selection of candidates has often consisted of a fierce competition to recruit the men or women whose affiliation to the party can mean the inclusion of a community of followers varying from a handful of village to the block vote of an ethno-linguistic group. Apart from the fact that each ethnic group must be represented on the list, the position of candidates on the municipal list also determines the voting pattern. There has always been the struggle by the various political parties to win the affiliation of popular candidates with the knowledge that they would bring with them the greater majority of members of their ethnic groups during political elections.⁸

⁶ Cameroon electoral code stipulates that candidates for municipal elections must reflect the sociological composition of the municipality and failure to comply with this, the list shall be rejected by Elections Cameroon-ELECAM.

⁷ See Nkwi (2011), 'Sons and Daughters of the soil' and those who claim to be the rightful owners of the land and consider any other person out of this as a stranger,' intruder' or simply the 'others', See Geschiere (2005a) for details

⁸ In most cases, those who are nominated by the various political parties are rich domestic elites, who are likely to distribute part of their wealth in exchange for votes.

Just two weeks to the polls-precisely on the 13th of September, President Paul Biya signed a decree allocating monthly allowances to traditional rulers.⁹ In a similar manner, during the countdown to the 2007 Municipal and Parliamentary elections, new administrative units-what Onoma (2008: 153) refers to as ‘gerrymandering’ were created with pro-opposition strongholds being the most affected. The two regions that were the most affected were the Littoral and the South; the former known for its pro-opposition tendencies and the latter, the most loyal Biya bastion.¹⁰ This was seen by the SDF as a strategy to lobby for support and to mobilise voters through traditional authorities and local or regional notables. This had far reaching implications because it made the chiefs not only to vote for the CPDM, but there was fierce competition between the various chiefs and ethnic groups to ensure victory for the CPDM in their homelands. Most chiefs in Cameroon have always shown their loyalty to the ruling party in return for privileges and support from the party. In most cases they have awarded titles to Paul Biya as a sign of their submission and loyalty to him and his CPDM party. ‘He is even considered by traditional rulers as one of them’. In the northwest he is known as ‘Fon of Fons’ and in the South region he is *Nnom ngui*-loosely translated as the ‘chief of chiefs’

Personally, I have gained recognition. I have the immunity from the party. I have been given medals up to the rank of Commander. I have other advantages which are helping me. As a true militant, when I go to Yaoundé, no body holds my hand into an office. They know that I am a strong supporter. You know most of the Ministers are of the ruling party, so I get special attention from them (Fon Mbambi).

4.4.2 Election Campaigns: The Politics of Gift-giving and Promises

Ethnic contradictions have always been used by politicians to manipulate the hostile relations between groups to their own advantage in their election campaigning (De Bruijn et al 2005: 63) and sloganeering. During the Municipal and Parliamentary election, there was an overwhelming

⁹ Traditional Rulers in Cameroon are governed by Decree No. 77/245 of July 1977 and are considered as auxiliaries of the administration. Within this framework, traditional rulers are recognised and classified into three categories, viz 1,2 and 3rd classes. According to a Decree signed on 13th September 2013 fixing monthly allowances for traditional rulers, 1st class traditional rulers shall receive a monthly allowance of 200. 000 Frs while 2nd and 3rd class shall receive a monthly allowance of 100.000Frs and 50.000Frs respectively. “Traditional Rulers ‘swear’ by Paul Biya’ in *L’Action Newspaper* 17/9/2013 <http://journal.rdpdpdm.cm/content/monthly-allowance?page=1> accessed 26/7/2013

¹⁰ See Decree No.2007/115 of April 2007 creating new administrative units.

display of wealth and power by the different candidates. Opposition candidates also held rallies with music and dance. More importantly, some of the musicians played out of political conviction, others played for money. While some musicians sang in support of President Biya and his program of *Grand ambitions* or Greater achievements¹¹, those of the opposition parties sent out counter messages intended to dissuade the electorate not to be convinced by the promises of the CPDM regime but also as a strategy to mobilise support (Angwafo 2014: 49). Like it is elsewhere in Cameroon, ‘people from other areas are frequently and repeatedly reminded that they are ‘strangers’, “settlers” or “come-no-go” especially when elections are near, they are reminded to go back to their villages of origin to register and vote’(Nkwi 2006: 124). In Wum, most of the ‘strangers’ were forced to register for the elections back in their homelands. As the date for elections approached, there was massive exodus of ‘strangers’ back to their villages of origin where they would vote for their own people.

In his capacity as the CPDM Campaign Manager for the northwest, Prime Minister Yang constantly reminded the people of Aghem and elsewhere in the region that voting for the opposition is synonymous to deciding to remain underdeveloped as they do not control the budget. He called on the ‘sons and daughters’ of Aghem and Bu to vote for the CPDM as a sign of gratitude for the appointment of a ‘son of the soil’ as one of the pioneer Senators in Cameroon and the promise made by the President to develop the Menchum Hydro-electricity project and the Kasina Ala Dam.¹² The Prime Minister castigated the SDF as a ‘barren mango tree’ that bears no fruits while referring to the CPDM as a ‘fertile mango tree’ that produces fat and juicy mango fruits. In deed, the Prime Minister even suggested that the barren mango trees should be cut down (Angwafo 2014: 74). This metaphor of threats and use of coercion was directed towards strangers and the opposition. Thus, perceived opposition strongholds (Waindo & Magha) were openly threatened through statements implying that the state would not provide for them if they made the wrong electoral choice (Nyamnjoh 2013b:1;Medard et al 2013: 552).

¹¹ Paul Biya’s program of ‘Grand Ambitions’ simply refers to the political rhetoric of the CPDM regime on their intentions to transform Cameroon into an emerging nation by 2035.

¹² Menchum Falls is located in Wum Central Subdivision and apart from being a touristic site; it has the potential that can supply hydro-electricity for the entire northwest region. Menchum Falls has always been used for political sloganeering and promises by the Biya regime to develop the hydro-electricity project for several decades and till today, nothing has been done for more, see <http://allafrica.com/stories/201311280583.html> accessed 26/7/2014



Figure 6 Royal paraphernalia of Fon Mbambi. Also see poster showing his relationship 'with Paul Biya' through patronage politics.

Photo courtesy: De Bruijn, 2013

During the campaigns Fon Mbambi encouraged his people to 'vote for the CPDM-the party that has the capacity and the means to distribute the resources of the state. This is one of the means through which the CPDM mobilises support and sustains itself in power. This reciprocity is also seen in the financial support that militants make for the up keep of the party. In appreciation for that, most of them are often appointed into the Central Committee of the CPDM.¹³ Those who are not interested in party politics but have economic interests to be protected also contribute to the parties campaign funds directly or indirectly.¹⁴ Politicians therefore practice what Bayart (1999) refers to as 'belly politics'. The main campaign slogans of the CPDM party were directed against Ni John Fru Ndi-the Chairman of the opposition SDF party whom they accused of having seized their land for personal gains. The people said that for over 23 years, the Aghem people have

¹³ See the comprehensive list of the CPDM central committee with the names of the economic elites in the country who own all the huge companies and industries. Most of those who are languishing in jail today in Cameroon because of embezzlement of state funds were leaders of the CPDM Teams to their various home constituencies, Fonjindam, Mebara, Ephraim Enoni, amongst others.

¹⁴ On similar election manouvres, also see Mwangi 2008 pp,272 on the Kenyan elections. For details on political corruption in Cameroon see Angwafo 2014,pp 49-74

supported the SDF but have never gained anything in return.¹⁵ To them, Ni John has made personal gains by grabbing much of their land on which he has established a huge farm and life stock rearing. This message was repeated at almost all rallies in Aghem and this is probably one of the reasons why the SDF was defeated by the CPDM in Wum. In addition to that, the People saw the SDF as not having the power to influence the national budget or provide social amenities. The general call was for the people to vote for the ruling CPDM Party that has the ‘knife and the yam’ and has the ‘power of the pen’ that can sign for their development.

When results were released, the ruling CPDM party won the Parliamentary and Municipal elections, in Wum Central. However, the SDF won at the Mbinjam polling station situated about one kilometre from his farm at Boocho with absolute majority.¹⁶ The victory of the SDF at this polling station was understandable because those who voted here were mainly the labourers who work in his farm. ‘Ni John Fru Ndi is the one who constructed the road from Mbinjam to Boocho and it was normal for us to ‘pay back’ for the good work that he has done for us here’ (*ibid*). Elsewhere in Aghem, Wallang Richard, the parliamentary candidate for the CPDM won the elections and the Aghem people voted massively for him because he is their ‘son’ and has brought a lot of development to the Aghem community and also influenced the provision of electricity in Bu.¹⁷ Informed by this, I conclude that patrons can only secure rural patronage by presenting themselves as privileged elite seeking to identify with the grassroots and that can provide their needs. While patrons enjoy loyalty of their clients’ they at the same time serve as facilitators for the conception and implementation of development projects, (Omobowale and Olutayo 2010: 464). From the foregoing, therefore, the various campaign strategies adopted by the various parties were based on Patron-client relations and exchanges.

¹⁵ Until the 2013 Municipal elections, Wum was the bastion of the leading SDF party but now taken over by the CPDM.

¹⁶ Yaya one of the Workers of Ni John Fru Ndi Interview 8/10/2013.

¹⁷ Honourable Wallang has constructed the Aghem Community hall, built bridges, roads, provided assistance to schools and donated a football trophy” Wallang Football competition’ that has always kept the youths busy during holidays.

4.5 Mistrust and Disillusionment

To imagine that there has been a smooth relationship between patrons and their clients in Aghem and Bu will not be a fair judgment of what really exists in the field. I stated earlier that patron /client relations are subject to changes, contestations and renegotiations and this seems to be what has taken place in the Aghem area. Today there is growing mistrust, switch in loyalty and disillusionment and lack of confidence between patrons and their clients leading to the emergence of new social networks. Several reasons account for this change of attitude. Firstly, the arrival of the Fulani was highly welcomed and as Vabi (n. d: 11) Konings (2001: 178) note, the local chiefs encouraged them to come and it was big wealth that the Fulani came with cattle into the region. They were allocated grazing land by the chiefs for *free* though the Fulani paid royal tribute in the form of cows, gifts and cow tax (*Jangali*). In most cases they were settled on marginal lands but their rights over the land was restricted only to grazing activities (Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 134; Stenning 1959: 6).¹⁸ This did not only ensure the recognition of the chief as the overall landlord (Patron), but was a good source of royal revenue. The advantages accruing from the arrival of Fulani and their cattle has been summarised by Fisiy (1995) as Follows:

Chiefs have always perceived cattle graziers as a source of revenue through their payment of tribute. Similarly, the colonial administration also viewed the arrival of Fulani graziers as a reliable source of income through the payment of *Jangali* taxes. The Fulani were subject to double taxation, in form of tribute to the Fon and in taxes to the state. This is ample struggle for control.

With the enactment of the 1974 land Ordinance and as a consequence of local politics, the Fulani graziers were persuaded not to pay this tribute to the chiefs as was the case before (*ibid*). Immediately this source of revenue was curtailed, silent conflict of interest developed between chiefs and the Fulani, since they (chiefs) could no longer rely on tributes and free services or on small stipends, gifts and tax commissions and women cultivators (Chilver 1988: 9). So a valuable source of royal finance was lost. This has been acknowledged by Fon Fobuzee and this is how he puts it:

¹⁸ Also see Konings pp177, in the Bakweri Area of South west Cameroon, the Stranger offered only a big pig to the villagers and he was accorded Usufruct rights without the payment of rents. See Tonah (2006: 155) for similar practices in a study he carried out in Northern Ghana between Fulani pastoralists and indigenous farmers.

Royalties that came in the past and enabled the chief to run the palace are not coming again. Now traditional rulers run the palace with no means and the only option open to them is to sell land. We should be very honest that while we condemn the practice by traditional rulers to sell land we should also condemn the practice of the populations who have abandoned traditional rulers to their own fate. What do they bring to the Fon now? A bottle of whisky and envelop may be 50.000 or 100.000FRS .So we are only enabling them to spend their time drinking and in the long run they are useless. Traditional rulers are helpless before the present situation.

The switch in Fulani loyalty from the chiefs to the Senior Divisional Officer has reconfigured new patron/client relationships where the chiefs have been relegated to mere auxiliaries of the administration (Geschiere 1993: 152) and have no powers over their ancestral lands any more. It is the fact that the control of the land and the allocation of grazing land have been transferred from the chiefs to the Senior Divisional Officers that has constantly made the chiefs to oppose state bureaucrats. Seeing that they have lost grip over their land, most chiefs have resorted to selling the land in order to generate income and survive. The commoditisation of land which has become an important source of wealth and power for individuals, communities and the state (Komey 2010: 64) is crucial.

As far back as the early 1950s the Fulani started clamouring for land rights and for recognition as citizens in a place they hitherto accepted their status as strangers.¹⁹ The recognition of *Sarki* as the Fulani Ardo (chief) by the state in 1977 further weakens the power of the *Batums* of Aghem and Bu chief. Consequently the dependence, allegiance, loyalty and obedience that the Fulani paid to their hosts-the chief of Kesu, their initial land lord has been eroded especially as most of the Fulani have become very wealthy. This is even more crucial in the case of Suleiman who now seeks to establish a title deed on the 100ha of land that was given to him by the chief of Kesu. As Bellagamba (2004: 391) notes, today they go as far as challenging the authority of their hosts and trying to sever their links of submission to their old hosts.

Another issue that the Fulani have against the courts is the arbitrary assessments and financial extortions by court officials. ‘The Fulani do not trust the justice system and feel that money is simply being extorted from them because the State counsels (courts) have the feeling that they can

¹⁹ See RAB No NW/Qf/g.1933 ‘Petition by Fulani residing in Bamenda Province’

just sell a cow and pay for what damages there may be'. This discriminatory practice has been summed up by Abdoulaye (interviewed 7/10/2013) as follows:

Once a cow has trespassed on their farms, even if what has been destroyed is not up to 20.000 Frs, when the matter is reported to the State counsel, you will be forced to pay a huge amount say 150,000 Frs. Generally, no evaluation is made, the State counsel just gives an arbitrary amount and we are obliged to pay. We have complained several times against this discriminatory practice but nothing has been done. We even prefer the DO because an assessment will be done by the Agricultural Department. But once the matter is reported to the State Counsel, the first thing is that you are thrown in the cell and you have to bail yourself out.

The protracted farmer-grazer conflicts in the area are not unconnected with the mistrust and disillusionment that now exist between farmers and herders, chiefs, administration and the court officials in Aghem. Under such prevailing circumstances, Omobowale and Olutayo (2010: 455) note elsewhere, that aggrieved clients can exert leverage by changing, or threatening to change, their patrons. This in most cases is orchestrated through corrupt practices and to paraphrase Balogun (2007: 248), bribery that was once a shameful deed appears to have become a legitimate way of conducting business nowadays. It is these corrupt practices that have resulted in the loss of trust and confidence in the administration, chiefs from their clients.

In the old, the women were usually mobilised to tilt the land for the chief and the chief showed his generosity by providing food and meat to his population (Kaberry 1952; Chilver and Kaberry 1967; Mbatndah 1994: 47). The secular authority of the king extended throughout his chiefdom and his legitimate authority was never challenged which would tantamount to treason, and punishable by death (Fisiy 1995). Because the Aghem women do not more trust their chiefs, they have stopped rendering services to them and even challenging their authority. The Aghem women also accuse the Fulani for carrying acts of atrocities on them and this has generated a lot of insecurity and mistrust between the two groups. 'In 2006 we protested against these people because we have lost hope in our chiefs' This has been summarised by Mua Delphine (interviewed 7/10/2013) as follows:

They are now Aku chiefs because they have violated the tradition. The chiefs do not more recognise the Aghem woman and the women have turn their backs on the chiefs as well and do

not more do such services again. It is of no use suffering for a chief who does not care about your welfare. Last year one of our six months pregnant daughters was raped by the Fulani when she went to harvest maize and she later on died. We cried all night long and the chiefs said nothing because they were bribed by the Fulani. The chiefs are the ones who have given land to the Fulani. When the Fulani entered Wum they were settled on land only on temporal basis. They did not own the land and the land was given on friendly basis and for free.

On the other hand, the Fulani do not more give-gifts to chiefs as was the case before since they do not get the protection of the chiefs any longer.

Because they have invaded our grazing lands, we have also suspended to give any gifts to the chiefs (very angry). Even if the chief request for assistance from me now, I will not give. I have made an enclosure round my compound and I consider myself as being in prison. Even the track that my cattle used to get to the stream has been blocked by the farmers.²⁰

It is this mistrust and lack of confidence that seems to be the cause of the so many land conflicts that we have discussed in chapter six.²¹

4.6 Why do Patron-Client Relationships Persist?

Patronage has been one of the means through which rent-seeking individuals or communities use to gain access to state resources in most of African regimes. Patronage has also become a strategy for lobbying for land by strangers and for state resources by communities. Again one of the reasons why land patronage has continued to exist is the fact that the chieftaincy institution which was believed will soon wither away as elected officials assume political power has not fully materialised (Fisiy 1995: 49), instead they have been co-opted into national politics and customary chiefs are still charting new spaces on the political landscape (Geschiere 1993). Furthermore, chiefs do not derive their authority solely from a material base but rather from ritual and moral authority supported and enhanced by a regulatory society (*opcit*).

²⁰ Idrissou Mohamadou interviewed 7/10/2013.

²¹ For instance, it is because of this mistrust that Mua has persistently wanted the Fulani to pay him the colossal sum of 500.00FRS for crop damages caused by the cattle of Idrissou. This also explains the so many tensions recorded between the Fulani and farmers and even the increasing hatred manifested on the traditional rulers and the state administration See interview with Mua 7/10/2013 it is for the same reason that Ebua Amisen abandoned his grazing land to the Fulani because he was afraid of his life and the danger of his cattle being killed by the Fulani.

Traditional rulers have established new alliances and social networks with local bureaucrats through whom they exchange land for money or for favours. The rich elite and bureaucrats now use their money to 'purchase' titles from traditional chiefs in exchange for land (Ndjio 2009: 79). Title-holding has always been an important aspect of social life. While in the past acquisition of titles was based on inheritance or personal achievements (in war, hunting, palace service) nowadays all men seem to crave for titles because of the prestige and respect which it brings to their holders (Simo 1995: 89). This trend clearly signals the commoditisation of cultural symbols and artefacts. Formerly, these were accorded mythic and ritual connotations, but have now been transformed into commodities and circulate in a broader social context (Fisiy 1995: 53; Nyamnjoh 2011: 709). Following Fon Fobuzee, most traditional rulers trade with these titles because they are poor and are unable to cope with the financial burden that tradition imposes on them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how power hierarchies that were invested in 'wealth in people' gradually shifted into 'wealth in land' with the inception of colonial rule. This created hierarchies of unequal social networks and exchanges between patrons and their clients. These networks have been exploited by land and political patrons not only as a means to maintain their positions and articulate their political ambitions but also as a means to channel resources from the state to their homelands but also to accumulate wealth. However, patron/client relationships have constantly been shifting and subject to renegotiations due to the economic, social and political transformations that have taken place in Cameroon. This has not only resulted in the formation of new networks and alliances but also in shifts in loyalty. The formalization of land rights through title deeds have led to a major shift in tenure system towards private ownership and has resulted in stiff competition between chiefs and state bureaucrats to gain control over resources. This has also brought chiefs into confrontation with state bureaucrats because of the peripheral role that the latter now play in land deals. This has pushed chiefs to indulge in corrupt practices and this has in no small ways contributed in the upsurge of the numerous land conflicts that are in the research area. Patron-client relationships are therefore seen as useful means towards wealth accumulation. In the next chapter, I examine how these patron/client relations have continued to generate contradictions within the frame work of a fragile Land Ordinances that was passed in 1974.

Chapter Five: Land Governance, Women, and the Politics of Dispossession

5.1 Introduction

The reunification of Cameroon in 1972 provided for the harmonisation of the reforms of the different land tenure systems since colonial times (Tegomoh 2013: 223). On 15 July 1974, the Cameroon Head of State enacted, by ordinance, laws that were expected to change the entire legal landscape on land ownership, control, and management (Fisiy 1996: 87). Cameroon's land tenure is therefore currently being regulated by three ordinances.¹ Apart from decree No 2005/481 of December 2005 to complete and supplement the 1974 Ordinances and 1976 decrees, Cameroon's land tenure regulation has not witnessed any significant and impacting reforms.² One of the main objectives of the Land Reform Act was to 'enhance farmer's access to credit and to ensure that an individual's productive resources are not diverted to unproductive, rent seeking behaviour, curb disputes among competing claimants, ensure the "rational" management of all lands and also to ensure farmers land rights' (Firmin-Sellers and Sellers 1999: 1116). Following the passage of this law, the state took over as 'guardian of all lands'.³

Unfortunately, apart from the fact that land has increasingly become a scarce and valuable resource, the land law seems not to have generated the agrarian revolution that was intended. This chapter is therefore intended to investigate how the 1974 law regulates land tenure in Cameroon with particular focus on the problems and loopholes that emanate from the application of the law and why the primary aim of the law has not been attained. The main questions here are: who are registering land under the new law and how are they using the law for different purposes

¹ See Ordinance No 74-1 to establish rules governing land tenure in Cameroon, Ordinance No74-2 to establish rules governing state land and Ordinance No 74-3 to establish expropriation procedures for 'public purposes' including the terms for expropriation passed in 1974. In 1976, three Decrees (No 76-156 to establish the conditions for obtaining land titles, No 76-166 to establish the terms and conditions for the management of national lands, and No76-167 to establish the terms and conditions for the management of private properties of the state) were signed to supplement the 1974 ordinances. See details in the 1974 Land Ordinances in Cameroon Decree No.76-165 of 27 April 1976 to establish the conditions for obtaining land certificates, amended and supplemented by Decree No. 2005/481 of 16 December 2005.

² Also see the 'National Engagement Strategy on Land Governance in Cameroon' of February 2014

³ Also see the 1994 Forestry Law No. 94/01 of 20th January 1994 and Decree No. 95/466-PM of 20th July 1995 on wild life. Both laws specify in Article 9 'special products' such as ebony, ivory, wild animal horns, endangered animal species and plants as 'protected' and the possession of whole or parts of these species is punishable by law. For more on this, see Ingram, (2014; 112) on statutory frameworks regulating Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs).

and what benefits accrue from it? What are the challenges and problems emanating from the application of the law? The chapter underscores the fact that customary law also exist side by side with the statutory provisions but it is not given the importance that it deserves within the system of land governance in Cameroon. The problems that flow from their coexistence have become even more acute in recent years (Twaib 1996: 81). In this chapter I argue that the present land law does not guarantee access to land for vulnerable groups such as women and the Fulani and this has contributed in fermenting the land conflicts in Cameroon. In addition, the non inclusion of customary rights in the law and the manner in which the state has dealt with customary tenure leaves much to be desired (*ibid*). Put the other way round, the absence of ownership right restricts the vulnerable groups from accessing land certificates which by this law is the only authentic proof of a private property (Sone 2012b: 90), and this has inherently kept rural users in perpetual conflicts and poverty. In support of the above assertion, the chapter discusses the policy of land expropriation from local communities for ‘public purposes’ by the state and the principle of compensation that have been contentious issues in the country. While most vulnerable groups are alienated from their ancestral lands through this policy, it also illustrates the precarious and chaotic nature of land governance in Cameroon. Particular provisions of the law have been extrapolated and analysed to show the dilemma that prevails in Cameroon, and Wum Central provides an interesting area of study because of its farmer/grazer relations and matrilineal system of inheritance. I use case studies largely from the area to emphasise and show in different ways how the law contributes to conflicts in Cameroon.

5.2 Towards the 1974 Land Ordinances

The issue of land titling has been a subject of debate among scholars for some time now. Some have been in favour of titling for various reasons why others see it as unprofitable business. I therefore present different views that have been expressed by proponents in favour of land titling and those who are against it. To begin with, land titling takes its roots from the colonial period and that has shaped the process of land governance in most of post colonial Africa. At the beginning of the 20th century, African colonial states were introduced to European imported land ordinances and reforms (Bennet and Vermeulen 1980: 206). As (Ndege 2012: 20) argues, the colonialists saw land itself as abundant, ‘underutilised’ or ‘unoccupied’ and therefore considered as

something to be appropriated and owned by individuals for capitalist accumulation and for the production of cash crops for the metropolitan markets. This was further accentuated by the idea that ownership to land rights was only through a title deed and so all unregistered land was considered 'unoccupied'. This in most cases provided the opportunity for the financially viable and politically influential elites to grab most of the 'unoccupied' land. White (2013: 38) however argues that what (was) and is being called 'idle' land in reality often belongs to the community and is governed by customary rights.

