

Establishment of Adamawa Emirate and its Legacies in Northern Cameroon

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This paper traces the historical construction of identity in northern Cameroon from early state formations to the Fulani jihad of the nineteenth century. The ecological setting of the Lake Chad and Benue basins encouraged cross-cultural exchanges and the rise of polities such as Borno, Kanem, Mandara, and Kwararafa, which established networks of trade, diplomacy, and assimilation. The decisive transformation, however, came with the Fulani-led jihad of Uthman dan Fodio and the establishment of the Adamawa Emirate in 1809. Fulani pastoral mobility, Islamic scholarship, and institutional innovations fostered a multi-ethnic political system. Through Islamisation, the building of emirate structures, and economic practices like the *rumde* plantations, Fulani leadership consolidated a regional identity that transcended ethnic boundaries. Later, the Mahdist movement of Shaikh Hayatu Balda sought to radicalise and globalise Islam, but its ambitions were curtailed by European colonial expansion. Overall, identity construction in northern Cameroon emerges as a layered process shaped by ecology, state-building, and Islamic revivalism.

Keywords: *Northern Cameroon; Fulani jihad; Adamawa Emirate; identity construction.*

Création de l'émirat d'Adamawa et son héritage dans le nord du Cameroun

Cet article retrace la construction historique de l'identité dans le nord du Cameroun, depuis les premiers États régionaux jusqu'au jihad fulbé du XIX^e siècle. Le cadre écologique des bassins du lac Tchad et de la Bénoué favorisa les échanges culturels et l'essor de formations politiques telles que le Borno, le Kanem, le Mandara et le Kwararafa. La transformation décisive survint toutefois avec le jihad d'Ousmane dan Fodio et la fondation de l'émirat de l'Adamaoua en 1809. La mobilité pastorale des Fulbé, leur érudition islamique et leurs innovations institutionnelles permirent l'émergence d'un système politique multiethnique. Par l'islamisation, la mise en place de structures émirales et le développement économique autour des *rumde* (plantations), les Fulbé consolidèrent une identité régionale dépassant les clivages ethniques. Plus tard, le mouvement mahdite du cheikh Hayatu Balda voulut radicaliser et universaliser l'islam, mais ses ambitions furent freinées par l'expansion coloniale européenne.

La construction identitaire du nord Cameroun apparaît ainsi comme un processus stratifié, forgé par l'écologie, l'édification étatique et le renouveau islamique.

Mots-clés : Nord Cameroun, jihad fulbé, émirat de l'Adamaoua, construction identitaire.

Establishment of Adamawa Emirate and its Legacies in Northern Cameroon¹

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Genesis of Identity Construction

Historically speaking, the legacy of a northern Cameroon regional identity construction can be traced back to a remote past, but as a revolutionary act, the genesis is in Fulani uprisings, often referred to as Holy Wars (jihad) of Uthman dan Fodio at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In origin, the favourable geographical conditions to human habitation in the area covered by river Benue and its tributaries together with Lake Chad and the numerous rivers that drain into the lake provided the natural regional foundation. This huge hydraulic complex that touches on every part of northern Cameroon provided extensive resources and communication network, which encouraged boundless possibilities of cross-cultural interactions. Consequently, waves of peoples from far and near have been attracted and found it convenient to settle, wander or pass through the area, most often leaving historical foot prints on their trails. The influence of their civilisation, such as those of the So or Sao, Mbum, Kanuri, Hausa, Kotoko and Musgum, can now be traced mostly from ethnological and archaeological studies, scanty traditions picked up here and there and from extrapolations from the past. Groups that have survived and can be classed linguistically and culturally have been named and studied as ethnic groups² though the traditions that link them together might be of relatively recent creation.

However, before the nineteenth century, some communities (for reasons that are not easy to explain in macro history) in the Basins of Lake Chad and the river Benue respectively, became powerful around major resource centres. As far as the Lake Chad Basin in the Extreme North of north Cameroon is concerned, by the sixteenth century, relations between Muslim states in

¹ This was originally published in Adama, Hamadou (éd.), 2016, *Traditions historiques et développement, Mélanges offerts aux Professeurs Thierno Mouctar Bah et Eldridge Mohammadou* (Annales de la FALSH, Numéro spécial Volume XV), pp. 25-42, Université de Ngaoundéré, Cameroun.

² C. Tardits, 1981, Common was the practice of divine kingship. Annie Lebeuf, *Les principautés Kotoko : essai sur le caractère sacré de l'autorité*, Paris, Université de Paris, 1969 ; Also Jean Hurault, « Les anciennes populations des cultivateurs de l'Adamaoua occidentale », in Jean Boutrais (ed.), *Peuple et Cultures de l'Adamaoua (Cameroun)*, CRNS, Paris 1994 ; *Ibid.* Thierno Bah, « Le facteur peul et les relations interethnique dans l'Adamaoua au XIX siècle », pp. 61-86 ; E. Mohammadou, *Les royaumes Foulbé du plateau de l'Adamaoua*, Tokyo, 1978. Bah makes a significant distinction between the Fulani culture before and during the jihad. Group identity before the jihad was based on language and « religion ». This was a matter of birth, though alliances brought about the acceptance of others for protection and prosperity of the group. A mistaken notion is that which politically divides Cameroon into ethnic groups. The jargon is recent, probably a colonial and postcolonial expression, where the word “tribe” had become derogatory. For a discussion on the issue, see Chrétien and G. Prunier (eds.), *Les ethnies ont une Histoire*, Karthala, Paris, 1989, pp. 135-148; T. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa”, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, CUP, 1983.

Northern and Western Africa, across the Sahara desert, encouraged emergence of strong states in the Lake Chad Basin in order to regulate the “caravan trade”. The history of Borno and Kanem to the west and north of Lake Chad, which linked up with North Africa is a case in point.³.

They produced able leaders such as Idris Alaoma of Borno, El-Kanemi of Kanem and Mai Bourka Adji of Mandara who, backed by Islamic nobility and strong diplomatic linkages abroad, made war and peace with and ruled over far-flung peoples. The objectives of these leaders would seem to be to acquire