Other scholars in support of land titling contend that customary tenure system appears to be fluid and ambiguous in its understanding and implementation. Furthermore, the promulgation of land law in most countries in Africa was based on the premise that customary land tenure is complex because multiple users hold rights to a single resource and the Western notion of private property rights cannot accommodate this complexity.⁴ In addition, customary law was seen as archaic and could not meet up with the exigencies of modernisation. This tended to view customary arrangements as backward while promoting formal titling (Amanor 2007: 33). While the latter were perceived to be in keeping with the demands of modern society, particularly in the public and commercial spheres supported by the state; customary tenure has often been considered to be simple, dynamic, flexible, equitable and linked to societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bennett and Vermeulen 1980: 206; Amanor 2007: 33). However, other still hold the view that despite its ambiguity and complexity, customary tenure system is being upheld by most communities because they consider it inevitable as it still reflects the traditional African culture.

One of the reasons in support of titling has been the idea that land registration will ensure security over the private property of individuals and will also curb conflicts over land rights. In support of this assertion, Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999: 1116) note that 'the government of Cameroon hoped that titling will end disputes among competing claimants and will preclude future disputes because titling will ensure that an individual's productive resources are not diverted to unproductive, rent seeking behaviour'.

⁴ For example, women, men, and traditional authorities may all hold rights to a single piece of land. Women may hold usufruct rights to cultivate food crops, men hold usufruct rights to plant trees crops; and traditional authorities have the right to harvest the 'fruits of the forest'-wild game, timber amongst others. Also see

Land titling, it has been argued, is to a large extent the result of the liberalisation of land markets, a policy adopted in the early 1990s that has contributed to the commoditisation of land and other natural resources (Olanya 2012: 6). Proponents argue that land is just another factor of production and should be placed at the disposal of those who can afford it and only through land titling can there be an agricultural boom. In line with this, Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999: 1118) note that ‘with the passage of the 1974 Land Ordinance, Cameroon government hoped to encourage the formation of an agrarian middle class, a group of farmers capable of managing large mechanised farms in the rural areas’. As they continue, it was hoped that private title will enhance individual tenure security [...] and to give farmers access to credit markets making it possible for farmers to invest. To this end, ‘the ownership of land will facilitate access to credit, give the poor more voice in the political arena, contribute to higher investments in children’s education, and thereby arrest the intergenerational transmission of poverty’ (Elhadary and Obeng-odoom 2012: 60). By implication, land has become a veritable source of income for the rich both at national and local levels where people can make a lot of profit.

However, critics have argued that titling only favours a tiny segment of the population and rather inevitably disinherits a substantial portion of the population who are usually women, migrants and youths and has tended to increase instead of decreasing overall insecurity of tenure. As Goheen (1988: 92) opines, ‘although the explicit purpose of the land Ordinances was to protect the small farmer by giving security of tenure, which, in turn, should increase production, the actual effect has been an increasing concentration of land and other resources in the hands of an emerging rural elite-an elite which is almost exclusively male’. Statistics on access to land titles by Fisy (1992) reveals that women continue to experience unequal access to land as compared to men despite the fact that women form 52% of the total population of the country.

Others see titling as prohibitive and unattractive because they do not offer increased access to credit; the process is very expensive and do not allow the applicant to respect customary obligations.⁵ For instance, the transfer of authority and control over land from local chiefs to state bureaucrats does not only weakened the power base of chiefs but also has a negative effect on the traditions and customs of indigenous people, and this has been another source of power struggles

⁵ See ____ (2014) National Engagement Strategy (NES) on land governance in Cameroon

between local authorities and the state.⁶ While there is no end to these debates, they however help towards our understanding of the conditions under which the land law emanated.

5.2.1 The Basic Tenets the 1974 Land Ordinances

To better understand how the 1974 law regulates tenure in Cameroon, it is important to examine the general conception of the law and its provisions. In doing so, I hope to identify the loopholes in the law and how it has resulted into conflicts from its inception to application between the state and other land users. As I noted in the introductory part of this chapter, colonial conquest and land policy enabled European settlers to acquire for themselves large tracts of land, together with the introduction of commercial crops. To achieve this aim, land was generally classified as ‘occupied’ and ‘unoccupied’.⁷ This provided a leeway for the Europeans to appropriate the ‘unoccupied’ lands for their own interests. It is within this same logic of land occupancy that the 1974 law was formulated. First, the law recognises three categories of lands in Cameroon: 1) Public property 2) Private property and 3) National Reserves.⁸ Public property is land that the state has already appropriated from local communities for public utilities often considered as ‘unoccupied’ and private land refers to land that an individual(s) or local communities have acquired a title deed on the said piece of land and considered as ‘occupied’ lands. National reserves include ‘virgin’ lands, game reserves and sanctuaries, national parks, zoos, botanical gardens, protected forest, water sources, highways and groves. By the provisions of the law, all lands whether occupied or unoccupied are mere parcels of national land. Like in most of Africa, all land in Cameroon belongs to the state and as Kea (2006: 132) also confirms in a study conducted in Gambia ‘the state owns the land and the people have usufructuary rights to it.’

The division of land into these three categories has generated serious conflicts between local communities and the state. First, communities argue that the fact that land is not put into effective use does not mean that the land is not owned by individual lineages or communities. The basis of

⁶ By Decree No 77/24J of 15 July 1977, all ‘traditional rulers/chiefs’ have been turned into auxiliaries of the administration and are therefore accountable to the Senior Divisional Officer of their area of jurisdiction. For details on this see Fisy 1995, pp.52.

⁷ Within the ambit of the law, ‘unoccupied land simply refers to land that is not in use or is not owned by individuals or communities, while ‘occupied’ lands are thought to be land that is in effective use, often seen in terms of investments, construction or the availability of landed assets such as crops fruit trees etc.

⁸ See chapter One: General Provisions of the 1974 land law.

local argument has been that, by their customary laws, all lands have landlords, though they might not be occupied. Still in line with this, Liversage (2010: 3) contends that it is increasingly recognised that, while some land may be underutilised, very little is not owned, vacant or unused. According to Olanya (2012: 34), ‘the perception that land is abundant is misleading because “idle land” is as an important source of livelihood for the rural poor, which provides them with resources for subsistence farming, such as access to edible wild plants, grazing, water and firewood.’

Secondly, in most of the Grassfields chiefdom, land is communally owned and each community or chiefdom has precise boundaries and maps which mean that a village is not only a social reality but also a geographical location and therefore ought not to be considered as ‘unoccupied’. Most communities in Cameroon have continued to resist and challenge the idea that their lands are ‘vacant and ‘unoccupied’. As Fisiy (1992: 120) puts it, ‘the customary guardians of ancestral lands have continued to behave as if such law had never been enacted and have kept on respecting local principles of land tenure in their communities’. Consequently, there is often a clash between customary law and statutory provisions over land rights and management.

According to customary tenure, land rights were based on one’s membership and kinship ties in a community and this gave full rights (usufructs or allodia) to people, but the new law has instituted the notion of land registration and a land certificate has become the only official document of real property rights.⁹ Implicitly, Cameroon’s official land legislation does not recognise land ownership claimed under customary law any more. From a first glance at the legal provisions contained in the 1974 Ordinances, one gets the impression that the customary guardians of ancestral lands have been completely marginalised. The state ignores them and deals directly with persons in effective possession of landed property. It guarantees to the latter free enjoyment and disposal of their lands (Fisiy 1996: 121). That is, the land title remains the only legal justification of land ownership. This therefore nullifies the concept of land rights based on ancestral land and gives the right for anybody to have a land title even outside his own ancestral land and without the consent of the chief (Tegomoh 2013: 225). By its provisions, any plot of land whose self-declared owner does not have a land title belongs *ipso facto* to the national property of the

⁹ See Article 1 of the 1974 Land Ordinances.

Cameroon state even if the owner has occupied that piece of land for centuries (Firmin-Sellers and Sellers 1999: 1117). Following the law, most people who are unable to register their land have become frustrated as one of the informants expresses: ‘It is very sensitive because you are using the land; you even have the feeling that it is your land, you have developed it yet you do not own it. It is like a deliberate attempt to make that law difficult for people to acquire the land certificates’.¹⁰ This renders vulnerable communities including smallholder farmers, women and indigenous people who are not able to obtain land titles for several reasons and who are claiming land ownership under customary law even more exposed to various forms of land rights abuses perpetrated by rich individuals, large companies and even land administrators. The situation has been described by Nsoh Robert as follows:

The indigenous people are particularly threatened because of the legislations that we have in Cameroon. Because it is only when your land is registered and you have a land title then can we say you are on your land but if the land is not registered, you are on ‘National Land’ it can be ‘occupied or unoccupied’ national land.

In its article 11(3), the law states that ‘applications concerning lands which are entirely unoccupied or unexploited shall be *inadmissible* under the procedure. Such applications shall be made in accordance with the procedure for grants.’¹¹ Another loophole with the law is the fact that it does not recognise property rights for those who were born after the law was promulgated. For instance, the law only recognises property rights for those who were born *before* 5th of August 1974 and are illegible to apply for a land certificate.¹² For any Cameroonian who was born *after* the law was promulgated, it is illegal to apply for a land certificate.¹³ Consequently, all those who

¹⁰ Lawyer Nsoh Robert interviewed (Morning Safari 2013).

¹¹ Grants are special concessions that one has to apply for before s/he can be allowed to use or occupy such lands. This is in a situation where the state may want to reverse land to a community. Unfortunately, most communities have hardly succeeded to get back their ancestral land. the renown case where the state has given back land to the indigenes is the Bakweri community.

¹² Article 9 (a) of Ordinance No 74 of July 6th 1974 is very clear on that and it reads that ‘customary communities, members thereof, or any other person of Cameroonian nationality, on condition that his occupancy or the exploitation predates 5 August 1974, date of publication of Ordinance No 74 of 6 July 1974 to establish rules and regulations governing land tenure are illegible to obtain a title deed’

¹³ Article 11(12) however stipulates that applications for lands occupied or exploited after 5th August 1974 shall also follow the procedure for grants unless it is established by the Land Consultative board that the development was preceded by a non convincing occupancy or exploitation implemented before 5 august 1974. The Land Consultative Board is made up of 7 members with the District head as the chair, Sub delegates for Agriculture, Lands, a surveyor, the traditional ruler and two notables .Also see interview with Theodore Nde Private Secretary to the Divisional

were born after the above date, cannot acquire land titles, even in an event where he is a trustee of an inheritance; is not allowed to obtain land certificates for its property in his name.¹⁴ 'I faced such a problem when I wanted to matriculate a piece of land in Bambui. There was some opposition and I had to negotiate and pay 500.000Fr for the village not to indicate that I did not own the land before 1974. These are all things which make it so difficult. When I paid for the opposition, the land title was granted to me.'¹⁵ Actually, for Cameroonians that were born after the promulgation of the law, they can only have title deeds through a join application with someone who was born before that date or simply cannot apply for the certificate. Because of these constraints, some family members that were born before the law was enforced have used this advantage to acquire titles on parcels of land owned by younger family members (especially successors) who are not allowed by the law to apply for title deeds. This has led to struggles over land claims between family members and also resulted into serious conflicts and land dispossession as the anecdote below shows (Sone 2012b). I cite the example of Kum George of Naikom to substantiate this position.

Following the rules of matrilineal inheritance, Kum George was crowned the successor to his late uncle in 2004 and landed property was handed to him by the Mua family covering an estimated surface area of 9ha including a raffia palm bush. Kum George decided to sell parcels of the land in order to secure a visa for South Africa. By the time he left for South Africa in 2009, he has sold over 6ha of the land to non indigenes without the consent of his family members but with the connivance of his father's sister-Koi Patience. These people have long acquired title deeds on these pieces of land with the chief of Kesu as signatory. When the other members of the family learnt about the land deals, they protested to the chief to no avail as the chief himself could not revoke the land titles. Today, the land is out of the control of the family and has become the private property of the purchasers.¹⁶

Officer for Wum Central 08/10/2013 . What they do is that they buy the land; deliberately forget about the documents that they used in buying the land then misrepresent saying that they bought the land before 1974 and there is often no person to challenge that. That is why the same piece of land can be sold to more than ten people.

¹⁴ See article 10 of Land Ordinances of 6 July 1974.

¹⁵ Kah Muam interviewed 20/10/2013.

¹⁶ Fon Mbambi interviewed 12/12/2013.

One of the problems with the law is the fact that the state of Cameroon gives credence to patriliney over matriliney. Put the other way round, although the land law allows for women to have title deeds, the state civil status recognises the father of the child (Patrilineal descent) and not that of the mother and customary law does not permit women to acquire title deeds in their names (Sone 2012b: 97). In most cases nephews who inherit the property of their uncles as we have seen in the case cited above, do not take care of the widows and the children. Some actually dispose of the land that they have inherited and this has generated a lot of conflicts between nephews who succeed their uncles and the children of the deceased which is contrary to the roles of matrilineal system of succession. Among the Aghem, and Bu there is a matrilineal ideology that historically allowed a woman to gain access to land from her maternal kin prior to her marriage. The system also gave an opportunity for daughters to inherit land from their mothers (Davidson 1988: 17) but today the land law does not recognise such practices. In matrilineal societies such as Aghem and Bu, people are therefore forced by such legislation to look for means to circumvent traditional practices and ensure that the property they have acquired is bequeath to their children when they will not be alive. By implication, the system of succession and property inheritance that used to move from uncle to nephew is being altered and challenged. This does not only compromise women's access to land but there are conflicting interests over succession and land rights.

5.3 Traditional Rulers facing the State

The control and management of land in pre-colonial times has always been under the trusteeship of chiefs and this gave them enormous powers and was also a means for them to accumulate wealth. This has been discussed extensively in chapter four. Control over land after independence then shifted from the local to the state and this was reaffirmed in the 1974 Land Reform Act which officially abolished customary tenure systems and introduced individual, state and national lands (Moritz 2006: 113). The occupation of the public sphere by state bureaucrats has given them the opportunity to manoeuvre, manipulate and organise themselves in ways that the local people and their chiefs have become powerless. At the sub divisional level, the authority over the control of land resides with the *Sous-prefets* indicating that they are gaining more and more control over the land (Moritz 2006: 113; Kuba 2006: 58). In this way, the government has attempted to exercise control and political power over people and their economic production

(Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 138). The struggle over property is essentially related to a struggle over power relations and political influence. Within the current dispensation, the chiefs feel that the state bureaucrats are now benefitting from their land (Sone 2012b: 91).¹⁷ The shift in authority over the control of land has been a source of conflicts between the state and chiefs. Fon Mbambi does not hide his feelings when he says;

They behave as if the land is owned by them. Just because they have been given the opportunity to be in the Land Consultative Board as the Chairmen and anything about land is referred to them. They look corrupt and very dishonest and take a lot of money from people.

The mistrust is caused by the fact that the law does not recognise the authority of the traditional rulers and customary law. While chiefs admit that the land now belongs to the state of some sort, they still lay claims over the land as the rightful owners. As most of the chiefs of the Grassfield maintain, Fon Mbambi has continued to insist that he is the owner and custodian of the land of Aghem and not the state. He puts it succinctly in this way:

As the Paramount ruler, I have a say in all the land in Aghem. That is why in 2004 during the Famer –grazer problem they all gathered in my compound when women complained that grazers have invaded their farm lands. It was not only Zongakwo women, others also came from Kesu and Zongafeu and so I had to manage to swim through. I actually closed the gap.

Their land claims are legitimate more importantly because ‘inhabitants of the communal area still refer most land matters and requests to traditional leaders’ (Spierenburg 2005: 120). Most land cases are still tried by the traditional rulers although according to the law, the authority to handle land matters resides with the D.O. Unfortunately, most of the Divisional Officers are unable to handle land issues because they come from those regions where chieftaincies were a colonial creation but are sent to administer local communities with established customary chiefs (Fisiy 1995: 52). The local communities even consider government administrators as strangers and intruders (*ibid*).

¹⁷ Also see Konings 1996,pp.335 and Fisiy 1995pp.52 on the Bakweri Land Claims where there is an on-going conflict between the Bakwerians and state administrators . the Latter have been accused of grabbing and selling land that the Cameroon Development Corporation –CDC has given back to the Bakweri community.

On the other hand, the law makes it possible for Traditional rulers to collaborate with the rich to amass community land, thereby depriving the local farmers of land to live on (Sone 2012b: 92). In a way, chiefs are now being held accountable by members of the community as the ones who endorse the transfer of communal lands to private property. This has often resulted into serious conflicts between chiefs and the local elite who have constantly accused them of giving away the land for money. As it is with all other traditional rulers elsewhere in Cameroon, Fon Mbambi of Aghem finds himself in a web of entanglements on how to respect the customary tenure of his chiefdom as the custodian of communal land and how to forge ahead as a member of the Land Consultative Board. In these circumstances, the Fon while preaching the notion of communality also facilitates the acquisition of land deeds in his chiefdom. He therefore mediates between tradition and state law.

Realising that the land has slipped off their hands, most chiefs have also decided to acquire title deeds on land that was hitherto owned by the community as private property. 'I have two land certificates in Aghem town and that is my private property'.¹⁸ As we see in the case of the Fon of Aghem, he has even acquired title deeds in his name and signed those belonging to some of his subjects and non indigenes. 'I am paid for every title deed that is issued in Aghem'. This does not only weaken the idea of communal ownership of land but also the social bonds that have always existed between chiefs and members of their communities. This suggests that the chiefs have therefore not only lost respect among their people but also the power they wield. Using a study conducted in Northern Cameroon, Moritz (2006: 113) seizes up the situation as follows:

Elsewhere in Cameroon traditional rulers have adopted different strategies to remain relevant in land deals. They now compel individuals seeking land titles to pay royalties or 'put the Fon's bag' before he or his representatives can sign the form for a title deed. Traditionally, a person requesting the piece of land has to give a 'bundle of zinc' to the palace. The equivalence of zinc is considered to be 200.000Fr. He also has to give food and drinks to the notables and the sum of 25.000Fr.

¹⁸ Fon Mbambi III interviewed 12/12/2013

Fon Mbambi is not an isolated case as in some chiefdom what is given to the chief is much higher.¹⁹ He acknowledged having signed that of Cho Cyprian, while the Regent of Kesu, Henry Muam, has been signatory to the land acquired by the Member of Parliament - Hon Wallang Richard at Bu Road, Ni John Fru Ndi at Binjang, the *Sarki* of the Fulani on land amounting to some 130ha. This has therefore placed traditional leaders at daggers drawn with the local communities. The law also makes it difficult for land to be reclaimed once a title deed has been issued. The only authority that can order for the cancellation of a title deed is the Minister of Land Tenure and State Property.²⁰

5.4 Land Acquisition for ‘Public Purposes’ and the Politics of Dispossession

The Cameroon land law stipulates that all land belongs to the state and it is referred to as ‘national lands’. By implication, the state can expropriate and appropriate parcels of land for ‘public purposes’ when need arises.²¹ By the same token, any individual(s) or communities can be disposed from their ancestral land if the government wants to carry out ‘development projects’ on a particular piece of land. If it is ‘occupied’ land, the present occupants will be evicted and the law provides that those displaced have the full right to financial compensations. However, the same law makes it clear that such compensations shall only be for investments²² ‘development’ that have been carried out on the piece of land at the time of eviction. This law raises a lot of concerns particularly with regards to vulnerable groups such as pygmies, women and grazers who very often have the land but hardly do they invest on it. In most instances, they are evicted from their ancestral lands without compensations on grounds that no ‘investments’ were found on the land at the time of eviction.

The pygmies have their habitat which is the forest and they rely on it for their survival. The forest is unoccupied and what is occupied is where they have their habitat. So too are the (Fulani) Mbororo, where they occupy is their land and the rest is National land. When you are

¹⁹ Evidence from the field indicates that in rural areas they are given scotch whiskey and about 10.000frs to 25.000frs, while in Urban centres like in Mankon, the ‘Fon’s bag is 100.000frs. It therefore becomes difficult for the chief to tell his people not to sell land when they accuse him of also reaping from land sales.

²⁰ See Article 20 of the 1974 Land Ordinances amended and supplemented by Decree No.2005/481 of 16 December 2005.

²¹ For example, land may be appropriated by the state for the construction of public schools, hospitals, roads, and other public utilities.

²² See details on the modalities for compensation in Article 13 of Land Ordinances 6th of 1974

on national land you can be disposed on that land at any time. If you have any development on land that is national land then that land can be expropriated upon for another use and there will be compensation but that can only be given to you for the development that you have put on the land. In which case, it will only be the houses and food crops.²³

Even in cases where there was effective recognition of the indigenous peoples customary laws, these people would not necessarily be fully protected from expropriation for needs of public utility (Socpa2010: 558). I also gathered from our informants that some of the land compulsorily acquired for ‘public purposes’ are being sold to non-indigenes and foreigners and this is seen as contrary to the law and spirit of acquisition of the land for public purposes’ and therefore illegal.²⁴ The law does not take into consideration the land rights of marginalised and vulnerable people.²⁵ At this juncture, I present some case studies on how the loopholes in the law have not only dispossessed communities from their ancestral land but also generated conflicts among land users in the area.

Case Study One

In the early 1960s, the government of Cameroon expropriated 500ha of land from the Aghem community for the establishment of an agro-industrial project known as the Wum Area Development Authority (WADA). The main objective for the establishment of WADA was to ‘boost food production in the area, curb rural-urban migration and also provide jobs for the youths in the area’ (Fonjong 2014: 16-17). Over 100 Aghem families were evicted from their ancestral land at the expense of this project without any compensation from the state. Until 1984 when the country fell into economic crisis, WADA was a heavy producer of milk, rice and maize within the northwest region of Cameroon. Considering that cattle is also one of the main economic activities in this area (especially because of the heavy presence of Fulani herders), a dairy production scheme was also installed at WADA where milk was processed for local and international

²³ Fon Nsoh is the National Coordinator of the NGO, ‘Movement for the Right to Food’ Cameroon interviewed 12/10/2013

²⁴ Also see Ayee et al, 2011 pp, 15 and a petition from Mankon to the Cameroon Government, Also see the accusations by youths of Bakweri against their chief for selling out the land reclaimed from the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) to strangers <http://cameroonjournal.com/page565.html> accessed 22/4/2014

²⁵ Those considered to be marginalized or vulnerable are the Fulani and Pygmies who are either seen as strangers or are being pushed out of their ancestral lands. This categorization however raises a lot of controversies because it is difficult to say which group or community is vulnerable or not since all land now belongs to the state.

markets.²⁶ When the country slipped into economic crisis and the government could not more service its external and internal debts and was also unable to maintain this agro-industrial plant, the WADA project collapsed. Workers were retrenched and others redeployed into different government services, the equipment and installations of WADA went into ruins and most of the workers have never received their retrenchment benefits till today. The land ceded to the state for this project is the ‘fertile crescent’ (Menchum Valley) situated about six kilometres away from Wum town along the Wum-Zhoa high way. The valley favours the production of cereals such as maize, cocoyams, beans roundnuts and vegetables and so most of the villagers depended on it for their livelihoods and survival.

After the land was ‘seized’ by the state, the population that was pushed to the margins could not go back to their land because the land was declared public property. Since then several attempts by the Aghem traditional ruler and his Councillors to regain control over ‘their’ land have failed and many have died landless and homeless. Today, the land is under the control of the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) for Menchum who gives out parcels of the land to Aghem women on lease basis. ‘If you want to cultivate in the WADA estate, you have to apply to the government. All this land that you see used to be our land but now that the government has taken it away from us, we have no choice but to pay before we work if you really want to work there.’²⁷ I tried to find out why the state did not compensate for taking away the land, Emmerencia said, ‘it is the chief who can answer because we know that the chiefs here like money a lot. If they received money from the government we will not know. That is why you see them dying like that’. She added. According to the stipulations of the law, compensations were not made because they held informal rights and hence were considered not liable.

Case Study Two

The site selected for the Wum Cattle Market was allotted by Fon Mbambi III to the Wum Municipal Council at no cost. Unfortunately wrangling between farmers and grazers has made it

²⁶ See Wache, F ‘on Mount Mary Anglophones stand 20years after the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) Buea <http://www.franciswache.com/2013/04/on-mount-mary-anglophones-stand.html#sthash.2LC4jAWA.dpuf> accessed 18/03/2014

²⁷ Met Emmerencia Youh at the DO’s office when she came to report a Fulani herder whose cattle has destroyed her crops in the farm at Naikom, interviewed 07/10/2013.

difficult for the market to go operational (Dze-Ngwa 2013). When I met Fon Mbambi, he was not very happy with the treatment that he has received from the Mayor of the municipality. The Fon has silently been expecting that the Mayor will ‘reason’ and then compensate him for the land, a thing which the Mayor is probably not reflecting on. Like in other instances including land that his father gave out for the establishment for schools, churches and other government services for free, the Fon has made desperate attempts with little or no successes to get back most of the land.

My father gave it for free in those days and so I could not change the situation now since they have already implanted themselves on the land. I have been able to squeeze out a little. Like in the case of the cattle market now, I gave the place to the council at no cost, nothing at all! We just went there and I demarcated that they should build here. Luckily, my son has come up as a Major. I hope that one day he might think of me and do something in compensation for the land.

Case Study Three

This particular case is not found in the area of research but it is important for several reasons. Firstly it shows how a community can ‘fight back’ and reclaim their land rights and secondly, it reflects the daily occurrences and challenges that other people in Cameroon go through and shows the weaknesses of the land law and how the state is unable to keep to its own commitments by not respecting the provisions of its own law.²⁸ In 1981, the government expropriated 480 ha of land from the Mankon²⁹ community for the construction of an airport. In the build up to this project, 278 families from Mankon lost their farm lands and about 50 families were displaced. The government carried out an evaluation on crops and property belonging to the members of the community which amounted to over 2 billion Francs. This period also coincided with the economic adversities that the country was facing. In the light of this situation, the people wrote several petitions to the government threatening to go back to their land if the government would not compensate them for the loss of their ancestral land and property. All the people got from the government were mere promises and after serious protests and pressure, only about 10% of the amount has been paid to selected individuals. After waiting for over 25 years, most of the community members have gone back ‘illegally’ to occupy unused portions of their ancestral land

²⁸ Also seen the Bakweri Land Claim Commission in Konings (2001)

²⁹ Mankon is a Fondom located some 65 KM from Wum where the research took place.

and most have died without being compensated. An airport was after all constructed on this piece of land but the government turned it into a military barracks; something which has angered the population as they do not see the benefits of such a project. Another issue which angered the people is the fact that the airport was given a different name (Bamenda Airport) instead of the official gazetted name-Ntambeng where the airport is located and stated in the presidential decree expropriating the land.³⁰

Case Study Four

Bouba Hawe is a (Mbororo) Fulani and the Assistant Secretary to the Mbororo Social, Cultural and Development Association (MBOSCUDA).³¹ She is among the few Fulani that earned a University degree and has been working with this association in an effort to empower the Mbororo girl-child. Bouba recounts the difficulties her parents went through to obtain a title deed on the piece of land they now occupy. According to Bouba, the difficulties stemmed from the fact that they are being considered as ‘strangers’ and each time her father applied for a title deed, he was always referred to the local chief who was always reluctant and not comfortable signing his documents for the title deed. ‘My father struggled for two decades before he could obtain a land certificate for the land where we are settled in Bambui. It took almost all that he had to get a land certificate’. The eviction of the Fulani from their lands has continued in Cameroon unabated and this is wide spread all over the country. On the 6th of April 2014, over 300 Mbororos (Fulani) were evicted from the land they have been occupying since the 1920s in Banjah by state bureaucrats and about 46 ha of their land seized and handed over to the Catholic University of

³⁰ See decree creating an Airport in a place called Natmbeng and petition to the Cameroon government by the Mankon Traditional Council .Similar name changes have brought about serious problems in Ghana between the state and the Communities of Afram and Kwahu see, Ayee et al 2011,pp.9 Also see letter of 29 July 2012 addressed to the SDO Mezam by Fo Angwafo III on the ‘ illegal’ boundary between Mankon and Mendakwe and Letter from Mankon Elite of 6th October 2012 in support of the Fon of Mankon.

³¹ Interviewed 20/11/2013 : Also note that , MBOSCUDA Stands for "Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association". It was conceptualized in1987 and officially recognised by the Government of the Republic of Cameroon in accordance with Law No 90/053 of December 19, 1992 and receipt of declaration of association No. RDA/06/BAPP of 21st October1992 as a non-partisan, not-for-profit social-cultural development Association. More on MBOSCUDA and its activities can also be found on www.mboscuda.org

Bamenda on grounds that the said area is situated within the Bamenda City and so not suitable for cattle rearing.³²

The different case studies show the weaknesses of the law and the over bearing influence of the state in land expropriation but equally generate anti-government sentiments. Section 11 of the 1974 Ordinance No. 74-3 of 6 July 1974 provides that any claim for compensation resulting from expropriation should be forwarded to the *Prefet* of the Division to the Minister of Lands and State Property. Here again, the channels are all administrative, the final decision on the applicant's claim being reserved for the minister.³³ It is not surprising that most politicians in these areas have always used their land claims against President Biya's Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) party during campaign rallies.³⁴ In spite of this, the alienation of indigenous peoples from the right to use and enjoy their lands has continued.

The acquisition of a title deed goes through a series of processes and modalities that makes it difficult for the poor to engage into. The land law is not only complicated, cumbersome and expensive for the common man to follow but takes a lot of time.³⁵ This has been summarised by Nsoh Robert as follows:

The assessment on the use or occupation of land is done by the Land Consultative Board. The law makes the budget of the Land Consultative Board to be factored into the budget of the Ministry of Lands and State Property but that is not done. Rather, the board requests money from the applicant before an assessment can be done on the piece of land. There is no fixed amount for land inspection but is allowed to the members of the board to do what they like. This is the same scenario nationwide. This makes it very costly and the traditional authorities too need money to come and justify the land and after spending the money unjustifiably the surveyor is expected to come to the site and survey before the pillars are planted. The applicant has to pay for the survey fee and also has to independently negotiate with the surveyor to come and do the job. There is no fix amount and so it depends on your bargaining power with the surveyor. At the end of the day,

³² See 'Eviction of The Fulani from their ancestral land at Banjah'.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47545&Cr=cameroon&Cr1#.U1fDsCjtA5g> Accessed 15th /4/2014

³³ See Section 12 of the 1974 Land Ordinance.

³⁴ The Present Mayor of the Bamenda II Council, Balick Fidelis Awa castigated the government for failing to pay the compensation promised several years ago and so called on the population to give a sanction vote by voting against the ruling Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM).

³⁵ Fo Fobuzee, is a member of the National Land Review Commission and Traditional Ruler of Chomba interviewed 8th November 2013

for one to have a land certificate in Bamenda one must be ready to spend at least 500.000fr or more. Families need money to educate their children, take care of their medical bills and other important expenses and that is why they think that to spend this money to register the land is huge waste³⁶. It is even illegal to apply for a land title now.

The entire law does not give provision for customary tenure, rather it abrogates previous laws concerning the procedure and functioning of the land registration and the registration of traditional land rights.³⁷ According to the provisions of the law, two rival claimants over a piece of land have the right to plant land markers (pillars) pending the judgment of the Land Consultative Board giving room for unnecessary expenses and corrupt practices.³⁸

5.5 The 1974 Law Ordinances: Women and Vulnerable Groups as Losers

Both statutory and customary laws do not recognise women and vulnerable populations (Logo and Bikie 1998). As Larsen (2007: 79) opines, customary laws are grounded in given cultural understandings, and as such they also include their own system of discrimination. One concern when considering customary rights is precisely that different rights and responsibilities are usually associated with different categories of persons, for instance persons differentiated by gender and /age (*ibid*). For example, women at best have users' rights which are in turn dependent on the nature of their relationship with men either as husbands, fathers, brothers, (male relatives) or her status as a daughter, sister, mother or wife (Englert and Daley 2008: 1; Fonjong 2012: 24;Larsen 2007: 78). As Sone (2012b: 97) notes, female farmers have been caught between cultural restrictions that do not allow women to own land and the inability to own land under the expensive and prolonged procedure stated by the 1974 Land Ordinances. There is, for instance, a gap between the restrictive customary rules on women's rights to own land and the statutory provisions that propagate equal rights to own land in the country (*ibid*).

In Cameroon, the ratio of women involved in food production is ten women to one man (MDG 2012). Despite their numerical strength, rarely do they have adequate access to land nor make

³⁶ At the initial stage, the applicant has to pay 25.000FRS to the DO, after the approval, he pays 70.000FRS as the inspection fee to the DO, Then 25.000FRS to the surveyor,25.000FRS each to members of the commission,50.000FRS to the chief of the village. Each pillar is evaluated at 5000FRS; the value of the land is negotiable. The applicant also has to 'facilitate' the easy movement of the officials to field. Each boundary neighbor must be given 'something' as well.

³⁷ See for instance Decree No. 66-307-COR of 25 November 1966 on the registration of traditional land rights

³⁸ See article 17 of Decree No 2005/481 of 16 December 2005 being an amendment of the 1974 law.

major decisions pertaining to the allocation and usage of such property (Fonjong 2012: 24). Some traditional practices that exclude women in issues of inheritance and also not allowing women to be in certain places have been recorded in most parts of West Africa, (Englert and Daley 2008: x). For instance, in most parts of Cameroon, the girl child is not allowed to inherit property and this restriction on the female child gives a lot of rights to the male child who does not only have control over landed property but can dispose of it without the consent of the female child. Like in most of Africa, customary law with particular reference to inheritance states that 'land ownership is the prerogative of men and land rights are inherited from father to son' and in this way, the girls are therefore excluded from inheritance of family land (McAuslan 2010: 117). This practice of gender inequality is most pathetic for widows and orphans with disturbing consequences of property grabbing from them by male relatives of the deceased husbands or fathers. Again, women do not have ownership rights over land and so reside on land more for social security purposes than for agricultural production (Aliber et al 2009: 436). Consequently, this marginalisation prevents them from having access to secure livelihoods and basic necessities which have kept rural women in persistent poverty.

5.6 Closing the Gaps: Towards a new Land Reform?

The outcome of both customary and statutory laws is that they rather generate their own inherent contradictions. One of the fundamental problems of the 1974 Land Reform Act is the fact that it is not *inclusive* enough. What should be done in order to take into account the interests of other land users that have been left out by the law? 'We also came out with pronouncements that the women, Fulani, the pygmies and other minority groups should have access to land and also stop nomadic life style and should begin to settle down. A good number of them are already doing that' (Fon Fobuzee). The ability to negotiate landownership depends mostly on people's socio-economic and political power in any given society be it in the gender, class or tribal domains. Power relations between the rich and the poor help to shape the forms and terms in which negotiations over landownership can be effected (Sone 2012b: 91). Thus, some of the influential and wealthy farmers (elite) and even herders have acquired land certificates which have given them long-lasting security and control over their production means, and have encouraged substantial

investments and sustainable land use.³⁹ The spirit of the 1974 Land Ordinances was to ensure that everyone is entitled to the guarantee of ownership, but this guarantee is contradicted by what obtains in the area, where statistics from the Divisional Delegation of Land Tenure and State property reveal that less than 5% of peasant farmers have acquired land titles.⁴⁰ 'The majority of titles to land have been awarded to state elites (politicians and bureaucrats) and businessmen' (Firmin-Sellers and Sellers 1999: 1118) who have the financial means to procure title deeds. The role of domestic elites in land acquisition has been discussed in detail in chapter 7.

As a means to come out of this quagmire, Fon Fobuzee has the following proposal to make; 'We think that these political elite should have a corporate responsibility towards these communities and not to acquire land and leave the people poorer that they were before'. He believes that 'when the traditional rulers would have been put at the forefront of community lands this would mean that they have been empowered to get into such negotiations since there will be the bargaining power. Calls for the inclusion of traditional rulers in land reforms have been recorded in most African countries.⁴¹

The Fulani at best only have grazing permits issued by the D.O and that is why Bouba is optimistic that 'when the new land or pastoral code will be established, it will give the Mbororos the right to own the land they have been using for over a century and that will ease the procedure for obtaining a land title'. To her, this pastoral code will demarcate land in a different way and it is going to make corridors for the cattle.

Another issue which women suffer from because of lack of rights and access to land is the difficulty in getting financial credits from banks (Gbetnkom 2008: 280) since title deeds are often demanded as collateral security for loans. Farm households which are dependent on agricultural production, and which would directly benefit from agricultural improvements and access to capital (finances) required for such improvements cannot afford such facilities (*ibid*). This is particularly important as women do the vast majority of work in agricultural smallholder

³⁹ Sarki of Aghem, Danpollo are Fulani but have multiple land certificates. Details on this in chapter 7

⁴⁰ Interview Jean Guendjom 3/10/2013 Divisional Delegate of lands Menchum

⁴¹ For instance see Spierenburg 2005pp120 and Ayee et al 2011,pp28 for similar reactions in Ghana and Namibia.

production, producing between sixty percent and eighty percent of all food grown in African countries (Englert and Daley 2008: xi), and Cameroon in particular. Fon Fobuzee notes;

We proposed for example that women should be given access to land. In other words, parents should be made to distribute land to their sons and daughters and that woman should eventually obtain land titles. Even when living in their marital homes, nothing should stop them from owning land. We thought that the traditional rulers should be made to play a primordial role in the management of land at the village level. The world is moving ahead and we cannot stay behind and stick to traditional practices that do not favour all sectors of society.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the 1974 Land Ordinances was to lay down a homogeneous legal framework for land tenure all over the country, thereby enhancing State control over land (Fisiy 1996: 147). Unfortunately, the 1974 Land Ordinance has not achieved policy makers' stated aims: it has not brought Western-style private property rights to Cameroon's rural areas, and it has not generated an agrarian middle class. Instead it has further complicated and alienated community rights over their ancestral lands leading to frictions, confrontations and outright conflicts between communities and their leaders. This has resulted in a conflict-generating relationship between modern laws and local customary laws that have complicated the resolution of land tenure disputes and created a situation in which multiple legal and administrative mechanisms vie for recognition.

The historical evolution of the both the customary and the statutory land regimes have been highlighted in this chapter and I note that there are discrepancies and inconsistencies in the lands department. The land law is actually flawed with lots of loopholes, and ambiguities not only because it is considered obsolete and cannot meet with the present cultural and economic demands of the people, but also that people do not feel secured over their property. Despite their numerical strength, women have continued to be discriminated upon. It is thought that the emergence of conflicts are attributed on bias and other forms of discrimination that are enshrined in the land ordinances and have continued to exclude certain categories of people including women and Fulani cattle herders. In the next chapter I try to profile the Fulani who are found in the area with particular emphasis on cattle rearing as an economic mode of production.

Chapter Six: Land, Cattle and Wealth: The Sore of Fulani in Wum Central Sub-division

6.1 Introduction

The Fulani constitute an important component of this research and as predominantly cattle herders; they are a focal point of reference in farmer-herder conflicts in Wum Central Sub-division. There is abundant literature on the Fulani in West Africa and also on those in Cameroon (NAB No.17/10). A lot of these sources consider the Fulani as nomadic pastoralist who entered the region with cattle as ‘late comers’ or as ‘strangers’ (Manu et al 2014: 299) or what O’Rourke (2012: 97-8) refers to as ‘native foreigners’ or African diasporas. The history of the cattle industry in the Bamenda Grassfields therefore dates back to 1919 when the Fulani started settling in the region principally from Nigeria and former German Adamawa in considerable numbers (Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 1; Nyamnjoh 2013a: 106). In this chapter the main question that lingers is; how did the presence of the Fulani alter the agrarian economy and what are the consequences on rights and access to land for women cultivators? To do this, I start by identifying who the Fulani are and some of the colonial land policies which facilitated their integration. I try to show how national policies have contributed to the change of their status and mentality from the perceived ‘strangers’ to citizens and the prevailing farmer-grazer relations in the area. The arrival of the Fulani into the area did not immediately raise ethnic considerations. Furthermore, I attempt to investigate why over time; their presence has become an issue to be worried about. I argue that the manner in which the Fulani were integrated in Cameroon coupled with the loopholes in the present statutory land legislation and customary tenure systems operating in Cameroon have paved the leeway for the present farmer/grazer disputes. I begin by identifying and tracing the history of migration of the Fulani.

6.2 Fulani: Of Man and Cattle

The Fulani entered Cameroon by the turn of the 20th Century and by 1920, they had reached Aghem area.¹ The Fulani group is said to have originated from Senegambia (now Senegal) and

¹ NAB No/Ab17/1 ‘Report on the Fulani Advisory Council by F.M Woodhouse, District Officer Bamenda Division and letter addressed by Dr MDW Jeffreys-Senior District Officer to the Commissioner of Lands Enugu on 8th February 1944.

Mauritania and spread in some twenty countries of West Africa perhaps with the exception of Liberia to Ethiopia and Kenya (De Bruijn et al 1995: 228; Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 1; Stenning 1959: 1). Their migration was precipitated by a rinderpest pandemic and famine which decimated herds of African cattle in the mid and late 1890s (Vabi n. d 11; Stenning 1959: 78). Driven by a continuous search for new pastures, the *Jafen* of the *Goshi* family under Ardo Maya² started entering the Western Grassfields of Cameroon from the Kano Emirate during 1870-80 and came in a wide sweep mostly through Bornu, Ngaoundere and Bayo (Mbah 2008: 65; NAB No.Ab 17/7). They came from northern Cameroon, mainly the Adamawa Plateau, and established themselves on the Bamenda Highlands. The *Aku* followed later, from the 1940s onwards, attracted by favourable grazing conditions and administrative policies. The *Aku* entered the Grassfields from the Jos Plateau in Nigeria, and settled on the lowland pastures on the northern fringes of the Bamenda Highlands (Pelican 2008: 542). The Fulani community in the research area is internally diversified, comprising members of two sub-groups, namely *Jafen* and *Aku* (Vabi.n.d: 12).

The name-*Fulani* has gained currency in national and international discourses when reference is being made to nomadic pastoralists and about issues involving farmer-grazer relations in recent times and even within academic circles (Adebayo 1991: 1; Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 1-2; Dafinger and Pelican 2006). Yet, the origin of the name 'Fulani' remains obscure and highly contested for lack of clarity.³ Although they are distinctively different from one another, they are often referred to as Fulani. According to British colonial accounts⁴ however, Fulani refers to a particular breed of cattle that is highly associated with the *Jafen* group. As Adebayo (1991: 1; Stenning, 159: 2) articulate, they have distinct ancestral origins and different names throughout West Africa.

The fair-skinned people who inhabit the Sudan fringes of West Africa stretching from the Senegal valley to the shores of Lake Chad and who speak the language known as Fulfulde, are known by many names.' They call themselves Fulbe (singular, Pullo). They are called Fulani by

² NAB No 17/7 'Fulani Intelligence report correspondence by the Resident Bamenda Division 1932 & See Davidheiser and Luna (2008: 78),by the year 2000, there were 13 million Fulbe speakers in West Africa.

³ The Pheul of North Cameroon, the Kanuri , Fulfulde and the Akus are often referred to as Fulani and this is sometimes very misleading.

⁴ NAB No Ab 17/1 'Correspondence by Woodhouse on Fulani Native Authority 1943'.

the Hausa of southern Nigeria, and this name has been used for them throughout Nigeria. The British call them Ful, Fulani, or Fula, while the French refer to them as Peul, Peulh, or Poulah.

Another group of Fulani are the *Fulbé na'i* or *Fulbé ladde*, the cattle or bush Fulani- the Bororo'en who are essentially nomadic. The name seems to suggest their very close association with the cattle breed *Bororo*. In fact, '*Bororoji* is the name of the large, long horned, chest-out type of cattle common among the nomads but the real name of the people is Fulbé-Ladde or *Jafen* and they prefer to be called Fulani'.⁵ In the early part of the 20th Century, seventeen different Fulani groups were identified and spread throughout the Bamenda Grassfields. Each group appointed an *Ardo*⁶ who was recognised by the Fulani themselves. It should be noted that the first Fulani who arrived the Bamenda Province was Ardo Abdulahi Sabga who settled at Babanki Tingoh. He was recognised by the British colonial authorities as the supreme leader of the Mbororo-Fulani throughout the British Southern Cameroons and charged with the collection of Jangali tax.⁷ Today the Fulani are scattered all over the country and hardly do they constitute any single polity of their own, hence they are often considered as strangers where ever they are settled (Dze-Ngwa 2013: 6). As Mbah (2008: 64) concludes, the Fulani do not even have land that they can call home.

In Aghem and Bu, most of the Fulani live on the hill tops/slopes and very close to their cattle while the host populations are mostly found in well developed compacted residential quarters. The Fulani tend to have a high degree of corporation and sense of unity among themselves. This has been captured by the Secretary to the DO (Ndeh Theodore interviewed 7/10/2013) and he puts it this way: 'The issue is that when the Fulani have a problem they collaborate and easily regroup which is not the case with farmers. They even raise money to solve their problems as a group'. But it is important to note that this unity is only when they are threatened or confronted by other land users such as farmers, whereas the following paragraphs show that there are differences among the Fulani. First of all, there are two principal categories of Fulani in Wum- the 'town' and 'bush' Fulani. As Mallam Bashiru opines, 'the "town Fulani" do not inter marry with the "bush"

⁵ NAB No 17/9 'notes on the Fulani of British and French Cameroons, Cameroon Province 1943'.

⁶ Ardo means 'leader' and is someone fit and proper to represent their interests and advice the administration on problems concerning Fulani. See NAB No/Ab17/1 Appendix B Part A.

⁷ NAB/No.1b/1938/3 'Fulani headman Ardo Sabga Bamenda Division Cameroons Province 1938'.

Fulani and those in the city look at us as uncivilised and have very little or nothing to do with us; and they always laugh at us'. Because they do not inter marry, each group has preserved its bloodline, having refused to become integrated into the host's society as well. Among the nomadic pastoralists, endogamy is highly practiced by bush Fulani and marriage of first cousins is regarded as optimal.⁸

As I indicated earlier, there has always been a long standing cordial relationship between grazers and farmers in Wum. In a related study on classic host-client relation carried out by Moritz (2006) among the *Mbororo* herders and *Gbaya* farmers in the Adamawa region of Cameroon, his findings revealed that reciprocity constitutes the basis of a symbiotic relationship where substantive gifts and commodities are exchanged. In such social exchanges, *Gbaya* may give sacks of manoc and maize, while *Mbororo* may give one-year old calves (essentially dairy products) and other items such as radios and bicycles. Aghem and Bu people carry out social exchanges with the Fulani especially during festive period such as Christmas or Ramadan. Social exchanges may include milk, butter, meat, manure that the Fulani give in exchange for groundnuts, maize, and manure and crop residue.⁹ In Bu, women have sexual relations with the Fulani for want of money but generally abhor getting married to Fulani.¹⁰ They belong to the same political parties, their children go to the same school and markets, and they consult in the same hospitals and use the same public utilities such as water, electricity, communication amongst others.

However, farmers and grazers retain their distinctive identities and compete for limited natural resources, but rely on each other for the provision of essential services and products (Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 1999: 398). In line with what De Bruijn and van Dijk (2005: 61) refer to as the 'internal contradictions' between grazers/grazers or farmers and grazers, these conflicts may after all be motivated or embedded in beliefs that reflect a deep-seated mistrust between or among these two groups-Fulani on the one hand and Aghem /Bu or Fulani versus Fulani(Moritz 2006: 10). To them, cases of crop damage are presented differently and they show a lot of hostility

⁸ Also see interview Suleiman Guizo, 7/10/2013.

⁹For details on such exchanges among the Fulbe and Mossi of Cote d'Ivoire see De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005pp65. Here, the Fulbe participate in Mossi naming and marriage ceremonies and may maintain fictive relations with Mossi families.

¹⁰ Beatrice Kah interviewed in Bu 12/11/2013.

towards each other in public: what they refer to as the 'front stage' and in private these problems are handled in a more cordial manner and they refer to such presentation as the 'back stage'. In the same manner, Fulani grazers generally show a lot of concern and speak in unison when confronted by farmers whereas internally, there are striking differences and even mistrust between the Mbororo and the Akus.¹¹ These differences notwithstanding, most discourses often speak of the Fulani in a homogenous manner whereas; available sources reveal that they are highly differentiated, not only according to clans but also by their economic pursuits and way of life. The Fulani classify themselves into two main groups.¹²

6.2 The Introduction of Extensive Cattle Herding Methods

Wum Central Subdivision has the characteristics that favour the coexistence of pastoralists and crop cultivators. Livestock rearing had been in existence in the area before the introduction of extensive cattle rearing by the beginning of the 20th century. Chilver (1988: 9) notes that goats, smooth-haired sheep and fowls were well distributed throughout the area. The rearing of pigs, as reported by Zintgraff in 1889 as a specialty in south-eastern Moghamo was a feature of the western part of the area and highly developed in Aghem. Formerly dwarf shorthorns were held in far larger numbers than at present. They were in most cases royal herds under the supervision of retainers and cows were slaughtered only on important occasions.¹³

There had been in the past several types of stock management in the region. Where pigs were bred and fattened for the market they were kept, in some cases, in sunken wallows also serving, saving your presence, as latrines and refuse pits. In others they were kept within nucleated villages, in and out of compounds, their dung collected with sweepings for infield gardens. The dwarf cows, usually a chiefly monopoly, were closed-herded by retainers with clappers and salt and in some up land districts were returned to trenched enclosures at night; vestiges of these could still be seen in the early sixties (Chilver 1988: 9).

¹¹ One of the cases at the DOs office was between Mbororo herdsman and an Aku herdsman; the latter had accused the former on grounds that it was not his cattle that actually destroyed the crops belonging to Meh Philip. So it would seem when the cattle of Mbororo destroy or trespasses into a farm, the blame is shifted to an Aku grazer.

¹² See Stenning 1959: 1; Adebayo 1991: 1, The first group is the Fulbe siire, the "town Fulani" (known in Hausa as Fulanin gidah-also referred to in some literature as the Toroodbe or Toronkawa), the class of Muslim clerics who were responsible for the religious revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in West Africa.

¹³ RAB/N0.NW/Ac.1960/1/BK .

There were several methods of herding small stock designed to protect food farms-for example the regular alteration of village lands on either side of a valley between grazing and crops, or the live hedging of cultivation areas. Access paths with young animals were also retained by triangular stock-collars or the fencing of fertile valley farm plots against goats. There was also a mixture of tethering, close-herding, fencing off tree crops and seasonal grazing of combined herds entrusted to a friend or relative in a remoter upland area (Chilver 1988: 10).

Gradually, the methods and practices in the herding of stock changed with the arrival of the Fulani. Upon arrival in Wum Central Subdivision, they obtained grazing permits from the farmer-grazer service; a sub-divisional office of the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Husbandry responsible for issuing grazing permits (Scott and Miriam 1980: 15). Between 1919 and 1960, the population of cattle rose from 10,000 in 1922 to 91,782 in 1940 and to 258,796 in 1960 while the population of Fulani staggered from a few persons in 1919 to about 10,000 in 1953 (Njeuma and Awasom 1988 : 1). According to the most recent and available Population Census statistics conducted in 2005, there are about 1.8million Fulani in Cameroon and the number of cattle are estimated at 6million with over 200,000 in Aghem.¹⁴ Individual animal ownership is not common and most animals are collectively owned by members of a household, including household-head, wife (or wives), blood-related brothers, parents and adult children (Vabi n.d: 16). In addition to cattle, most households rear sheep rather than goats because of the ceremonial role that sheep perform. Also because goats are less easily controlled, they increase the possibility of damage to crops (*ibid*).

The co-existence of the Fulani with their host populations was smooth until when farmer-grazer relations were strained by the 1940s¹⁵ because of crop damages caused by cattle on farms belonging to women. The decision to demarcate grazing land from farm land was as a result of

¹⁴ Doing Business in Cameroon 2012 Edition.

¹⁵ See Kaberry NAB No. Ab 17(10) 'Report on Farmer-Grazier relations and changing pattern of Agriculture in Nsaw - South Eastern Federation, Bamenda, Southern Cameroons' and also Vabi on the mass killing of Fulani cattle and public demonstrations of 1958.

disputes that were already noticed between farmers and Fulani in 1937¹⁶ and this is what Woodhouse had to say.

In recent years, there have been many and bitter disputes between the Fulani and the farmers over the question of trespass on farms and damage to crops. In places where the grazing areas have been already demarcated by Dr Jeffreys, these disputes have ceased entirely. In others they, are becoming more frequent, the farmers anxious to be able to lay claims to as much land as possible when the time for demarcation comes are rapidly extending their farming activities. It is obvious that the sooner the work of demarcation can be completed the better.

As early as 1928, the District Officer placed the Fulani in each village under the chief of that village but the Fulani were not very comfortable.¹⁷ Because of this strain relationship, strategies were being developed by the indigenous ethnic groups to evict the Fulani from most of the areas on which they had settled. The claims for eviction by indigenous populations were reinforced by continued crop damage cases brought to the attention of the administration particularly by women of indigenous origin that constituted, and have remained the bulk of the crop farming population (Chilver 1988: 1). In some instances, the cattle have often been attacked and killed by local population. With the constant inflow of Fulani into the region, coupled with generalised complaints of crop damages by Fulani cattle, cattle control rules were enacted and enforced by a Native Authority Ordinance in 1947 (Vabi n.d: 14). The situation called for reorganisation of the land use pattern to take into account the widespread complaints by the indigenous peoples against crop destruction by cows (Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 2). This led to a reduction of cattle cases and the effort was welcomed by the women (Kaberry 2004: 90) but these measures were short lift.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Resident's Correspondence of 18/8/1943 to the Secretary Eastern Province Enugu from the Provincial Office, Buea, Cameroon under the British Mandate.

¹⁷ See NAB /1b/1938/3 'Fulani headman Ardo Sabga Bamenda Division Cameroons Province 1938'

¹⁸ Since 1946, most Native Authorities passed Grazing Rules which gave them power to issue permits to Fulani to limit the size of herds, to stipulate the number of herdsmen, and to enforce rotational grazing. For more see Kaberry (1952: 100)

In order to solve this problem, grazing land was demarcated and separated from farm lands.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this approach did not work because Fulani cattle not only destroyed farmers' crops but provoked soil erosion and exhaustion.

Soil erosion and exhaustion were caused when too many cows overgrazed in a single area for a long period without allowing the top soil to rest and the vegetation to fully recover. The consequence was that wind easily blew the top layer which was reduced to dust by cow hoofs, and this rendered the area bare and exposed (*opcit*).

In an effort to seek for permanent solutions, the Livestock Mission in 1950 designed an experiment (Fulani Settlement Scheme) intended not only 'to change the nomad into a settler, but to improve the stock, preserve the grazing areas and to protect the interests of the local inhabitants' which involved structural changes to accommodate the pastoral industry and a definite orientation of Fulani traditional way of life.²⁰ According to the Commissioner for the Cameroons, the Fulani Settlement Scheme was considered invaluable because it would bring about a balance to the economy of the Bamenda Province but the difficulty was how to settle the Fulani 'without noticeable disturbances to indigenous society'. It was also difficult to determine where to settle them and the size of land to be allotted to them. Another reason for initiating the Fulani Settlement Scheme was because the colonialists believed that there was abundant land and many of the hillsides were laying waste.²¹ However, the colonial administration still went ahead and initiated the Scheme which advocated for the permanent settlement of the Fulani by building enclosures within which would be practice rotational grazing methods. This was not supported by the Natives who saw it as a means of taking away their ancestral land. It should however be noted that many settled rearing cattle but as more land was used for agriculture, the Fulani were faced with diminishing grazing land for cattle living them invariably in conflicts with sedentary farmers (Ndenecho 2010: 61).

When the Fulani Settlement Scheme failed, a new land use pattern was introduced and this was the concept of mixed farming which involved the alternate use of land by farmers and grazers for

¹⁹ See NAB No. 17(6) 'Application for lease of grazing grounds in the Cameroons Province'

²⁰ NAB No. Ab /17(7) 'Fulani intelligence report correspondence Bamenda Division 1932.

²¹ See NAB/Ab/17(8) Commissioner of the Cameroons correspondence with the Resident, Bamenda Province on 'Fulani Settlement Bamenda Division.

their mutual benefit.²² By this, a section of a plot of land is reserved for farming while grazing takes place on another section. After several years of farming and grazing, farm land would be transformed into grazing land and vice-versa. This would permit crops to grow on former pasture-land that had been fertilised by cow dung, while cattle would thrive on a new type of vegetation on the former land (Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 9).

The idea behind promoting mixed farming was that the native people would realise the advantages of farmer-grazer land interchanges and the benefits of mutual co-existence with the Cattle Fulani. Again this scheme failed because, the Fulani continued to oscillate from one pasture to another and maintained their nomadic life style. As the commissioner of the Cameroons notes, ‘the Fulani were conservative and resistant to innovation and also considered the Natives as Pagans with whom they could not live together’.²³

Another scheme which had tremendous impact on the land use pattern was the Enclosure System which was intended to protect the farms of women from Fulani cows.²⁴ Like the demarcation of grazing land, the scheme failed because to the Natives, its implementation would mean sharing their land with the Fulani (Njeuma and Awasom 1988: 11). Till today, there has been no appropriate solution for the farmer-grazer conflicts in the region and particularly in Wum. Frequent clashes and skirmishes between the Natives and the Fulani have been recorded for the past four decades. They do not own the land they live on. Other ethnic groups in Cameroon look at them as sub-humans and today the people want them to leave for good.²⁵ This has led to a redefinition of the relationship between land rights and the management of identity (Boni 2006: 168). Today, the Fulani are highly involved in the cultivation of maize, beans, potatoes, cassava and a variety of vegetables around their homesteads. These farms also help to reduce complete dependence on indigenous cultivators for food crops thus allowing reduction of cattle off-take (Vabi n.d) ‘We have even become farm masters and there is no one here that can cultivate maize

²² See Njeuma, M and Awasom (1988), This is also referred to as Night Paddock farming and despite the efforts of the Cameroon government to ensure its defective implementation, the practice has failed woefully.

²³ NAB, No. Ab 17(8) Fulani Settlement Bamenda Division 1954

²⁴ The strategy was to provide women with Barb wires to construct fences round their farms often. This also referred to as the ‘Barb Wire Scheme’

²⁵ Interview Bouba Hawe 23/11/2013

as we do'.²⁶ The Fulani also see their involvement in crop cultivation as a means of reinforcing their rights over the areas on which they are settled (Vabi n. d: 15).

So far, I have made a brief description of the life style of the Fulani and also some of the colonial policies that were put in place for their integration in Wum. As it can be noticed, these policies were conceived by the British colonial administration and imposed on the local people because of their economic interests in cattle. Consequently, they were not in conformity with customary practices and in most instances were rejected by the farming populations whose access to land was already being threatened. Below, I try to show why the 'harmony' that existed between the Fulani upon arrival gradually developed into deep seated animosity and why the issue of land claims has become a common currency in the area.



Figure 7 Mallam Suleiman Guizo instructing his son Bashiru (herdsman) about to take the cattle afield for grazing

Source Author, 2013

²⁶ Interview Abdoulaye, 7/10/2013, Bu Road Wum.

6.3 The Genesis of the ‘Unholy Alliance’

When the Fulani first came to Bamenda in the Cameroon Grassfields a century ago, all the parameters were there for them to settle and there was enough grazing land and water for cattle.²⁷ As Werner (1993: 137) notes in a similar situation in Namibia, ‘the maximization of pastures and water resources even required a high degree of mobility’. For example, Vabi (n. d: 11) notes that the chief of Kedjom-keku and his subjects perceived Fulani migration into their territory as an opportunity to reduce beef shortages in the village. He states further that information about Fulani settlement and the ensuing advantages to the people of Kedjom-keku also spread to neighbouring villages resulting in a scramble for subsequent Fulani immigrants by other local chiefs and their subjects. The local chiefs encouraged them to come and it was big wealth that the Fulani came with cattle into the region as they were highly welcomed and appreciated. ‘It was not by force, the chiefs were concern and because they had the financial backings and could sell two cows and give to the chiefs, say 500.000 Frs for a piece of land. That was done and that is what actually happened’ (Fon Mbambi interviewed 12/12/2013). Thus Fulani movement into and settlement in the northwest did not immediately raised problems of ethnicity and ethnic consciousness relating to land use rights (*ibid*). But today after settling in the area for over a century, they are still considered as strangers or ‘outsiders’.²⁸ One of the reasons for these conflicts is the perception that the Fulani are very rich and have their wealth in cattle.

The Fulani are highly associated with the rearing of cattle and cattle have become a source of wealth. The general conception that the Fulani are wealthy was raised as far back as 1942 by Woodhouse, the District Officer for the Bamenda Division who insisted that they have to pay Jangali tax.²⁹ Till today, they are perceived by farmers as very wealthy and this wealth is seen in cattle (Nyamnjoh 2013a: 121). However, not all Fulani have cattle and are rich. Indeed, there are wealthy Fulani and others who are poor. While the former control herds of cattle, and landed property, the latter in most cases work as cattle herders (*Ganakos*) tendering cattle for their masters or are engaged in other economic activities- see details on these activities below. I cite the

²⁷ Adamou interviewed 23/11/2013.

²⁸ Robert Nsoh, interviewed 23/11/2013.

²⁹ See NAB NoAb17/1 ‘Fulani Advisory Council report’ Also see NAB Ab 17/1 on the Direct Taxation Ordinance No.45/1940.

case of Alhaji Baba Ahmadou Danpollo, an influential Fulani, who Krieger (2008: 78) refers to as a ‘powerful rancher and financier’ with economic interests as far away as South Africa. Danpollo’s political and economic connections with the present regime in Cameroon have made it possible for him to dominate not only the Fulani community in the Northwest region but also to be able to evict local communities from their ancestral lands.³⁰ For instance, in Ndawara, ‘he evicted and displaced the inhabitants of Afoa village from their ancestral lands (FIDH, 2013). To calm the leadership of the Kom people, Danpollo is said to have bribed the Fon of Kom into silence, by providing him with handouts including most recently a four-wheel drive vehicle’ (*ibid*).

The Fulani have also appropriated this *wealthness* to the point where they violate government orders and also have become very boastful and disrespectful as Eboa Aminsen asserts: ‘If you tell the Fulani to get out of the land they will laugh at you since they can easily buy the conscience of the chief with money or cow, today money determines the direction of justice.’³¹ The lure for money by chiefs has been one of the driving forces that have facilitated the acquisition of land for grazing by the Fulani. As Cheng (interviewed 12/10/2013) notes further, ‘the chief will even ask you that if he sends away the cows where shall he get money to pay his children’s school fees?’ A similar situation has been documented by Tonah (2006: 166) in the Volta Basin in Ghana and he presents it as follows:

Generally, chiefs in the area are eager to have Fulani herders settle on their land. They have seen the value of land placed under their jurisdiction rise since the Fulani started settling in the area. Indigenous and migrant farmers make only token payments consisting mainly of a bottle of Schnapps or local gin and some small amount of money for the use of farmlands in the area. Fulani herders, on the other hand, make substantial payments to chiefs and other landowners on whose land they decide to settle and herd their cattle. This usually consists of one or two mature animals every year.

It is this believe that cattle is a source of wealth that has often led to the accusation of chiefs and administrators by farmers for taking bribes and gifts from Fulani in order to deliver justice in their favour. For example, ‘when an Aghem woman reports the Fulani to the Administration, you are

³⁰ In recent years, a lot of Fulani have come under attack and have been harassed, arrested, imprisoned, threatened and brutalised by Danpollo.

³¹ Eboa Aminsen is a retired Businessman interviewed 30/10/2013.

surprised that the administrator will change his language the next day because he has received money from the Fulani' (Ebua Aminsen interviewed 30/10/2013). Consequently, cattle is not only a trigger of conflicts through crop damages and trespass but also a source of wealth and leverage or mechanism through which conflicts are perpetuated and reproduced in Wum.

Furthermore, the conflict between farmers and grazers is partly as a result of the policy of 'Grazing land and Certificates of Occupancy that was conceived and issued by the British administration to the Fulani as far back as 1941 and 1947 respectively'.³²The Resident Cameroon Province (Murray) argued that it was better to give the Fulani some security of grazing land and to control overstocking, over grazing and also to prevent cattle from invading farm lands. The certificates restricted their activities only to grazing and they did not own the land. Instead of granting them land rights, the 1947 Ordinance repeated and reinforced the stipulations of an earlier Land and Native Rights Ordinance of 1927 which conferred all lands to the natives with the exception of government-owned lands (Vabi n.d: 16).³³The 1927 Land and Native Ordinance defined a native as one born of parents who originated from the area in which (s) he was living. Embedded in this law of occupancy was the notion that although the Fulani were using the land, they were strangers and not natives. In support of this assertion, the Cameroon land law has continued to maintain this idea by granting grazing permits to herders and not ownership rights (Moritz 2006). This means that a herder has a grazing permit (usufructs rights) but the land belongs to another person and this principle has continued till today and Fon Mbambi asserts.

Actually it is not their land because they do not have the land titles (Land certificate) to the land. You can only say the land is yours when there is a land certificate. 'Now that they are living on the land without the certificates, out people once in a while move in and encroach near to their doors and ask them to go elsewhere. So you can only expropriate land for farming and not for grazing'.

Yes it is our land; they do not contest the ownership of the land because the Fulani pay allegiance to the various chiefs in Wum. And they know that the land belongs to the Wum. For

³² See NAB/N0/Ab 17/6 'application for lease of grazing grounds in the Cameroons Province and the certificate of occupancy and the Fulani Native Ab 17/1. The 1947 Land Ordinance stipulated that lands granted to non-natives prior to 1947 needed authority approval. For such lands, only the Governor General of Nigeria and Southern Cameroons could transfer native lands to non-native. The Ordinance further stipulated that such transfers had to conform to indigenous laws and customs regulating land distribution.

³³ Also see NAB/No 17/1 'Fulani in Bamenda Division reorganisation'.

instance they know that Wum Central has boundary with Nigeria. So they have occupied part of the land right to the boundary and there is no Fulani village here except Wum. It is our land not their land (Fon Mbambi interviewed 12/12/2013).

This notion is not only held by the Fon but by most women cultivators in Aghem and Bu as the following excerpts indicates:

When the Fulani entered Wum they were settled on land only for temporal basis. They did not own the land and the land was given on friendly basis. It was for free but when a cow was sick, it was given to the chief to slaughter. They gave cattle to the chief and the land was never given to the Fulani to remain there permanently. Periodically a Fulani had the right to exploit the land even for more than five years but that did not give him the right to own that piece of land (Koi Delphine interviewed 19/10/2013).

As Hussein et al (1999: 400) have documented in similar situations in Africa, the conditions under which the Fulani were settled have changed. First of all, the population has multiplied more than tenfold and there is stiff competition over water sources and fertile lands for farming and cattle rearing. This in itself constitutes a source of conflict between farmers and grazers since the resources are diminishing. The Fulani are now increasingly engaged in farming and their activities are not limited to grazing any more (Tonah 2006: 161). The Fulani were largely restricted and settled on marginal lands but today, they are in search of fertile grounds to carryout food cultivation. For example, the Bu Plain that is very fertile and provides ideal conditions for rice and dry season vegetable farming has come under pressure and also being competed for by both farmers and grazers. The continuous occupation of the plain by rice fields have not only deprived Fulani herders of key dry season pasture during transhumance, but has made it difficult for livestock to access water and have also blocked water tracts used by cattle.

In many settlements, farms are located next to fields reserved for grazing livestock. The increasing cultivation of bush farms by migrant farmers has also contributed to the increased risk of destruction of crops by cattle. 'During the farming season herders have to meander through farms to reach pastures, and cattle are prone to trampling on farmers crops. In the pre-harvest period cattle frequently destroy or eat ripened crops as they are being led from the pastures into their kraals' (Tonah 2006: 161).

It is gradually becoming difficult for the Fulani to practice transhumance during the dry season. If they must do that, they have to go as far as Obang and Bafut Valley.³⁴ For that, they need to negotiate and pay huge sums of money or provide cattle to the local chiefs in these areas to allow them come over with cattle. I argue that increase in population and diminishing arable land and resources have contributed to the strained relationship between Farmers and herders. Again, both the colonial government and the local chiefs were more interested in the financial benefits that accrued from the cattle tax and so in order to attract more cattle, granted only grazing permits and not land rights to the Fulani. On the other hand, the Fulani have continued to consider grazing permits as the equivalence of land certificates.



Figure 8 The immobility of the mobile Fulani has brought them in serious confrontation with indigenous farmers as they compete over land and diminishing resources. Abdoulaye Guizo-a Fulani farmer in his pepper plantation at Bu Road Aghem.

³⁴ Mallam Suleiman Guizo Interviewed 23/10/2013.

In addition, many former arable farmers have now also taken up cattle herding (Sone 2012a). ‘The hills that were given as grazing land to the Fulani are being transformed into government ranches, parks, game reserves, zoos and the rich non Fulani are grabbing all the hills for grazing thus depriving the Mbororos (Fulani) from using these resources’.³⁵ To cope with the situation, most Fulani now tend to reduce the size of their cattle and this decrease has forced and pushed them to engage permanently in economic activities other than herding.³⁶



Figure 9 Despite Fulani occupation of this land for over a century, they are still regarded as strangers by the Aghem and Bu communities.

Source: Author, 2013

6.4 Farmer/Herder Relations

The relations between farmers/grazers have been described and categorised by some researchers as competitive (Moritz 2006) and mutually beneficial or complementary by others (Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen 1998), and yet some consider the relationships as inherently conflictual (Kah 2009; Diduk 1992; Sone 2012a). Available sources and discourses on farmer/herder conflicts have, however, systematically lumped and referred to Fulani as grazers

³⁵ Boubu Hawe interviewed 30/10/2013

³⁶ Most of them have become mobile not as herders but as intercity bus drivers, teachers, *Benskin* Riders, hawkers, while others are settled in some of the big cities in Cameroon and employed in different professions. Ali Abdou born in 1999, Mohamadou the Son of *Sarki* and motor bike and bus drivers respectively.

and to the Aghem and Bu communities as farmers. Such a distinction is not only misleading but blurs our understanding and renders little justice to the complex reality of herder/farmer relations and how they navigate and negotiate various identity margins as indigenes and strangers, citizens and subjects (Nyamnjoh 2013a: 110). Their differences and incompatibilities notwithstanding, within the present context, it is increasingly difficult and complex to separate grazers and farmers into two ethnically distinct groups. Several reasons are responsible for this complexity. First of all, the economic boundary between Fulani and the Aghem and Bu people is fast fading away but for rivalry over land ownership and this is so because, non Fulani farmers and Hausa (also Moslems) keep livestock and Fulani who were hitherto cattle grazers are now engaged in crop cultivation (Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 1999: 398; Dze-Ngwa 2013: 18) and it is also increasingly difficult to know the proportion of the herd that belongs to Fulani and those that belong to indigenous and Hausa Moslem stock-owners (Tonah 2006: 172).

Furthermore, there are Fulani who are farmers and do not own cattle and farmers who own cattle but are not farmers. Evidence has shown that, cattle belonging to non-Fulani are herded by the Fulani and the Fulani 'are no longer the cattle herdsman of the Fulani but anybody's herdsman' (DeBruijn and van Dijk 2005: 69). To put it simple, 'it is more scientifically rewarding not to treat these communities as bounded and exclusive (Nyamnjoh 2013a: 106). These conflicts are therefore complicated and aggravated by competition over the same arable land and pastures and not necessarily as a result of crop damages. As De Bruijn and van Dijk (2005: 69) have demonstrated, 'conflicts between herders and farmers can be seen as the result of incompatibility between different land use strategies and cultural and social factors as well as the growing similarities in their respective system of land use'. Moreover, conflicts may not necessarily be between farmers and grazers but may include conflicts between farmers and farmers, herders and herders, may even be inter personal, inter-ethnic and in some cases between local users and outsiders (land grabbers from elsewhere), and corporations and the state (Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 1999: 400).

I argue that very often farmer/grazer conflicts are politicised and the Fulani are usually seen as victims, what Nyamnjoh (2013a: 107) refers to as 'bounded victim community'. The politicisation of this *Fulaniness* is not only to draw domestic and international sympathy and support by the

Fulani who feel marginalised and victimised, but also to press, local and state power structures to protect them against land seizure, appropriation and the use by elite (Diduk, 1992: 192). It is also to advocate and lobby for new land reforms that would not only give them users' rights but ownership rights as well. There are already growing fears that the over 1.8million Fulani that are considered as *indigenous* people will soon dominate other groups in Cameroon who do not have the same status and do not have land rights as well.³⁷ This becomes very clear when we look at the situation of the Cameroonian woman, who does not have ownership rights over land though enjoys access to land and have rights as citizens.

6.5 MBOSCUDA and Citizenship Rights: The Fulani Response

Fulani marginalisation and victimisation can be traced back to 1943 during the colonial period when they realised that their pastoral interests were inadequately represented by local Grassfields chiefs, and so requested for a Fulani Advisory Council, an Alkali court, veterinary centre and a school from the British.³⁸ Unfortunately, their demands were refused and instead they were regarded as 'strangers' and placed under Native Authorities. Although presently their citizenship rights are guaranteed by the 1996 constitution, they have continued to negotiate for recognition and representation with difficulties and lots of resistance from Aghem and Bu groups who consider them as foreigners. Thus 'the Mbororo in the Western Grassfields had developed a conscious political identity long time ago' (Pelican 2008: 544).³⁹ It is against the backdrop of this marginalisation that the Fulani created the Mbororo⁴⁰Social and Cultural Association (MBOSCUDA) in 1992. MBOSCUDA was established to protect Fulani rights, promote their development and to ensure their full integration into the society. As the constitution of MBOSCUDA indicates:

³⁷ Tony interviewed 23/November, 2013.

³⁸ NAB/No.Ab17 (9) 'Notes on the Fulani of British and French Cameroons, Cameroon Province 1943'.

³⁹ NAB, No Ab 17/1 'Reply by the Resident Bamenda Division on the request for the creation of a Fulani Advisory Council I 1943'.

⁴⁰ The name Mbororo refers to a species of cattle which was introduced in Cameroon in 1920 by a group of herds' men under their leader *Goshi* who migrated from the Kano Emirate.

The Mbororo believe that they are subjected to exploitation, oppression, humiliation and marginalisation as a result of their peculiarities-nomadic and pastoralist way of life, illiteracy, ignorance and lack of guidance and cooperation.⁴¹

During the early years of its existence, MBOSCUDA attracted a lot of international and national attention which made them to receive funds from financial donors and carried out training programs to enhance the capacity of the Mbororo especially in the domains of human rights and political participation.⁴² Presently, MBOSCUDA has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights recognising them as *indigenous* people.⁴³ Since its creation, most of its founding members and other educated MBOSCUDA members have travelled abroad and even studied in some European Universities and this is what Pelican (2008: 546) has to say:

Some educated individuals and MBOSCUDA representatives have benefited considerably from opportunities for advanced training and international travel. For example, over the past four years MBOSCUDA's current provincial programme coordinator attended six international workshops in the United States, Britain, Tanzania and Nigeria, as well as three skill enhancement trainings in southern Cameroon. His wife attended a three-month Indigenous Fellowship Programme in Geneva organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Some of the issues that motivated the creation of the association were economic and political marginalisation. 'Locals tell us that we should go away from here and that this is not our land, where do we go to? This is where I was born; this is where my father was born. When people say we should go away, where do they really expect us to go to?'⁴⁴

⁴¹ See Constitution and Internal Regulations of MBOSCUDA pp3.

⁴² A number of these programs have been realised with the support of local communities and national or international nongovernmental organizations. Pelican 2008: 548.

German Development Service and Village AiD, a UK funding-partner agency (Pelican 2008: 549)

⁴³ It has been so difficult to come out with a definition of indigenous people because each country has its own definition with its specificities. Indigenous people and the issue of owning land has become more and more a problem in Cameroon the people are being taken away from land that is supposed to be their natural habitat and ancestral land. After several years, in 2007, the UN adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People. Unfortunately Cameroon has not ratified the ILO convention on indigenous people. Interview Lawyer Robert Nsoh 23/11/2013.

⁴⁴ Adamou interviewed 23/10/2013

MBOSCUDA's extensive use of the social media (internet, twitter, face book, yahoo-groups etc) as the medium to raise awareness on the plight of the Fulani in Cameroon and to articulate their land claims have paid off. This is very crucial since they are scattered all over the place and can hardly be identified with a particular land area. The social media has continued to be a uniting and galvanizing force for the Fulani both at home and in the Diaspora.

Despite the tremendous progress made by MBOSCUDA, it has gradually come under criticism from within and from without which has generated internal contradictions and led to the emergence of many factions that have weakened the association.⁴⁵ Firstly, to the protagonists, the association does not represent the interest of all Fulani; this is because 'MBOSCUDA's founding members have distanced themselves from sedentary Town Fulbe in northern Cameroon and stressed their identification with (agro-) pastoral Fulbe' (Pelican 2008: 548). Secondly, the association has become localised, functioning only in some towns of the northwest region where its national head office is located. Thirdly, it is argued that the name refers only to the pastoralists of the Fulbe clan and does not cover other groups such as the Aku and Hausas who are also found in Cameroon and engage in cattle herding. It is for this reason that the Aku decided to create their faction known as the-Aku Cultural and Development Association (ACUDA).⁴⁶ Again, only a few influential and educated Mbororo elite seem to have benefitted from the association.

Thus, the 'indigenous peoples' discourse benefits mainly the Mbororo elites. Against the background of these emerging new opportunities, it is not surprising that there are indications of increasing rivalries and ruptures within MBOSCUDA. Furthermore, criticism has also been raised by Mbororo leaders who submitted a petition to the British High Commission, accusing Mbororo intellectuals of falsely portraying the Mbororo as an impoverished people, and of misappropriating international aid (Pelican 2008: 553).⁴⁷

In recent years, MBOSCUDA members have come under attack and have been harassed, arrested, imprisoned, threatened and brutalised by Alhaji Baba Ahmadou Danpollo, an influential Fulani

⁴⁵ For more on the embroglio between SODELCO and MBOSCUDA, See Nyamnjoh (2013a: 124-5) and Dze-Ngwa (2013: 22-23) the former is led by Alhaji Baba .

⁴⁶ Nana, S .S (n.d), why we refuse to align ourselves to reactionary forces against our Community (unpublished),A letter published by Nana, Sarli in reaction to atrocities and acts of violence orchestrated by Alhaji Danpollo Baba. The use of the internet is one of the means through which the Fulani try to make their voices heard.

⁴⁷ Nana Sarli is a founding member of MBOSCUDA and a post graduate Student, Department of Comparative and Applied Social Sciences, Graduate Institute, University of Hull United Kingdom. Also see Krieger 2008,pp.77-78.

(Krieger 2008: 78). The Fulani are therefore not only facing external challenges but those coming from some Fulani who have close links and political interests in the ruling Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM), where Danpollo is a member of the Central Committee (Krieger 2008: 78; Tegomoh 2013:226).

While a few long-established and influential individuals have acquired land titles, the majority relies on the goodwill of local administrators and Grassfields chiefs (*ibid*) and continues to be impoverished and victimised. Even MBOSCUDA that was created to provide lasting solutions to the plight of the Fulani has turned out in most cases to favour only influential Fulani and the rich while a majority of them still suffer in victimhood. In such informal arrangements with chaotic outcomes, the land question only favours rent-seeking individuals who have the bargaining powers and the political leverage.⁴⁸

6.6 The 1990 Liberty Laws and Fulani right to Citizenship

In 1990, Presidential Decree No 90/1459 of 08 November 1990 created the National Human Rights and Liberties Commission (NHRLC) and particular attention was given to minorities and native populations (Hossain, Besselink, Selassie and Volker 2012: 170; Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 146).⁴⁹ Before this time, the Fulani were not considered as citizens in Cameroon but when the '1990 liberty laws' (Law No. 90/052 of December 1990) were put into effect; they gained full citizenship rights as Cameroonians. Unfortunately, this ushered in new modes in the struggle over belonging and exclusion among ethnic groups (Geschiere 2005a; Konings 2008). Following these laws, any Cameroonian has the right to settle anywhere in the country. With that conception, the Fulani have acquired national identification papers with Aghem as the place of birth and as Cameroonians. This is the same scenario with other Fulani that are spread throughout the country; acquiring identification papers as members of the communities where they live (Scholte et al 2006: 34). Regular reference to place of birth in particular, is considered as evidence of the permanent settlement of the Fulani and their assimilation into indigenous socio-cultural systems

⁴⁸ Also see open letter of November 2011 by Nana about the activities of Danpollo' Cameroon billionaire, land owner defies the government every time, all the time'.

⁴⁹ See *Cameroon: Institutional situation*

http://www.etat.sciencespo-bordeaux.fr/_anglais/institutionnel/cameroon.html accessed 10/01/2013.

of the northwest [...] region (Vabi.n.d: 13). ‘They thus see themselves as able members of Grassfield chiefdoms, and claim rights and belonging in the same way as their Grassfield neighbours (Pelican 2008: 550). Taking the cue from there, Vabi (n.d: 16) notes that a majority of Fulani pastoralists have settled, grow crops, and now practice a form of limited seasonal transhumance and there is therefore a clear trend towards the establishment of mixed farming systems.⁵⁰

These in so many ways have contributed in the Fulani identity change and their relationships with the local communities. With this identity change and as it is with other ethnic minority groups in Cameroon, the Fulani are not only competing with the local communities over resources but also for recognition and representation in the public space (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003). Following De Bruijn and Dijk (2005: 61), I argue that the manner and the policies that were used to integrate the Fulani favoured livestock production at the expense of agricultural development⁵¹ and also contributed in many ways towards these conflicts. ‘Because the Fulani population and the population of cattle increased tremendously in the region by the early 1940s, the colonial administration began to pay more attention to this group of people: as their numbers grew, so too did tax revenues from the collection of Njangali’ (O’Rourke 2012: 107).

In conclusion, this chapter has traced the historical path through which the Fulani arrived in Cameroon and also in Wum. A brief ethnographic account of the Fulani has been presented and the conditions under which they were integrated in the area. Generally, the Fulani are considered as nomads and also associated with the rearing of cattle and their wealth is believed to be in cattle. But increasingly, Fulani have adopted a sedentary life style and are now involved in so many economic activities not even linked to cattle. This, in a way has resulted in Fulani identity change. With the enforcement of the Liberty and Freedom rights, the conception that Fulani are nomads has changed while the social and economic boundaries are fading away. One of the means

⁵⁰ For example, Abdoulaye Guizo with three wives and sixteen children has only five cows that he has integrated into his elder brothers herd of cattle and now concentrates on the cultivation of pepper with manure that he gets from the cattle and generates over 2 million Francs as revenue each season interviewed 23/10/2013.

⁵¹ Also see Sone (2012a) on a similar explanation. However, Moritz (2006: 18) holds a contrary view and rather think that development programs have been biased against mobile pastoralists which have reinforced the alienation of mobile pastoralists by supporting village claims over territory. This therefore suggests that the conflicts are basically as a result of competition between two different incompatible land use systems (De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005: 6).

through which the Fulani use to legitimate their claims over land and citizenship has been the use of the social media through which the imaginary of being perceived as strangers is deconstructed. Despite this identity change, they have continued to be marginalised, politically and economically while at the same time being stigmatised and victimised as outsiders.

It is as a result of this stigmatisation and marginalisation that they created MBOSCUDA to defend their interest. MBOSCUDA has achieved a lot in the domain of female empowerment, education, and human rights but has generally not been able to address the crucial problem of Fulani land rights. Instead, a few influential Fulani have used the association for personal gains. Rivalries among the Fulani have remained a crucial problem especially as some of them have political and economic connections with the regime in place. Thus, MBOSCUDA has remained a mere political tool than an agency that can solve the problems of the Fulani. In the next chapter, I present a detail analysis of the conflicts that exist between Fulani herders and women cultivators in Wum.

Chapter Seven: ‘When two Elephants Fight the Grass Suffers’: The Politics of land Conflicts and Contesting identities.

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I focused on those factors¹ that have not only influenced changes in land use patterns but have also contributed in different ways towards persistent land conflicts between women cultivators and Fulani herders in Wum Central sub-division. Following Fisiy (1992: 145), I argue however that these conflicts are embedded in customary practices, power hierarchies and history which have been internalised by the Aghem and Bu where respect for tradition is still optimal. For instance, once individuals have internalised a group identity they are often reluctant to dispose of it. As I indicated in chapter six, the Aghem ethnic group consider themselves as indigenes (first-comers) or the ‘rightful owners’ of the land and the grazers (Fulani) who migrated in different waves into the area much later are often regarded as ‘strangers’ or ‘outsiders’ (Lenz, 2006; Konings 2001: 170 Nyamnjoh 2013c).² The bone of contention here is not just over land rights and resources, but also that of identity and the politics of belonging. It is a conflict about claims over who belongs where, who has the right to call a particular place their homeland (Page, Evans and Mercer 2010: 354). In this chapter, I try to show the different trajectories and manifestations of conflicts and the role that women and Fulani play in them. I also argue that the critical issues which cause land conflicts in Wum are not primarily caused by crop damages but the struggle over access to land and the multiple meanings that people attribute to land (Andersson, 1999) and how local chiefs and state administrators allocate land for activities such as farming, grazing and the building of houses or other services (Fisiy 1992: 55). The various strategies that the contesting groups adopt in their land claims have also been analysed. The main question therefore is: why despite the farmer/grazer commission that has been put in place; the

¹ For instance chapter three is focused on local power hierarchies and their involvement in land deals, chapter four examines the 1974 Land Ordinances and its consequences on women’s access to land, chapter five concentrates on the Fulani and grazing activities.

² NAB, No.Ab17/(3) ‘Report on *Education for Nomadic Bororos* by A.E.F Murray, Resident Cameroons, Province, Buea December 31st 1941, Also, NAB, No/17(10) by Kebbery, Phillis, on *Farmer-grazer relations* of 17/4/1959. In these reports, it is evident that the Fulani entered French Cameroon through Banyo and Adamawa by 1903 from the Emirate of Kano Nigeria and by 1920; they were in the British Cameroons although earlier contacts were there by 1870-1880.

conflicts in the area are still persistent? It is within this frame that I would like to examine the land conflicts in the Aghem area.

7.2 Women Protests and Confrontations with Fulani Herders

In 1981, Aghem women mobilised in response to excessive crop destruction by unsupervised herds of cattle. Some were owned by local elites and most by nomadic Fulani who had been granted the right to seasonal pasturage for their herds (Diduk 1989: 339; Dze-Ngwa 2013: 25). The Fulani were considered by the women as strangers and the grazing of their herds on land that did not belong to the grazers brought about animosity between the women and the herders (*ibid*). Furthermore, 'women's farms were suffering from the depredation of cattle and nothing seemed to be done about it; warnings to cattle-owners went unheeded' (Chilver 1988: 8). There were violent confrontations between farmers and herders which led to the destruction of property and eighteen people sustained injuries (Kah 2009: 188; Sone 2012a: 84). The security forces intervened and eight people were shot.

The latest protest occurred in 2003 when six thousand women besieged the chief's palace in Aghem, boycotting all social and ritual activity. "The immediate cause of the protest was an attempt by the Divisional Officer to enforce an order expelling about 600 women from a piece of land where they have cultivated food crops"(Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 134). Instead, the women wanted the eviction of the Fulani that they have constantly been referring to as strangers from Aghem.³ In these protests, women considered their access to land as being threatened which seems to have put them in a precarious situation. Consequently, the women have not been indifferent to these challenges but have resorted to fight back and defend what they consider as an infringement in the domain of women. One of the ways that women have always expressed their frustrations and the invasion of what Diduk (1992) refers to as 'women's sphere' is through

³ Previous disputes between farmers and herders were recorded in 1937, 1943, 1951, 1958, and 1966 and in 1973, Aghem women organized a public protest boycotting all market activity in Wum and in two neighbouring villages. They demanded that Fulbe herders should keep their animals in three demarcated grazing zones or be expelled. They argued that herders continually disrespected farmers' efforts and endangered farmers' livelihood by appropriating more and more land. Also see Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 133; Kah 2009; Pelican 2006, Sone (2012b)

public protests. This is particularly important when such actions threaten land which is considered as a source of their livelihoods.

Female protest movements⁴ have occurred in widely separated areas of sub-Saharan Africa (Diduk 1989: 338). Although they are found in varied societies, at great geographical distance, and during different moments of history, they exhibit structural similarities. In each case women join together in public contexts to protest against what they feel are infringements of their economic or political prerogatives (*ibid*). Similar protests by Kom Women known as *Anlu* have been documented by Chilver (1988: 7; Nkwi, 1985) and also on the *Fombeun* in Kedjom Keku (Diduk1992; Nkwi, 2011). For example, the circumstances which triggered off the *Anlu* women uprising originated from a false rumour that land was to be sold to the Igbo, (a stranger) provoked by the arrival of surveyors (Chilver 1988: 7). Women were the farmers in both the Kom and Kedjom societies and this fear that their lands were being sold out to strangers was of serious importance (Diduk 1992: 339).

7.3 Why Women?

The Bamenda Grassfields economy of which Aghem and Bu form part has been recognised as marked by an unobtrusive division of labour in which women are engaged in so-called subsistence agriculture and food preparation and men in wealth producing activities, trade and crafts, as well as building, bush clearance and help in harvesting and the provision of meat, medicine, oil and salt (Chilver 1988: 4).⁵ This distinction has been analysed by Goheen (1988 1996) among the Nso' of the northwest region of Cameroon, and she concludes that 'men own the fields, women own the crops'.⁶ Except for a few pioneers, the response of men to food farming was slow. A man with a hoe in a grain farm was then an anomalous, even ridiculous, figure in the eyes of men and women alike in most districts (Chilver 1988: 4) and in some cases was considered a taboo except for crops that were cultivated without using the women's hoe (Henn

⁴ See Falola and Paddock (2011) on 'the women's War of 1929 and Fiona and Mackenzie (2000: 709) on the Kikuyu 'women's revolts of 1948, and Fonchingong and Tanga (2007) on *Takumbeng* of Mankon women protests

⁵ RAB, No. NW/AC.1960/1/BK

⁶ 'Women own the crops, Men own the fields', as used in this work is culled from the title of the book published by Goheen (1988, 1996) and I wish to duly acknowledge this.

1979: 207). Thus, there is a sharp division of roles and crops owned and cultivated by women and those belonging to men.

In Cameroon, women constitute 52 percent of the population and their contribution to the country's agricultural and economic development is unavoidable (Fon 2011: 65). In the chiefdoms of Aghem and Bu, women perform the main tasks of food production. Their predominantly female farmers tend to cultivate such crops like maize, groundnuts, beans and vegetables on valleys, plains and the hill sides of land that belongs to their male folks. Other crops cultivated are roots and tubers such as cassava, sweet potatoes, yams and cocoyam. The same scenario that Goheen (1996: 84) has described in Nso' exist in Wum where women perform other tasks such as tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting which in combination are ongoing tasks for much of the year and require almost daily attention. Aghem women often work in cooperative labour groups during peak labour seasons requiring maximum labour input (Kaberry 2004: 55). This predominantly female population is engaged in subsistence agriculture and sometimes food surplus is sold to generate revenue for the sustenance of the household. The importance of land is therefore very crucial for rural women in Cameroon and Wum Central Sub-division in particular. Considering the important role that they play in food cultivation, it is therefore not a surprise that the protest movements against crop damages are usually championed by women.

In practice, women, as cultivators, have considerable informal rights over plots they are actually cultivating, may loan them to other women, and transmit them to close female kin.⁷ These are in effect, managerial rights, and a sharp distinction is made between a farm and heritable family land. Women usually farm on the plots of their husband's lineage but they may exercise rights of usufruct in lands belonging to their mother's lineage and, provided they have maintained cultivation continuously, may even retain the use of plots they farm in adolescence in their father's lineage land (Kaberry 2004: 41; Teboh 2002: 170).⁸ Women's access to land is therefore dependent on their relationships with men. In such a system (Kah 2009: 190), 'since the land is managed by men, women cannot arbitrarily choose a plot of land for exploitation' or for food

⁷ Also see Funk, U (1988: 42) on a similar situation among the Brassa of Guinea-Bissau where women's access to land is indirect and is only through their relationship with men.

⁸ Also see RAB, No. NW/Ac.1960/1/BK.

production on their own. Women's land rights have been acknowledged by Henn (1979: 160) and she puts it this way:

A wife's right to her food plots cannot be taken from her even if the marriage flounders. A woman with children will remain in the husband's village even though separated or widowed in order to have land to farm in order to feed herself and her children, to earn a little cash on her own, and to protect her sons' future land rights from encroachment by the husband's relatives.

Women's usufruct rights are of course reversed in Aghem and Bu where there is matrilineal descent. Here the inheritance of plantain groves and houses is matrilineal but these revert to the *Batum* if the legal person to whom these things were handed fails to take possession (NAB No.Ad/22).

7.4 Women's Resistance to the Infringement of their Sphere

Within the Aghem federation, there are women societies –especially *Kefap*, which plays leading roles as the custodian of Aghem tradition and culture (Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 95; Kaberry 1952: 100). Furthermore, women are very important in the agrarian economy (Fonjong 2012; Goheen 1988, 1996; Kaberry 1952; Chilver and Kaberry 1967). In Aghem, apart from recreation and initiation of new members, *Kefap* whose membership is restricted to women is very important in society and performs several functions. The *Kefap* society is charged with the responsibility to ensure order in the community. In Aghem, *Natum* is a title assigned to the mother of the king. Each reigning chief or king therefore has his own *Natum*. Under the leadership of the *Natum*, women undergo a fattening process and are invigorated with a medicine brewed by the *Natum*. This medicine is also closely associated with agriculture: just prior to planting it is rubbed on the bodies of members and it is believed to bring success in farming (Kaberry 1952: 100). In the old, a *Natum* could also invoke the blessing of the ancestors and of God on the harvest (*ibid*). The women's' associations under the leadership of their *Natums* also combine to protest against flouting of custom by men, not excluding the *Batum*. They did this by strewing a man's compound with knotted elephant grass, which could not be removed until penitence had been signified by the payment of a fine (Diduk 1992; Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 95). They might even

expel a *Batum* who refused to reform or kept to tradition. This was particularly so in situations where there was an abuse of women, their rights and person (Nkwi 1985: 181).

Kefap was therefore not just a social group, but an agency through which social harmony and any interference in farming practices considered as their sphere were regulated. Furthermore, among other functions, Kefap was charged with the organisation of work parties among women and also settled disputes among members of their own sex and acted as their spokesmen. Till today, *Kefap*, like *Anlu*, serves as a militant group and the voice of the women through which any infringement is resisted (Nkwi 1985). In the case cited above, the idea of strangeness was not only directed by the women towards the Fulani but in everything that was considered contrary to traditional practices and which in some cases included the introduction of new farming methods. The existence of women societies seems to be a general characteristic of the Bamenda Grassfield chiefdoms and although they may differ in magnitude, they display a semblance in terms of their attributions.⁹

De Bruijn and van Dijk (2005: 61) however contend that although the conflicts may result from crops that have been damaged by unsupervised cattle, 'the situation is much more complicated than it appears, and current conflicts result from a complex interaction between government policies, internal contradictions between farmers and grazers'. Boye and Kaarhus (2011: 100) drag the argument further and document that in most cases they are conflicts over land and may sometimes have their roots in complex and hostile-relations over land ownership. The protests by the women were not just against crops that have been destroyed but they believed that their authority was being challenged. Drawing from the example of *Anlu* (Fisiy 1996: 223) the protests were often against changes in the farming techniques initiated by the colonial office to fight against soil erosion and environmental degradation.¹⁰ The women also objected to a government edict prescribing contour farming to replace the building of ridges vertically along hillsides.

⁹ See Nkwi, 1985, pp 181, Fonchingong et al 2007 and Diduk 1989: 338 on *Anlu*, *Takumbeng* and *Fumbeun* women associations respectively in some chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields.

¹⁰ For full account on *Anlu*, see Diduk 1989; Chilver 1988; Nkwi 1985, *Anlu* emerged as a very powerful women's social movement which was quickly transformed from its cultural trajectory to become an effective and frightening political action group during the transition to independence. Fonchingong and Tanga (2007) have also written extensively on *Takumbeng*, a similar women's movement that played a leading role in 1990 when multiparty politics was reintroduced in Cameroon.

Meant to prevent soil erosion, the directive was extremely unpopular amongst women because it is much more difficult and labour-intensive to ridge horizontally on a steep slope (Nkwi, 1976: 179). What angered the women were the fact that government-imposed agricultural innovations were introduced with minimal consultation locally and were perceived as strange and an intrusion.¹¹ Such farming techniques were already being implemented by the colonialists as far back as 1940s as a means of integrating the Fulani stranger populations. The various techniques and innovations (for example the barb wire scheme, night paddock, and grazing lands) introduced by the British have been discussed extensively in chapter Five. Such actions did not only change the land use patterns but also the idea that their land rights were being threatened by intruders.

7.5 Chiefs Facing the Women

Within the present land law, chiefs are the main signatories in all land arrangements and transactions, alongside government administrators. As custodians of the land, they are charged with the responsibilities to distribute land to women for cultivation. At the centre of the accusations by the *Kefap* women's movement was the Paramount ruler of Aghem, Fon Mbambi III who was arraigned and kept under the rain for hours by the women for always supporting and giving out farm lands to the Fulani. 'It was the grazers' "financial power" (Kah 2009: 191) that caused the disappearance of farmers' documents in the court as part of the dirty trick occasioned by the bribes given to the chief and the Wum Area Development Authority (WADA) personnel so that free access to farm plots by cattle grazers would not be a problem'. Aghem is not an isolated case where accusations have been made against chiefs and notables for corrupt practices and the transfer of land to grazers for financial gains by women. Such accusations were recorded as far back as 1958 when Kedjom Ketinguh women sang, against their Fon and Quarter heads (Diduk 1989: 243) for the same reasons. Led by Kedjom women, Fon Vugah Simon was finally murdered and burnt into ashes for 'giving land to strangers for cattle rearing and the cultivation of cash crops in January 2006.¹² This precarious situation has brought traditional rulers under serious

¹¹ See Fiona and Mackenzie (2000: 706)The introduction of agricultural policies such as crop rotation, composting and grass leys were favoured and proved to be popular among the Kikuyu but they also resisted other innovations and soil conservation techniques such as terracing

¹² In 1985, Kedjom Keku women also marched to the sub-divisional headquarters to register outrage that lands have been sold by the Fon to herders in the mountain of Kedjom Keku, see Diduk 1992: 193 & Tegomoh 2013,pp223

criticisms, scrutiny and challenges from the public. It is as part of this transfer of land use from subsistence cultivation to herding and cash crop farming that women's protests must be understood.

The Aghem women were opposed to the enormous powers that the different *Batums* wield over land matters. In the past, it was the *Batum* who controlled unused arable land and gave it out to members of his own section; the demarcation of boundaries was left to the women cultivators, usually under the supervision of his *Natum* or titular mother.¹³ As Kaberry emphasises, no men, but women only went out and distributed land to other women. The Chief went out to the fields only when there was a quarrel or a dispute between women on the land (NAB No.Ad/22). Today, the *Batums* have usurped the powers of their *Natums* and are increasingly making things difficult for the women because instead of allotting land for collective farming as required by tradition, they prefer to sell the land out rightly to the Fulani (Kah 2009: 187). 'If you tell the Fulani to get out of the land they are willing to do so but remember that the chief will prefer him to stay since he can easily buy the conscience of the chief with money or cow'.¹⁴ As Kah (2009: 188) notes, the *Batums* of Naikom, Waindo, Afuh Nkouh and Chuoembi villages are known to have received money from grazers to allow them graze on land meant for farming without the respect for demarcated areas.

The 1974 Land Ordinances provides that land can be expropriated by the state for 'public purposes' and the chief in each village is expected to facilitate the process of expropriation by demarcating and 'officially' handing over the piece of land to the state. The same ordinances also allow a chief to sign the individual title deed for property rights. As 'gate keepers' of communal land, chiefs are usually accused by women and the elite for exchanging land with the state or selling it to individuals for money. In the light of these accusations, Fon Mbambi argues that 'a *Batum* does not sell land, but "gives" land and for doing so, he receives money which is rather known as "zinc", "grass" or "firewood" to the Palace. The Fon of Aghem also acknowledged that he is usually given 200.000Fr by an indigene who is in need of a piece of land but when he gives land to the state, nothing at all is given to him. 'That is what happened when I gave land for the

¹³ See Ndifor, Cletus (1960: 44), RAB No NW/Ac.1960/1/BK, *Historical notes Bamenda Grassfields*, Delegation of Culture, Bamenda

¹⁴ Cheng Emerson, Secretary Wum Council interviewed, 20/10/2013.

Wum Cattle Market'.¹⁵ In Bu, the nomenclature is different and before land is allotted to a member of the community, 'something' is given to the Chief but it is kept secret by the giver and only known by the receiver-the *Fon*. They refer to it as "the Fon's bag." This has therefore placed traditional leaders at daggers drawn with the local communities who do not see their leaders as protecting their interest anymore. In some situations, the authority of the Batum or chiefs is contested either by his own villagers or by inhabitants from another village (Andersson 1999: 557).

7.6 A Panorama of Conflicts over Crop damages

This is usually a result of herders leaving cattle unattended and thus allowing them to wander into cultivated fields. Cattle may also go on a rampage and destroy seed crops or consume food items stored in barns. Cattle often destroy food crops during the planting season and the immediate post-harvest period (Tonah2006: 161).

Drawing from the above citation and from a study they carried out on Fulbe herders and Senoufo farmers in Northern Cote d'Ivoire, De Bruijn and van Dijk (2005: 63) demonstrate that conflicts are sometimes caused by the poor treatment of clients by their patrons. As they note, 'the rich Fulbe employ "salaried, young and impoverished Fulbe" who have no means of employment in their home [...] to look after their herds'. They go further to state that hardly do the patrons pay the meagre salaries thereby pushing them to resort to selling or stealing cattle belonging to the patrons or that of non Fulani cattle farmers.¹⁶ Consequently, some of the hired herdsmen allow the cattle to graze unsupervised; thus wandering into farms and damaging crops (Tonah 2006). On the other hand, Baye (2008: 154) demonstrates, that some Fulani with a view to frighten farmers intentionally allow their cattle to destroy crops as they believe their relationships with administrators and judges are cordial. From the above analysis, it is thought that there are different factors at play when it comes to farmer grazer conflicts.

In the following section, I present empirical evidences on some of the conflicts that I got from the field to show the trend and the different ways that they manifest. Three distinct ways that conflicts

¹⁵See Diduk (1992: 213) for a similar situation among the Kedjom Keku of the Grassfields of Cameroon where such exchanges are referred to as *meulo mufo*, "wine for the Fon."

¹⁶ For more on such stealing practices, see Manu et al (2014) 'socio-economic effect of cattle theft on the pastoralists of the northwest region of Cameroon', *Scholarly Journal of Agricultural Science* Volume 4(6) PP 299.

manifest have been identified and they include; disputes over crop damages by cattle, encroachments/trespass by farmers into grazing land and evictions. In discussing the different cases, I have also explored the part played by the Farmer/Grazer Commission which is in charge of handling farmer grazer conflicts. In the case cited above, the decision to evict Aghem women from their farm lands by the Senior Divisional Officer and the notion that their chief received bribes sparked up protests which the SDO was unable to handle. Consequently, it attracted the attention of the Regional Governor (Koumpa Isa) who paid a visit to the site. During his field visit, a mixed commission (Koumpa Isa Commission) was put in place, made up of Fulani and farmers, administrators and chiefs with their notables to look into the matter and also to subsequently handle specifically farmer/grazer disputes in the area. The commission is made up of nine members¹⁷ and meets periodically to examine reported cases; they also have the duty to undertake site visits on disputed areas and to appraise a situation before taking a decision. Consequently, since 2004, disputes involving farmers and grazers are being handled by this commission.

Selected cases involving crops that were destroyed by cattle and how the disputes were settled by the Commission¹⁸ are presented below. The first is the case between Josephine Kum (farmer) and Saidu Aliyu/Daouji Gero (Grazers). The former had accused the latter for crop damages caused by their cattle. After field inspection and evaluation by the commission, it was noticed that cattle had destroyed the crops and the commission ordered the grazers to pay the sum of 131,250 Frs to the farmer. The commission also deliberated in another case involving crop destruction caused by cattle belonging to Alhadji Baba Danpollo and Abdul Karimu at the farm of Ebua Clement in Aghem. This case is special in the sense that it involves Alhaji Baba Danpollo considered by Cameroonians to be the richest Fulani in the country.¹⁹ 'When he was invited by the commission, Danpollo failed to show up'. The commission however decided that he and Abdul Karimu should pay for the damages. It should be noted that Karimu is a hired herdsman working in the Elba

¹⁷ They are, the Sub-divisional Officer for Wum Central as the Chairperson, the Divisional Chief of Land tenure as its secretary, the Sub-divisional Delegate of Agriculture, the Divisional chief of Surveys, the Fon of the concern village and two of his notables and then the parties involved.

¹⁸ In compliance with letter No 474/1/E28.01/6Vol28/342 of 20/08/2010 convening the Wum Farmer/ grazer commission to deliberate on farmer/grazer disputes.

¹⁹ Danpollo has over 100 ha of land in Esu near Aghem, several cattle ranches in the country and the main tea producer in the country. Also see Teghemo, E (2013),pp226-7

Ranch belonging to Danpollo. In another matter, the cattle of Danpollo had also destroyed crops belonging to Akwo Cletus Chuo and through his herdsman he was also fined to pay 80.000Fr. The last but not the least of the cases was the one in which Alhaji Ibi Sale was also charged to pay the huge sum of 700.000Fr for destruction done by his cattle on the farm of Ni John Fru²⁰ at Mbinjam. These are few of the so many cases that I came across and was reported to the farmer/grazer commission to resolve. It is likely that not all cases involving damages caused by cattle are reported to the commission.

However, evidence from the SDO's office shows that the highest incidences of crop damages usually occur between March which is the peak of the farming season when food crops have been planted and in October when there is just little grass for grazing. Within this period in 2013, 87 cases of varying magnitudes were recorded by the Sub-divisional office and grazers were charged to compensate farmers with different amounts estimated at 1.6million Frs.²¹ 'The tendency has always been for the Fulani to negotiate with the individual farmers on the amounts to be paid as compensation for the crops that have been damaged and we also try as much as possible for reconciliation and this has paid off' (Ndeh Theodore interviewed 8/10/2013). In any case, not all the amount of money mentioned above were paid as in some instances the Resolutions of the Commission and various administrative Orders concerning farmer/grazer conflict were not implemented by both the traditional leaders and administrators. As Baye (2008) has argued, the administration tends to complicate the possibility of negotiating lasting solutions to the farmer – grazer problem because by so doing avenues of rent-seeking will be narrowed. There are situations where some Fulani have out rightly refused to 'compensate' farmers for such damages and instead violate Prefectural Orders.²² In the case of Idrissou mentioned below, Ndeh Theodore²³ admitted that Idrissou is notorious and has many cases involving crop damages

²⁰ 'The evaluation was estimated at One million but the commission accepted that the grazer pay 700.000FRS although Fru Ndi insisted that all the money be paid (Guemdjom Jean -Divisional chief of lands). Apart from owning over 250 cattle and farms located in Mbinjam Fru Ndi is also the leader of the main opposition political party in Cameroon. The land that he has is estimated to be over 50ha of land in the study area.

²¹ Interview with the Secretary to the DO Ndeh Theodore on 7/10/2013 Also see Farmer-grazer registrar at the D.O's office Wum Central.

²² See Prefectural Order No 036/2004 and Municipal Decision No.07/2004 and DO's Notification,7 May 2004

²³ Theodore is the Private Secretary the D.O Wum Central interviewed 7/10/2013.

caused by his cattle. 'He is always here to defend himself against charges levied by farmers and he is always hesitant to pay the money, others do pay actually'.

Idrissou owes Regina so much money for similar acts of atrocities. For over a year she did not carry out any farming activity because Idrissou threatened to kill her.

This farm that we are talking about belongs to Ma Regina; it is not even Idrissou's farm. He had a serious case with Regina and the matter was taken to the Appeal Court in Bamenda. Finally Idrissou was asked to pay Ma Regina the sum of 550,000 Frs. Idrissou did not complete the payment. He was also charged to pay 150,000 Frs for disturbance of peace and quiet enjoyment. That he did not till today. When I took the matter to the Divisional Officer, he went there and swore to the staff of the Divisional Officer that he will do all to eliminate me just as he told Ma Regina and she died. All what I want is for him to sign here and now that he will never abuse me again and will never threaten my life too. This guy also has another case with my husband. He is so heartless that he can still send cattle into your farm even in your presence. My husband has a large farm with pineapples, plantains, coffee and he does not want cows to trespass into that farm. Unfortunately cows always invade the farm. On my way to this office I saw cows in that farm. Idrissou is a very wicked man.²⁴

7.7 Encroachments into Farmlands/grazing Fields

The main reason for the protests staged by the Aghem women was the encroachment of cattle into their farm lands. I however observed that both farmers and grazers encroach into each other's sphere of influence. Several cases of encroachment by cattle into farm lands and farmers cultivating into reserves meant for grazing have been recorded. I highlight the case of *Ardo* Mama Umaru who refused to evacuate his cattle which had invaded the farm land of Buo Peter at Zonghefu and the cattle of Alhaji Ndere Shefu grazing in the farm land of Tino Jain at Naikom. The same situation was recorded in Waindo and Wanangwen villages.²⁵

On the other hand, complaints from Fulani about encroachments into grazing lands by farmers were also rampant. Women encroach and cultivate in grazing areas because cattle provides dung which enriches the soil. Even in situations where there is available land for farming, the women

²⁴ Emmerencia interviewed 7/10/2013.

²⁵ See 'Report of Wum farmer-grazer commission of 12/12/2005'

are still attracted by the dung to farm in grazing lands where they can have manure at little or no cost. Increasingly, most Fulani have lost their cattle and are now engaged in food cultivation and so they compete with farmers over fertile arable land (Dze-Ngwa 2013: 13). Competition over fertile land [...] leads to collision between the practice of extensive grazing and seasonal transhumance by Fulani herders and the shifting system of cultivation practiced by farmers (Nyamnjoh 2013a: 116). Worthy to note is the matter between Dion Shadaru who 'constructed his fence very near the house of Adamu Hassan and blocking the way of passage used by cattle for grazing and the route to the spring site. By the stipulations of the land law, it is illegal to cultivate in a grazing area that has been carefully demarcated'.²⁶ There are several reasons why the limits to the grazing lands are constantly being violated. Firstly, the degree of complementarity between farming and herding has decreased and they have become direct competitors to land and this has been described succinctly by de Bruijn and van Dijk (2005: 60) using the example of the Fulbe and Mossi as follows:

In the past, the strategies of farmers and herders were complementary in the sense that the farmers made use of the arable land and the herders made use of the bush, with sufficient space for both. After the cereal harvest, the Fulbe herders' livestock grazed on the harvest residues, were penned on Mossi agricultural land, and supplied them with manure to maintain soil fertility. This relationship altered when the Fulbe also took up cereal cultivation.

This assertion is supported by the fact that the demarcation of farming and grazing lands that took place over 20 years ago is now highly contested because of the growing population in need of more farmland (Baye 2008: 153). Since pasture for grazing is decreasing, the cattle easily encroach into farms eventually damaging crops. Secondly, the Fulani seem to have the conception that gestation is better when cattle eat residues from maize and so herders invade farms in search of maize that would improve on the gestation of cattle,²⁷ while farmers encroach into grazing lands in search of parcels of land that have been enriched by cow dung, In an effort to curb or

²⁶ Also see the prefectural Order evicting Hamidu Tashi from the plot of Chi Stephen in the report of the Fungom Agro-Pastoral commission following letter of the Divisional Officer No 69/L/E28.04/PS/45/2012 of 19th January 2012 and the case between the Lord Mayor of Wum Njukwe Charles at Mbinjam where the Mayor has invaded the grazing land of Musa Mukawo. The Mayor was ordered to evacuate the grazing land. See report of the commission of 11/03/2010 holden at Kesu following letter invitation No 358/L/E28.01/6vol28/324.

²⁷ Kuwo Beatrice, interviewed 23/11/2013, in Aghem.

reduce encroachment into grazing areas and /or farms, the government introduced the night paddock system.

Night paddock is basically a system where cattle/animals are allowed to graze in fields in the day and locked up in the paddock for the night. It can take different forms. That is, it could be enclosed paddocks or allowing them in a farm where crops have been harvested. In the latter, there must be agreement between farmers and grazers in which case, farmers risk their land being hardened by cattle trampling on it while eating residues from harvest but gain fertility. It is usually a complimentary (win-win) relationship in which farmers get fertility and grazers gain the feed. Unfortunately, this system has never worked because both parties have never respected the terms of engagements.

7.8 Ritual and Burial Sites as Strategy for Land Claims

One of the strong arguments put forward by the Aghem people about their land claims is their ownership of burial sites and the performance of rites on what Luning (2007) refers to as 'ritual territories'. Ritual sites are ancestral graves or shrines and as James (2009: 246), opines on the Mpumalanga contesting land claims, knowledge of the existence and where about of such graves has become a means to prove informal rights. More importantly, each year, the Aghem carry out traditional libations at the shrines. The shrines therefore have become significant sites for the concentration of social memory of the Aghem. The earth priest (in the case of Aghem) *Denghezem* or his first son carries out the *ndukenye* rituals at the shrines for good harvest, fertility, the birth of children, and protection of the Aghem people as Chilver and Kaberry 1967: 95) explain below.

In Aghem the main lodge for crop protection is *ndukenye*, presided over by the *Batum's* son. Its function is to protect and promote the growth of corn by the preparation and distribution of medicines on farms and road junctions during the period of growth, from April to August and sacrificing in the lodge and on the graves of the *batum's* ancestors for a good harvest [...] the first rite in September involves a sacrifice and preparation in the central medicine-house by the *Denkeghem* and a test of good will and legitimacy of his four assistants, the four senior *Batums*.

Aghem hegemony and land claims are also reflected in the history of migration, settlement and conquest over the Aghem land. The Aghem insist that they do not have any collective memory with the Fulani and because of this; they have continued to see the Fulani as strangers and intruders. Going by this, the Aghem customary law considers the Fulani as illegal squatters and make their presence unlawful, thus effectively denying their land rights (James 2009: 239). The essence here is to bring out the important role that ritual and burial sites play in land claims. I link this up with the scenario that I observed in the field as explained below.

A more serious case I came across was the one between Alhaji Ngouni and the Regent of Kesu where the regent allocated part of grazing land supposedly belonging to Ngouni to Kesu women without the knowledge of the Farmer-Grazer commission. When the Regent was ordered to select a different site for Kesu women by the administration, he resisted saying that the portion of the land was a ritual site and instead requested that Alhaji Ngouni should move. To him, if he evicts the Kesu women over that piece of land and hand it to Ngouni, calamity will befall him as it is the ancestral site which harbours the shrine of the Kesu deity. He insisted that 'the ancestors will be angry with me and it will even be difficult to convince the women to move to another site'.²⁸ Luning (2007: 95), articulates in a similar study among the Maane in Burkina Faso that 'these places are not considered to be empty but populated by 'bush beings' (the ancestors) and seen as the source of life on condition that they remain free of ordinary human and social activities'. The ancestors are therefore always there to watch over the people who must not let them get angry. The administration however insisted that Kesu women must be evicted from that area because according to the D.O-Kandem Ngounou Maurice, 'the law of Cameroon is superior to tradition'. The administrator then decided that the women must leave that parcel of land that the commission had allotted to Alhaji Ngouni and that 'a solid cattle proof fence be constructed by the farmers under the supervision and responsibility of the chief of Kesu'. The commission also ordered that Alhaji Ngouni should construct a strong paddock to keep his cattle save at night. Till today, the issue has remained unsettled and frequent disputes occur on this ritual site. In this narrative, there is a clash between the statutory legislation and customary tenure which does not only ridicule and put the village chief of Kesu in a dilemma but also make him to lose

²⁸ See Minutes of dispute between Alhaji Ngouni and the Chief of Kesu at Mbinjam of 20th January 1997 following invitation Order from the DO No598/L/E28.01/6vol23/714 of 17/1/97.

trust from the Kesu women who see their leader as violating the tradition and the DO as an intruder. To prevent the Aghem from visiting or performing rituals on these shrines or lose claims over them is a serious source of grievance. Aghem women have attributed the rampant death of chiefs in Aghem as a result of the curse from their ancestors as they (women) even pray for their demise. ‘Aghem women have deserted their chiefs and have even vowed not to take part at their funerals. Whatever we do the dead are seeing and we are really in agony for what our chiefs are doing’²⁹

Another area of conflict is the management of natural resources such as forest reserves. With the enactment of the 1994 forestry laws, exploitation of the forest and the hunting of wild animals have been regulated if not forbidden and the killing of wild life is punishable by law. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), wild life has been classified into three distinct classes.³⁰ The restrictions imposed on the exploitation of these forests without providing alternative sources of livelihoods have become ineffective as the adjacent communities to the forests have continued to depend on them for survival although they are aware of government regulations. With land ownership drifting away from the communities into the hands of the state, the customary claim on the land by traditional rulers over the forests has become meaningless (Postel 2013: 242). Like it is with all unoccupied lands, traditional rules governing forest use have been diluted by formal legal land titles, by indigenes and outsiders seeking land for farming, grazing and cash crop plantations.

7.9 The First Comer/Late Comer Thesis

The migration and settlement of the peoples of Cameroon brought together different conflicting cultures in search for peace and welfare (Dze-Ngwa 2013: 3). While most ethnic entities settled in specific locations, others found no separate geographical space, but settled amicably among the autochthons (*ibid*). This was the case with the Aghem/Bu communities who migrated and settled

²⁹ Kum Beatrice interviewed 7/11/2013, in Aghem.

³⁰ Class ‘A’ include animals such as Elephants, tigers, leopard, lion, crocodile, chimpanzee, Baboons, Monkeys, Gorillas etc and hunting is strictly forbidden and punishable by law. Fines range from 2-10 years imprisonment or cash payment from 500.000FRS to 10million FRS Class ‘B’, includes animals such as cane rats ,rat moles that need permission before hunting can be done and class ‘C’ includes ruminants that are hunted without permission. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/> Accessed 2/5/2014.

at their present sites at an earlier date. Generally, these ‘first comers’ are referred to as the ‘early settlers’ and the Fulani who came in later are often called ‘late comers or simply ‘strangers’. The history of the Fulani is beyond the scope of this chapter but it has been discussed extensively in chapter six. Unfortunately, with the changing fortunes and diminishing wealth in cattle, urbanisation (Nyamnjoh 2013a: 118), increasing population, new land policies and decreasing pastures, and innovations in cattle herding practices; the Fulani have been compelled to adopt a sedentary life style.³¹ The Aghem /Bu land claims have always been based on grounds that they were the ‘first comers’ or ‘founders’ and or rightful owners of the land. As far back as 1940, the Fulani started clamouring for citizenship rights, instead, they were granted grazing permits and refused the status of politically independent minority and classified as ‘strangers’ rather than ‘natives.’³² It is within the ambit of the colonial land policies and the Cameroon land law that this idea of perceiving the Fulani as strangers has been engrained into the minds of the Aghem and Bu people.

I argue that this ‘first comer’ thesis, is used by the dominant group to tap scarce resources from the state and also to keep away competing groups from these resources and from occupying geopolitical space on grounds that those who came later are not the ‘rightful owners’ of the land (Konings 2008; James 2009 Nyamnjoh 2013a). It is important to note that the situation of farmers and Fulani herders in Wum is not an isolated case because; the politics of belonging has been instrumentalised as a system of governance in Cameroon.³³ That is why in the Cameroonian context dominated by the politics of belonging and ethnic identity, highly migrant groups such the Bamilike and Fulani have come to embody the image of what Ndjio (2009: 77) refers to as ‘eternal strangers’ who threaten the existence of autochthonous populations in their ancestral lands. Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, in the past, both farmers and grazers developed complimentary strategies where one benefitted from the other and vice versa.

³¹ The practice of intensive cattle rearing and pasture improvement through the planting of fodder such as *Bracaria*, *Accasia*,

³² See NAB No. Ab17 (6) ‘Application for lease of grazing grounds in the Cameroons Province’.

³³ For more on ‘cam-no-go’, see Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003; Nkwi 2006.

7.10 Why are these Conflicts Persistent?

First, Wum has a huge population of Fulani and cattle and the population density has increased from 12.5pers/Km² to 88 inhabitants /Km². The available grazing land in Menchum is 41.533 ha and the grazing land per animal in a year has reduced from 3.6ha in 1990 to 2.8 in 2000 (Ndenecho 2010: 61). Following this trend, it is estimated that there has been a further decrease in 2014.³⁴ Secondly, Jangali tax has become a veritable source of income for the Wum Municipal Council. The more cattle there are in a council area, the more revenue that accrues to the council. Consequently, because Jangali is a source of revenue for the municipal council, they prefer to deal with the Fulani than with the local population who contribute nothing into the council coffers.

Furthermore, conflicts and rivalries, what Sone (2012a: 91) refers to as ‘class animosity’ have continued to exist between chiefs and the administration over allodia rights. This is because according to the 1974 Land Ordinances, the control of land is now vested in the DO who is the chairman of the Land Consultative Board. Landowners (chiefs) argue that the Administration has no right to allocate land and determine the purpose for which it may be used. ‘Landowners and villagers increasingly resist attempts by the District Administration to usurp their power to control and distribute land in their traditional areas’. In addition, the majority of the rural people still has the strong belief in their customs and out of sheer ignorance of the functioning of State law, has continued to rely on their local land tenure mechanisms for land management (Fisiy 1992: 148; Logo and Bokie 1998). As Fisiy notes further, ‘the state claim to unregistered land has not reduced the amount of ethnic and village disputes over ancestral lands. The practice is such that local landlords and chiefs still exercise a firm grip on land grants within their areas of jurisdiction and they behave as if no such law exist. In fact, in all cattle grazing areas, the chiefs have never accepted the fact that the grazers are now answerable to the Senior Prefects rather than to them. This switch in loyalty from the chiefs to the Senior Prefect is said to be one the causes of mounting farmer-grazer tensions. The chiefs and their subjects have persistently accused the administration of colluding with or favouring the richer grazers because they receive bribes in cattle from them (Fisiy 1992: 229). On the other hand, chiefs who are guardians of customary

³⁴ For details, see Ndenecho 2010pp 61. Each ruminant is entitled to about 4 square metres of grazing land per day on the average and with demographic pressure and competition over resources, conflicts are bound to continue.

land are being lured and co-opted in an alliance with the governing state elites as members of the Land Consultative Board (Fisiy 1992: 148) where they have also been accused of protecting the interest of the rich Fulani. This has made the Fulani and the women to be vulnerable to corrupt practices that work to the advantage of the chiefs and the administration without seeking a final solution to the disputes. In addition, the administration and chiefs use the farmer/grazer conflict as a means of enriching themselves and as such constituting part of rather than a solution to the problem (Kah 2009: 188). This assertion is supported by Moritz (2006: 103) and Dafinger and Pelican (2006: 133) who note that 'traditional and regional administrative authorities purposefully and masterfully avoid conflict resolution as they gain more by perpetuation of the conflict than by its resolution'. It has been argued that chiefs have indulged in selling land because royalties that came in the past and enabled chiefs to run the palaces are not coming again.³⁵ Now traditional rulers run the palaces with no means and the only option open to them is to sell land. The Fulani have also accused the women of using the damages caused by cattle as a means to maximize their gains or minimize their losses by seeking compensation and punitive damages based on the premise that herders "can afford more" and thus should pay more (Moritz 2006: 21). The conflicts are further complicated and compounded by this cycle of accusations and lack of trust amongst the contending groups that instead struggle to make maximum gains out of the situation.

Another reason why the conflicts have persisted is the fact that the committees set up to handle the persistent farmer/grazers conflicts are overwhelmingly dominated by men to the detriment of women. Women who constitute the bulk of the farming population are not included in the Land Consultative Boards and the law does not take into account women's concerns (Logo and Bikié 1998). It is the same scenario as it concerns the farmer/ grazer commissions where women and Fulani are not represented. It is however important to note that a Fulani could be called up by the Commission to justify, only when his cattle are involved in crop damages or trespass. Apart from that, they are not represented in the commission. More importantly, the members are made up of state bureaucrats who very often are 'strangers' and do not know the customs and traditions of the people they are dealing with.

³⁵ Fon Fobuzee interviewed 8/11/2013

It should be noted that right from the colonial era, cattle played an important role in the local economy of the area and till today, it has continued to be the major source of revenue for the Wum Municipal Council.³⁶ The Fulani have constantly argued that they make enormous contributions to the economy of the country especially in the beef diet of towns and villages in Cameroon which comes largely from cattle raised by Fulani people but unfortunately they have always been regarded as second class citizens and have never had a voice.³⁷ By implication, it would be of strategic interest for the government and society to protect Fulani cattle-grazers. Besides, the Fulani people argue that they pay huge taxes to the various local councils including the exorbitant taxes known as *Jangali*. As Nana observes:

The Fulani remain politically excluded from major decision making structures in Cameroon and are constantly reminded of the second class status (FIDH, 2013).³⁸ ‘Locals tell us that we should go away from here and that this is not our land, where do we go to? This is where I was born; this is where my father was born. When people say we should go away, where do they really expect us to go to?’

Despite the enormous fiscal contributions that the Fulani bring into the area through cattle tax, they are still marginalised and are not considered as full members of the community. The Fulani also argue that they are not only marginalised economically, but politically too. ‘They claim under-representation or no representation at all in local councils and top government positions even though they contribute enormously to the economy of the region’s economic prowess.’³⁹ Some of this marginalisation is as a result of internal contradictions within the Fulani society itself (De Bruijn and van Dijk 2005) and the way they also relate with their neighbours. ‘They understand their neighbours but their neighbours do not understand them’.⁴⁰ Influenced by the *Pulaaku code*, they claim superiority over the indigenous people and this has promoted and reinforced the dichotomy with the indigenous populations thus creating permanent social

³⁶ Cheng Secretary Wum Council interviewed 12/10/2013, Wum Council Office

³⁷ Nana, S. Pioneer Secretary General, now lives in Hull, UK

³⁸ In the northwest region, there are only 46 Fulani Municipal Councillors out of 1035 and none is a Mayor. It is the same scenario in Aghem where they are not in any of the structures; the best they have had is a Deputy Mayor-Adamou. Within the traditional Council structures, they are co-opted as members but their membership is only restricted to issues that involve grazers/farmer disputes.

³⁹ Also see Dze-Ngwa 2013, pp18

⁴⁰ Achuo Michael interviewed 7/11/2013

boundaries.⁴¹ ‘There is more cooperation among the Fulani and they have often manifested more solidarity with other Fulani (Mbororo) out of Aghem and Bu than with the indigenous peoples.’⁴² By distancing themselves from the indigenous people in so many ways, there is prejudice between farmers and the Fulani as they have been objectified in victimhood. In the same line of thought, Nyamnjoh (2013a: 111) has argued that contrary to the perception that the Fulani are bush people and uncivilised, the Fulani rather look down with silent disdain on farmers whom they even consider as poor. Furthermore, they are largely endogamous, marrying often within their own clan or close affine to prevent division of their wealth and to protect bloodlines. Paradoxically, some Fulani have become more socially integrated and have become ‘insiders’ even if they are still seen as outsiders by the ‘others’. They are now buying and owning large tracts of land, in Wum. A case in point is the Fulani *Ardo* of Wum who now owns extensive lands and would not accept that the land be reduced.⁴³

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to identify the main causes of land conflicts and the key actors that perpetuate such conflicts. The analyses reveal that although the disputes centre on crop damages by cattle or trespass, they are not automatically based on economic considerations but usually have multiple meanings. These conflicts also reflect local power hierarchies and the role that government agents play in them. In addition, the Fulani in the area have distanced themselves from the Aghem/Bu people in so many ways and because they are not fully integrated, there are often considered as the ‘others’ and conflicts are bound. Again, this chapter has shown that women play a leading role not only as the main food cultivators but as custodians of the culture and land conflicts in this area can not be fully explained without examining social and gender relations in the area. Furthermore, the farmer-grazer disputes in Aghem are embedded in cultural practices where two tenure regimes operate. Till today, neither farmers and herders, nor the colonial and post colonial administration have been successful in negotiating a satisfactory way of combining the two extensive economic systems (Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 132).

⁴¹ For more Pulaaku, see Dze-Ngwa 2013; and Nyamnjoh, Stenning 1959

⁴² Ndeh Theodore, interviewed 8/10/2013 at DO’s Office Wum

⁴³ He has two title deeds and he owns land that is estimated at over 50 hectares .

The metaphor of the elephants and the grass simply relates to the chiefs and administration (elephants) on one hand and the Fulani and women (grass) on the other hand. It describes the clash and contradictions in the customary law and the statutory legislations that have permanently prevented the Fulani and women from having land rights and have constantly brought them into confrontations. Implicitly, the two tenure systems considered here as the elephants and the Fulani and women seen as the grass that suffers. The discrepancies in both tenure regimes and the role of chiefs and administrators have led to chaos of some sort.

Finally, identity politics plays an important role in these conflicts and this is a situation where particular groups claim territories and natural resources as their own, to the exclusion of others. This is generally marked by a growing desire to exclude people considered as strangers from economically resource rich areas as we have seen in Wum.

Chapter Eight: ‘Land is now Money’: Understanding the Role of Domestic Elites in land Deals

8.1 Introduction:

The 1974 and 1994 land tenure and the forestry legislations abolished traditional land tenure systems and proscribed formal land and resource use procedures, which progressively tilted to individual ownership under some sort of freehold (Baye 2008: 143). In Wum and in other regions of Cameroon, domestic elites, bureaucrats, and rich cattle grazers exploit these laws and use their positions and wealth to amass large tracts of land, on which they establish cattle ranches and plantations and some are actually involved in land hoarding. The paper argues that the phenomenon of land grabbing is essentially a product of imbalance power relations orchestrated by the political elite because of their position in the public sphere, and enforced by economic considerations and a weak institutional legal frame work.

In this chapter, I seek to answer the question; why attempts to mitigate these conflicts have always failed. In doing so, I focus on the role of domestic elites and huge land acquisitions (Sone 2012b: 86). In many cases, their activities have deprived the rural population of parcels of land on which their subsistence hinges (*ibid*). I also demonstrate how these domestic elites exploit the weaknesses of both customary tenure and statutory land law to fan conflicts than providing solutions. I present the biographies of two domestic elites to demonstrate how land commoditisation has not only contributed to these conflicts but have been used to accumulate wealth and have become an arena to mobilise political support through political patronage. I start by examining the phenomenon of land grabbing or huge land acquisitions and the reasons why people engage in land grabbing.

8.2 Understanding the Phenomenon of Land Grabbing

Within the past two decades, land grabbing has attracted the interest of scholars and researchers (White 2013: 38) and there is growing evidence that much academic literature is being published on this. However, the phenomenon of land grabbing does not only involve states or transnational organizations within the international sphere but local actors who are also acquiring huge tracts of

land.¹ Unfortunately, a lot has been written about global land deals and very little attention has been paid to domestic land grabbing. This chapter shifts from global land deals involving transnational organisations and states and examines domestic land grabbing. This is crucial for several reasons; firstly, concentrating on large-scale transnational land deals, precludes our understanding of the land dynamics that are taking place at the local levels (Liversage 2010: 5). Secondly, domestic land grabbers constitute a market chain and are linked to the global markets where they serve as the main conduits through which semi-finished and finished agricultural produce are transmitted from the local markets to the international markets. This is usually done in collusion or alliance with external interests. Thirdly, domestic land grabbing and commoditisation of land has become the foundation for the formation of capitalist mode of production and wealth accumulation and losing this land for local food production has disproportionate impacts on food security and livelihoods (Zoomers 2013: 59). Finally most of the communal/local conflicts are masterminded by these domestic elites as I have demonstrated below.

8.3 The Drivers Behind Land Grab

A lot of theoretical assumptions have been posited by scholars as to why organisations, states and individuals engage in land grabbing and the reasons are as varied as there are needs. I shall proceed by examining the different trajectories that explain why land grabbing has become an issue and taking a particular dimension now. Matondi et al (2011) define land grabbing to include exploration, negotiations, acquisitions or leasing, settlement and exploitation of the land resource, specifically to attain energy and food security through export to investors' countries and other markets. This definition suggests that multiple actions take place in the process of land grabbing. It also indicates that several actors are involved. At the international level, it involves bi-lateral

¹ According to the International Land Coalition, 80million hectares have been acquired worldwide while Oxfam puts the figures at 227million hectares and over 60% of such land deals are in Sub-Saharan Africa (White 2013: 38). As Evers, Seagle and Krijtenburg (2013: 2) indicate, the estimates differ but point to a growing trend. Since 2006, 46 million hectares were leased out to foreign investors and 20 million hectares officially transferred to investors worldwide and 20 million leased to private companies, states and businesses in Africa alone. Following Zoomers (2013: 58), a report by the Global Land Project demonstrates that a minimum of around 10 million hectares in each of Mozambique, DR Congo and Congo and in 27 African countries (Olanya 2012: 10) where 177 deals covering between 51 and 63 million hectares of land have been leased out.

cooperation between states while at the local levels it involves local elites in connivance with state bureaucrats and sometimes community leaders. Several reasons have been advanced by different scholars for the intensification of land acquisition but these reasons are varied and sometimes full of contradictions (white 2013: 38).

According to White (2013: 38) one of the main drivers for land grabbing is the idea that there is availability of huge tracts of 'empty or 'unused', 'idle' land in most of the developing countries. Frequently, national states consider underused land as being available for disposal to outside investors (Liversage 2010: 3). This supports the claim by the colonialists who saw land as abundant, 'underutilised' or 'unoccupied' and therefore considered as something to be appropriated and owned by individuals for capitalist accumulation (Ndege 2012: 20) and for the production of cash crops for the metropolitan markets. At the domestic level, the scenario is the same, as the Cameroon Land Ordinance is not only perverse but also considers some categories of land as 'unoccupied' or 'state land'. This is further accentuated by the idea that ownership to land rights is only through a title deed and so all unregistered land is considered 'unoccupied.'² This in most cases has provided the opportunity for the financially viable and politically influential elites to grab most of the 'unoccupied' land. White (2013: 38) however argues that what is being called idle land and leased by governments to foreign investors in reality often belongs to the community and is governed by customary rights. Still in line with his argument, Liversage (2010: 3) contends that it is increasingly recognised that, while some land may be underutilised, very little is not owned, vacant or unused. According to Olanya (2012: 34), the perception that land is abundant is misleading because he sees 'idle land' as an important source of livelihood for the rural poor, which provides them with resources for subsistence farming, such as access to edible wild plants, grazing, water and firewood.

Another school of thought holds that the search for land in African countries has been triggered by growing concerns over food, population growth and energy security in developed countries following the global food crisis of 2008 (Olanya 2012: 4;Evers et al 2013: 1).³ Rich countries or

² See Cameroon Land Ordinances of 6th July 1974.

³ The food security of food-insecure nations was threatened by skyrocketing food prices in 2008 resulting from increased import bills and inflation, harsh weather conditions, poor soils and scarce land and water in many areas, combined with economic and demographic growth Also see Olanya 2012,pp 9.

foreign investors are therefore driven by food, fuel and livestock shortages at home and so embark on investing in food production, what White (2013: 39) refers to as ‘off shore farming’. This is to ensure food and fuel security at home in an era of recurrent shortages and rising commodity prices (*ibid*). In fact, ‘food-insecure’ governments that used to rely on imports to feed their populations, like the Gulf States, are now seeking to outsource domestic production by buying and/or leasing vast areas of farm land abroad for food production (Olanya 2012: 5). The same assumption holds at the domestic levels. In 2008, Cameroon was hit by food crisis and rising prices of staple foods (Awung and Atanga 2011: 95) which forced a lot of people to invest in agriculture; thereby acquiring most of the land from the rural communities. Increasingly, land also has become a veritable source of income for the rich both at national and local levels where people can make a lot of profit. Price rises in basic food stuffs such as rice and wheat in 2007–08 encouraged financial speculators to invest in land to generate profit, not to feed people (Olanya 2012: 17).

Other Scholars see land grabbing as an opportunity to reverse longstanding underinvestment in agriculture that could allow land-abundant countries to gain access to better technology and more jobs for poor farmers and other rural citizens (Olanya 2012: 5). They consider poor developing countries as the recipients of these investments and that are actively trying to attract investors because they value land deals as an opportunity to gain funds for the development of agriculture or infrastructure (Friss and Reenberg (2010: 7). In fact, proponents of this school see land grabbing as a means to stimulate agricultural development (Zoomers 2013: 56) in developing countries.⁴Small scale farmers could significantly increase yields and incomes, both of which are necessary for poverty reduction. Consequently, investments in agriculture have been seen as the opportunity to provide employment and encourage skills development and secondary industry.

Another argument is that the global ‘land grab’ is to a large extent the result of the liberalisation of land markets, a policy adopted in the early 1990s that has contributed to the commoditisation of land and other natural resources (Olanya 2012: 6).They argue that land is just another factor of production and should be placed at the disposal of those who can afford it and only through land

⁴ There are various competing interests in these deals. International institutions such as the World Bank and FAO support foreign investment in farmlands in Africa, along with African governments, which believe that land deals offer a golden opportunity to develop the African agrarian economy. See Olanya 2012pp,22 .

deals can there be an agricultural boom. This has also been influenced by the notion that free market economy encourages free mobility of capital that in turn, opens land markets to cross-border transactions and buyers (White 2013: 40). As White (2013: 39) concludes, food shortages and rising prices notwithstanding, global scarcity provides an opportunity for capital accumulation and so land grabbing is an effective, safest and attractive means of investment in today's turbulent global economy. This is how Liversage (2010: 6) has summarized the drivers for land grabbing and it goes thus:

Rapid population growth, changing consumer patterns, climate change, a shrinking natural resource base, and continued extreme poverty and vulnerability in rural societies, especially in the developing world, require a major shift in the approach to development. There is a need for increased investment in agriculture in the developing world focusing on promoting and supporting smallholder farmers, pastoralists and artisanal fishers. The main assets that they have are land, labour and their creativity. Often what they need is secure land, water and other natural resource rights, capital investment, expertise, appropriate technology and access to markets.

8.4 The State and Domestic Elites as Vectors for Land Commercialisation

Within the past several decades, land has increasingly become a commodity of everyday trade in most urban and peri-urban areas in Africa and Cameroon through leases to indigenes and non-indigenes for housing and commercial developments (Pul 2003: 62). Specifically, domestic elites in Cameroon and in the Grassfield have indulged in the process of acquiring huge tracts of land for the establishment of agro-businesses to serve local and international markets.⁵ This has brought unnecessary pressure on land and its resources and also competition over access to land which in most cases have resulted into conflicts. This is important because land is perceived by rural users as a source of security and relative stability (Boye and Kaarhus 2011: 118). That notwithstanding, increasingly, a lot of financially rich domestic elites are now engaged in large scale mono-cropping and cattle herding both requiring huge tracts of land. The conflicts in Wum should therefore not be seen as resulting only from competition between Fulani herders and

⁵ Examples cited include Ahadj Baba Danpullo owns the largest tea estates in Cameroon-one at Ndu in the northwest and the other at Tole in the Southwest region of Cameroon. Also see Fisiy 1992 on Chief Mukete who is the Paramount chief of the Bafaw and the Oldest Senator in Cameroon with Huge oil palm plantation in Kumba

farmers but also competition among domestic elites. Again, the competition over access to land and landed resources can also be considered as competition between two different land use or production systems: agriculture and cattle rearing (Moritz 2006: 7). 'As competition for these resources increases, people have become more and more aware of its monetary value and the need to exclude potential competitors' (Dafinger and Pelican 2006: 139). In most instances, the elites use their vantage power positions and commercial interests to appropriate and transform communal land into private property aided by an ambiguous and confused land law (Simo 2011: 8).⁶ Apart from generating situations of food insecurity, this also exacerbates conflicts over diminishing land holdings. Protests against land seizure by the local communities have always led to confrontations, brutality, arrests, deaths, detentions and in some cases legal action.⁷

Domestic elites operate within the state where there are administrators (bureaucrats) and a legal institutional framework which they sometimes manipulate to achieve certain desires. For instance, they have always been accused of colluding and collaborating with state bureaucrats to dispose communities and families from their land. The central role played by the state towards the acquisition of land by domestic elites is incumbent because 'all lands has been placed in the public domain' and this makes it difficult for various groups and communities to indulge in legal claims and counter claims over the land (Pul 2003: 58). The state has been described variously by scholars, and some see it as being at a distance 'out there', irrelevant and indifferent but only having the capacity to extract (Nyamnjoh 2013b: 2) or exploit resources. Other social scientists have simply conceptualized the state in the abstract (Fisiy 1992: 150), in which individuals and communities bypass national borders and undermine the role of the state to tap from these resources in a discrete and disjunctive manner (Ferguson 2005: 379; Nyamnjoh 2013b: 2) As Moritz (2006: 19) puts it, 'bureaucrats and elites instrumentalize the apparent disorder to use the state and its public resources for personal enrichment and support for their clients'.

⁶ See Cameroon land law of 1974 which gives right for individual land entitlement, yet there are lots of complications and it is really cumbersome for one to have a land title because of the huge cost involved and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

⁷ Mbororo appeal acquittal torture case <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/lisa-matthews/mbororo-appeal-acquittal-torture-case> accessed 02/01/2013

Since the state in most cases has never met up with its responsibilities and perform its duties, the result of this unrealistic expectations⁸ of the 'state' has given room for ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty in the governing of natural resources (Moritz 2006: 107). Where the state does not have the capacity or will to exercise its sovereignty, there has always been a break down in law and order (Hansen 2006: 306). Sovereignty therefore evokes the idea of maintaining public order at all cost and the state has the monopoly of power that is often exercised through the courts and the police. Within the state, local strongmen (political elite) occupy strategic positions between state institutions and the population and very often become very powerful especially in situations where proper land titling has never been undertaken and where access to entitlements is contingent on having a well-connected patron who can channel claims and applications. It is within this background that we should see farmer-herder conflicts not only as a result of crops destroyed by cattle and access to land but also about local power relations and the role governmental agents play in them (Definger and Pelican 2006: 134). Generally, elite claims to land right have often been enforced by state institutions (Galaty, 2013: 20).

There are three principal ways through which the elites can have access to land. The appropriate means is through one's membership into a community. Most of the domestic elite maintain close contacts with their communities and by virtue of their birth; they enjoy certain rights and owe certain obligations to these communities. Access to land is one of such rights, and this is the most common pattern of having access to landed property (Fisiy 1992: 166). Another method of acquiring land is through purchase or lease and here one does not necessarily need to be a member of the community and today such transactions are protected by the Cameroon Land Ordinances. Finally, access to land can also be through state expropriation where domestic elites and bureaucrats who organise themselves as elites from certain specific areas try to direct state development projects to their areas of origin (Fisiy 1992: 152) and very often, this gives them the opportunity to manipulate state power for personal advantages. In matters relating to land, it has become a very common practice to acquire land in the name of the state and, in turn, convert the same into private estates for members of the state elites (*ibid*). As Elhadary and Obeng-odoom

⁸ As Ferguson (2005: 380) holds, the state has the responsibility to protect, provide services, products, accounts, statistics to and about its citizens but very often, the state has failed to do this and this makes it possible for leakages and weaknesses within the state which individuals and groups exploit for their advantage.

(2012: 59) put it ‘the state grabs land and sells it to amass wealth and power under the guise of compulsorily acquiring land in the public interest and for title registration’. In some situations, they use force and their positions to acquire land from indigenous populations. In other areas, they seize the best land tracts from local farmers and assert their family claims on the lands, thereby further marginalising the farmers who are also family members by pushing them to the outskirts to look for farmland (Sone 2012a: 89).

8.5 Elites and the ‘Sons and Daughters of the Soil’ Syndrome

There is enough evidence to show that ethnic elites constitute important triggers of violence and conflicts in most of Africa and Cameroon (Pul 2003: 42). The causes of farmer/grazer conflicts in the northwest region of Cameroon (Pelican 2008; Sone 2012b; Baye 2008; Nyamnoh 2013b) have been closely associated with the actions of the rich elites in their various communities on grounds that they are the rightful owners or ‘sons and daughters’ of the soil (Nkwi 2011; Geschiere 1993; Nyamnjoh 2013c; Ndjio 2009). As sons and or daughters of the soil, they consider themselves as the rightful owners of the soil thereby categorising those whom they consider not to be part of the ‘soil’ as the ‘others’ or ‘strangers’. Since most of the domestic elite generally have the means to mobilise the population to protect the land that they consider to be theirs, they can also determine the course of conflict (Swain et al 2011). Most of the elite therefore appeal to ethnic sentiments or use public offices and /or state power and resources for ethnic interests (Pul 2003: 64), to claim their land rights (Geschiere 2005a).

As Swain et al (2011: 27) have documented in the Southern African Region, most conflicts be them riots, insurgencies or less organized forms of conflicts usually necessitates the active involvement of elites. In fact, most scholars argue that ‘without the presence of resourceful and willing politicians, businessmen, communal or military leaders, a desire amongst individuals to engage in violence is unlikely to transform itself into collective action’ (*ibid*). Apart from the fact that they occupy positions of leadership in the community, they also have the financial leverage that would enable them to mobilise the local populations to engage in conflicts. The lower echelons of society seldom have the resources and skills needed to finance and co-ordinate violent acts of a collective nature. Ethnic –led conflicts occur when ethnic symbolism goes to extremes-

what Pul (2003: 58) refers to as the ‘ethnic myths’. That is why the Fulani grazers who migrated from Nigeria have persistently been considered as strangers, irrespective of whether they were born in the region or not (Fisiy 1992: 224). Following Ndege (2102: 51), domestic elites use land as a factor of political and ideological contestation, which in itself, is about power and the legitimacy of competing claims to authority, as about control of property *per se*.

By utilizing ethnic, political, economic or military networks, they can generate the necessary feelings of affinity, trust and even fear to convince men and women to fight for them... Such acts of violence can at times be an extension of national disputes, whereby chiefs and communal leaders align themselves with national patrons, or, be purely localized affairs concerning the control of local resources (Swain et al 2011: 28).

The mechanisms, processes and institutions through which the political elite organise their activities arises from an imbalance power relations that do not permit ordinary citizens and groups to articulate their interests, exercise their rights, meet their obligations, let alone to mediate their differences (Simo 2011: 5).

8.6 Why Sell the Land?

Driven by economic hardship and persistent poverty caused by the economic crisis of the 1980s and mid 1990s, people see land as the quickest means to get money. Secondly, land is seen as something they have simply inherited or acquired freely and so could easily give it out without any constraints. Thirdly, land has become a commodity just like any other article fit for the market through which money can be generated. ‘Land is now money and people sell land to pay school fees, medical expenses, and to carry out investments.’ Also there is the belief in some communities that land is in abundance and has no use. ‘There is no use keeping large tracts of land when you really need money to solve your problems. It is better you give out parcels of the land to someone who can develop it and put it into use’.⁹ Fon Fobuzee has attributed the unorthodox practices of selling land by traditional rulers to poverty and he puts it this way:

We should be very honest that while we condemn the practice by traditional rulers to sell land we should also condemn the practice of the population who has abandoned traditional rulers

⁹ Chu Joseph, interviewed 30/11/2013, Naikom, Aghem

to their own fate. I know some traditional rulers who used to have 77 wives with more than 400 children, in fact a village. That is not the ideal that is not what we want. The future is very bright particularly as they are putting young Fons and a good number of them are not idle sitting there waiting for Royalties, many are employed. Take a young Fon, the moment he is put on the throne as the tradition dictates, he soon have four, five and six wives and children come in as fast and he has to educate them, feed them, then he has to give them medical care and all these responsibilities, and he sits there with nothing.

Today, the new chiefs are selling the land out rightly. 'It is only here in Kesu that I hear that land is being sold. There are people from Bafmen that have bought land here. Since I grew up in Waindo, Chief Banja never sold land. The chiefs are very lazy today and do not want to work as their predecessors did. They have farms but do not want to work' (Emmerencia 7/10/2013). For fear that the community land will be taken away by state bureaucrats, chiefs prefer to sell or lease out the land in order not to lose everything to the state (Fisiy 1995: 55).

8.7 The 'Silent Group' and the Fulanisation of the Farmer-grazer Conflicts

For the past four decades, land has become a commodity and the domestic elites are seriously engaged in huge land acquisitions in Wum and in Cameroon. Like it is in most other areas in Cameroon, the commoditisation of land is one of the major factors that have exacerbated the land conflicts in Wum. Unfortunately, this group of people whom I would like to refer to as the 'Silent group' are usually 'forgotten' and most discourses simply gloss over the role they play in land deals and only focus on Fulani. But I emphasise that there has been the over politicization of the *Fulaniness* in the grazer/farmer relations in Aghem. This Fulanization has contributed towards a negative stereotype and stigmatisation of the Fulani that have further alienated them from being socially integrated into the indigenous communities. The statistics I got from Aghem indicate that there is a growing trend for the acquisition of land certificates by the economic and political elites in the area. Because the 1974 Land Ordinances does not limit how much land someone can acquire, this has made it possible for the rich to have as many land titles as there is money. I identified about 20 persons mostly politicians and businessmen who have more than five land certificates in Wum alone with over 277ha of land (see table below). Most of those who have

acquired land in the area do not live there and are considered absentee land lords or migrant land grabbers. Those of them who own cattle have entrusted the herding of their stock in the hands of Fulani herdsmen, while others have given out parcels of the land on lease basis or on tenancy arrangements to farmers. I cite a few examples to elucidate the point very well.

A rich Fulani rancher who has appropriated huge tracts of land in Wum and other parts of the Northwest region is Alhadji Baba Danpollo who, apart from the huge tea estates in Ndawara Boyo, Ndu-Donga Mantung, Djottisa, and Tole in - Buea (Nyamnjoh 2013a: 124-5), he has also acquired 100ha of land in Esu and another 200ha in Bafmen.¹⁰ Danpollo's Elba Ranch in Esu is about 100ha but he is claiming over 2000ha from the villagers and this has resulted into a conflict between him and the villagers. Several attempts have been made by the Divisional officer for Menchum to bring him in person to Esu for the problem to be resolved but he has never showed up.¹¹ In Bafmen, one grazer by name Ndong Thomas applied for a land certificate and the Fon (Aneng Francis) together with his population opposed that the land is too big. In an effort to occupy the land 'Ndong is quoted as putting up structures at every corner on the large piece of land. As a means to restrict his expansionist policy, the Divisional delegation of lands together with the chief decided to plant boundary pillars on the 17 hectares of land that he has already occupied' (Jean Guemdjom interviewed 7/10/2013). To understand the land dynamics in Wum, it would be important to pay special attention to the silent group and more research should be conducted on this group.

¹⁰ Interview, 7/10/2013 with Guemdjom Jean: Divisional Chief of lands Menchum. Ndong Thomas comes second to Ahaj Danpollu in terms of livestock size in the entire Northwest Region.

¹¹ Instead he prefers to send but other people. This behaviour has angered the Chief of Esu and his subjects to the extent that they have vowed never to allow Danpollo expand the ranch by an inch. They have however accepted that he can exploit the land but cannot be issued a land certificate on grounds that they too have children and cannot allow a stranger to take all of their land (Guemdjom Jean Interviewed 7/10/2013).

Table 1: Statistics of Some people who have Acquired Land Titles on at least 10ha of land

Name	Size of Land (in hectares)	Location of land	No. of Land certificates
Cho Cyprian	50	Wum	No data
Hon Wallang Richard	52	Bu road	No data
Chia Patrick	15	Wum	No data
Ni John Fru Ndi	Just applied Acquired land before 1998	Binjam-Wum Bafmen road	No data
Chief Mbambi of Wum	No data	Wum	6
Prince Bilingual Academy	No data	Weh	No data
Akwa Patrick	14	Weh	No data
Acheng Chia Thomas	28	Wum	2
Christian Gospel Radio Bafmen	14	Bafmen	No data
Tatoh Emmanuel-(Menchum Bilingual Academy (MBA)	No data	Bu Road	No data
Catholic Mission Bawuru	No data	Menchum Valley	1
Bala Saidou	19*	Wum	Over six
Malah Thomas of Bafmen	19*	Wum	No data
Njukwe Charles	No data	Wum	6
John Paul II Com Col	33	Wum	No data
Muslim Community Weh	400m*	Weh	No data
Total	277 Ha		No data

Source: Divisional Delegation of Land Tenure Menchum 3/10/2013
Land with * belongs to the Fulani in Wum.

8.8 Two Case Studies of Land Acquisitions

I. Honourable Wallang Richard Ebu

Honourable Wallang Richard Ebu is a 'son of the soil' from Aghem-Menchum Division of the northwest region. After his elementary education in Wum, he attended post secondary school and after completion, he decided to go into business and also specialised as a government Contractor. In 2007, Honourable Wallang was elected into parliament as the youngest Parliamentarian from the northwest under the CPDM party for the Menchum South Constituency. In the 2013, he was re-elected during the Municipal and Parliamentary elections by his party as a member of parliament. Aside from politics, Honourable Wallang operates a 10 hectare palm plantation along Bu-road on land he acquired from the Regent of Kesu. As a son of the soil, Honourable Wallang has constructed a community hall and donated to his people as a sign of gratitude for the support that his people have been giving him. Honourable Wallang uses resources from the state through

contracts that he executes not only to support his party, but also to maintain his clientele. He does this by giving- gifts, assisting the needy in his community.¹²

II. Ni John Fru Ndi

Ni John Fru Ndi hails from Baba II, a tiny village in Santa Sub-Division in the northwest region of Cameroon. After completing the Santa Native Authority School, he travelled to Nigeria to study and work.¹³ Upon completion of his studies, he worked briefly with the Nigerian railway in Lagos before returning to Cameroon in 1966 when the Nigerian-Bafria War started. In Bamenda, he ran a bookshop known as Ebibi Book Centre. Apart from social affiliations, Ni John was not known beyond his confines. His rise to prominence was as a result of politics.

In his political career, Fru Ndi was a militant of the lone political party (CPDM) that existed in the country before 1990. He was a candidate of the party in the Mezam Central Constituency in the single party list system (Khaki list) in the 1988 parliamentary elections, losing to the 'White' list headed by Achidi Achu.¹⁴ The economic liberalisation and the political democratisation reforms of the 1990s (Geschiere 2005b; Konings and Nyamnjio 2003; Nkwi 2011) provided an opportunity for him to launch a political party- the Social Democratic Front, hence (SDF) under very difficult circumstances.¹⁵ He became the founding Chairman of the SDF that has survived till today and the leading opposition party in Cameroon. He was a Presidential candidate in the elections of 1992, which were thought to have been rigged by the CPDM (Nkwi 2011b). Since then, he has continued to be the Chair of the party and has participated in all elections as the Presidential candidate for his party.¹⁶ In the first ever Senatorial elections organised in Cameroon in April 2013, he was the list leader for his party in the northwest region and was again defeated

¹² Fon Mbambi 'he has constructed schools for our children, donated benches, organized sporting events for our children during holidays. He sponsored the electricity project in Bu and above all, he has given us a community hall.'

¹³ John Fru Ndi http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Fru_Ndi accessed 23/7/2014

¹⁴ In Cameroon, there was only one political party but there was inter-party competition as militants of the same party participated at elections by aligning themselves in different lists. In this system, there were two lists and people voted for a list that presented the best candidates.

¹⁵ The launching of the SDF was considered 'unauthorised' by the government and so employed massive security. The party went ahead with the launching and six young adults were shot to death as the crowd dispersed. For details on this see Krieger (2008: 15)

¹⁶ He was Presidential Candidate in 1997, 2004 and 2011 elections and the best he could get was the second position only coming after Paul Biya the CPDM incumbent chairman.

by his arch rival now Senator Achidi Achu. He alleged that the ruling party had bribed some of the SDF local councillors to vote against him.¹⁷

Besides being a politician, Ni John Fru Ndi is also a farmer and owns over 200 hectares of farm land in the northwest region, which is believed to be the bastion of the SDF party that he has been leading since 1990.¹⁸ His largest farm is located at Ngoh, some 23Km from Wum town and another at Mbinjam about 8Km from Wum town, along the main highway to Bafmen. He has smaller farms in his home town of Baba II and in Bambui-Tabah Sub-division (Tegomoh 2011: 230). Ni John is a cattle Rancher and has over 250 herds of cattle in his farms at Ngoh and Mbinjam. They are mixed breeds-some imported and others selected locally.¹⁹ He also rear goats. Pasture is improved through the planting of Braccaria which enhances the nutrition intake of the cattle and hence, good quality and quantity of milk. Milk production is sold in the local Markets. He is also involved in the cultivation of plantains, sunflower, beans and maize and most of the finished product is transported to the regional market in Bamenda.

Fru Ndi does not live in Wum. He lives in Bamenda which is about 79Km from his farms in Wum. Consequently, the estates are controlled by Sule and he only pays periodic visits to the farms during weekends.²⁰ In the case of Ni John, he can be considered as an absentee land lord. The farms are all fenced with barbed wire and entry is only allowed through a permit. Fru Ndi's rise to prominence as one of the founding fathers of the SDF, has offered him the political leverage to acquire huge tracts of land and also to carry out huge economic investments. He now owns one of the largest and lucrative business buildings along the Mankon Commercial Avenue in Bamenda.²¹ His Ntarinkon residence has been refurbished and expanded to accommodate his

¹⁷ Since 1990, the SDF has been controlling a majority of the municipal councils and Parliamentary seats in the northwest region. By the provisions of the law, Senators are elected by Municipal councilors, and since the majority of the councils were controlled by the SDF, it was thought that the SDF Senatorial list would win but it turned out to be the reverse. It is for this reason that Ni John accused his own councilors for voting the other way round.

¹⁸ For example see the number of parliamentary seats won by the SDF in 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007 legislative elections and the municipal elections of 1996, 2002 and 2007. Detail analysis have been provided by Krugier 2008: 18-19.

¹⁹ Sule interviewed 15/12/2013.

²⁰ Kum Grace Interviewed 14/12/2013 at Mbinjam Usually, he comes to inspect the farms, sometimes he works in the farms. It is also during weekends that he pays his workers.

²¹ Since the inception of the SDF, Fru Ndi has been very vocal about France, whom he thinks are supporting Paul Biya. But he came under scrutiny and highly criticised for giving out the building to a French based company PMUC.

political entourage and clients. He runs in one of the most expensive Land Cruiser Toyota vehicles.

The two case studies presented are prominent political elites belonging to different political parties but with the same economic interests. It is even thought that they use their political positions, connections and finances to acquire huge tracts of land (Tegomoh 2011: 230) and also to mobilise labourer, who in turn have become their political clients. Fru Ndi has over 150 hired labourers who are paid on man days.²² Most of the community land now belongs to these private individuals and the majority of the people have been alienated from their land. It can also be argued that apart from the fact that they enjoy political support from their workers, they also provide a source of livelihood to the local communities where these establishments are situated. So many families have been employed as labourers in these farms which have ensured a steady source of income. This is crucial for the Fulani herdsmen who have lost their cattle and can now work on these farms as hired-herdsmen.

Conclusion

For the past several decades, there has been the proliferation and rush for the acquisition of huge tracts of land in the northwest region of Cameroon by individuals. In Wum, there are a growing number of domestic elites who buy land or seize land using their political connections and financial powers. Most of them have established cattle ranches and have also developed huge plantations where monocropping take place and the produce are destined for local and international markets. This has not only led to the dispossession of people, but has also created new forms of power relations within communities. Although it may be argued that they provide employment in these communities, what they gain from the exploitation of the land far supercedes the wages that labourers receive from them. From field observations and the present trend of land commoditisation, farmer-grazer conflicts may instead be on the increase as more and more land is taken over by the rich.

²² Each ridge is constructed for the sum of 1000frs a day (interview with Kum Grace 14/12/2013)

Chapter Nine: Concluding Reflections

The main research question was to know why the conflicts between women cultivators and Fulani cattle herders in Wum Central Subdivision have been persistent. The study focused on two villages-Aghem and Bu. The objective was therefore to investigate into the causes of these conflicts and also to know who are the key actors /players. Furthermore, the research aimed at examining why different measures and strategies adopted to curb these conflicts have always failed. In order to address the research question and research objectives, several theoretical approaches on conflicts were reviewed. Following the review, the most suitable of the causes for this study were those of the politics of belonging, inherited colonial laws coupled with weak institutional frame work and resource scarcity. There is a strong positive relationship between the theoretical approaches that I have reviewed and research findings. For instance the politics of belonging takes into consideration competition over resources by the various groups and competing identities. Therefore a holistic approach needs to be employed in order to better explain the presence of conflicts in the area.

The major outcome of this research reveals that though the conflicts in Aghem and Bu are usually presented as crop damages caused by cattle belonging to the Fulani, the conflicts are more complicated and multilayered than they are portrayed. Embedded in these conflicts are cultural practices that have been internalised and where respect for tradition is still optimal. From the research findings, there are several key actors that contribute in different ways towards these conflicts. They include, women, Fulani, local chiefs, state bureaucrats and rich domestic elites. It is the involvement of these actors that constitute the power hierarchies in the area and who use their financial, economic and political positions to perpetuate the conflicts and also to accumulate wealth and prestige.

Another domain is that of gender relations which are highly reflected in the system of matrilineal succession. In such a system where women play the leading role as food producers and which guarantees their access to land, any action or attempt that affects land automatically touches on their source of livelihood. As it is in Cameroon, statistics reveal that women continue to experience unequal access to land as compared with men despite the fact that women form 52% of the total population of the country. Since the land is owned by men and women only have

usufructs rights, they are easily dispossessed from the land if men want to do so. In Aghem and Bu, matrilineal succession is increasingly being challenged within the present context of land formalisation since the law lends credence to patriarchy. Some successors actually dispose of the land that they have inherited and this has generated a lot of conflicts between nephews who succeed their uncles and the children of the deceased which is contrary to the roles of matrilineal system of succession.

Secondly, the recurrent conflicts involving farmers and herders over land ownership have their roots in scarcity of key resources. With rapid population increase and resource scarcity, two modes of production (farming and livestock) are competing for land and resources. It is this competition and scarcity and /or diminishing resources that have led to the intensification of these conflicts and the emergence of identity politics. When the Fulani arrived in the early 1920s, land was in abundance and their relationship with farmers was cordial and there was complementarity in terms of social exchanges as each benefitted from one another. Their presence did not raise ethnic concerns but as they started competing over resources, ethnic sentiments were evoked particularly by the women who felt that their access to land was being threatened. The Fulani that were initially accepted later on became 'strangers', 'late comers' and /or 'outsiders'. Just like migration, ethnicity is not a given and it is not geographically determined. The stigmatisation of the Fulani as strangers therefore raises a lot of questions since they are not the only group that came later. Implicitly, it should be born in mind that ethnic relations and identity politics between farmers and Fulani seem to be hostile only when it concerns land and resources and are constantly being (re) negotiated, redefined and contested depending on the interest at stake. As Vubo and Neba (2001: 163) conclude, 'identity fluctuates as people assert both similarity and difference from each other with differing political processes'.

Since the colonial era, several factors or agents have brought about changes in the land use patterns. The introduction of land laws since the colonial period encouraged private real property rights which were contrary to the principle of communal land ownership. Within the neopatrimonial state of Cameroon, all hitherto existing colonial land laws and edicts were harmonised and all land became the property of the state. With regards to the law, in some cases, the laws continue to be disregarded in favour of wealthy cattle grazers against farmers' right to

own land. First, the ambiguous and wavering state policies on land ownership and chieftaincy rights are conflicting and overlapping. Since the 1974 Land Ordinances does not take into account the land rights of vulnerable groups such as women and Fulani pastoralists, both farmers and Fulani instigate and use it to contest and put forward their claims to land even if such claims are imagined or constructed ethnic identities.

In the present situation, chiefs have lost control over land and consequently the exclusion of customary tenure in the Cameroon land law has constituted a contentious issue as chiefs continue to claim ownership of the land. It is this transfer of rights over the control of land that has generated conflicts between chiefs and state bureaucrats for long. As a result, two tenure regimes operate in Cameroon-the one statutory and the other customary tenure system. The existence of these two regimes have paved the leeway for chiefs who have continued to insist that they are the rightful owners of the land to exploit the weaknesses of the state statutory land laws for their personal interests. Unfortunately, even though chiefs know that under the current law they do not own the land, they have increasingly asserted ownership of all lands within their purview. Because of the financial gains that they make from land, chiefs have ceased to be the custodians of the land and have instead become competitors with their own subjects.

Another major outcome of this research is the idea that land has become a commodity and given the weaknesses of the statutory provisions, state bureaucrats collude with rich domestic elites to expropriate or appropriate communal land at the detriment of women who depend on land for their sustenance and subsistence. Titling only favours a tiny segment of the population and rather inevitably disinherits a substantial portion of the population who are usually women, migrants and youths and has tended to increase instead of decreasing over all insecurity of tenure. This has made the Fulani and the women to be vulnerable to corrupt practices that work to the advantage of the chiefs and the administration without seeking a final solution to the disputes.

The mediatisation of Fulani marginalisation has led to the emergence of opposing camps which have only reinforced these conflicts and have not been able to solve the so many challenges that herders are facing in the area. I therefore conclude that MBOSCUDA just as SEDELCO is, are merely different strategies through which Fulani's search for geopolitical space is articulated,

navigated and negotiated, redefined and the legitimate means through which they seek representation and recognition.

By way of recommendation, here is an urgent need for a new land reform in Cameroon. The aim of land reform therefore should be to improve social justice, and equity, and to raise the standard of living of the poor. Presently, while a majority of the people is disposed of their land, there is an emerging capitalistic tendency which gives room for the rich to accumulate wealth through land titling. Since 2012, Cameroon's Ministry of Lands and State Property is leading a land policy reform process which is expected to improve on the land governance framework of the country and render it more adapted to the present global and national contexts. If nothing is done, many of the gaps in the current land legislation could be carried into the new legislation. If this happens, the land rights of vulnerable groups (smallholder farmers, women and indigenous people) will still be at stake. To do this, all stakeholders in the land sector should be involved in the review process at all levels.¹ Such an inclusive approach will take into consideration, cultural tenure system, women rights and Fulani access to land.

¹ For example, women, youth, Fulani, other vulnerable groups should be implicated in the land reform process. They must not be looked upon only as end users but as those who have contributed in the process. In that way it will be very inclusive and take into account the interests of all the stakeholders.

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Glossary

Akon- Aghem name for a ward

Aku- A clan of the Fulani pastoralists who rear small white black-nosed cattle

Aghem- This is the name of the ethnic group and people occupying part of the research area. This should not be confused with Wum which is the administrative name of the area derived from colonial influences

Anlu/Kefap/Funbweun- Female militant group in matrilineal societies, called differently in Kom, Aghem and Funghom

Ardo/Sarki –the Traditional leader of the Fulani in Wum Central Sub-division

Batum- the Traditional title for the chief of one of the Aghem sections

Bororoji –A breed of cattle usually associated with the Jafen

Denkeghem- Title reserve for the Paramount and spiritual ruler of the Aghem

Fon, Fuai- Hereditary title for village head in some ethnic groups of the Grassfields

Ganako-Local name for cattle herdsman

Goshi- the First Family of nomadic pastoralists to arrive Cameroon at the beginning of the 21st Century

Jafen-(Jafun) Nomadic Fulani family that migrated from Kano into the Cameroons between 1880- 1897 and rear large dark-brown cattle

Jangali-tax paid per herd of cattl

Meulo mufo- Symbolic drink for the Fon but could also refer to other gifts including money

Mbororo (Bororo) the term refers to all the sub groups of the Fulbe pastoralists derived from a cattle breed *Bororoji*

Natum/Nafoyn-Title for the mother of the chief in Wum and in Kom it is known as Nafoyn

Ndukenye- It is the ritual performed by the Denkeghem or his first son at the shrines of late Batums for good harvest, fertility, the birth of children and protection of the Aghem people

Takumbeng- Women militant group in Mezam Division, same with *Kefap* and *Anlu*

Tshokon- Ward head appointed by a Batum

Pulaaku- It is the Fulani moral code of conduct which also prescribes strict adherence to the Islamic religion. It is also the agency through which young Fulani are socialised to follow Fulani culture.

Sallah/Ramadan- Moslem Feast

Sous-Prefet- French title for a district head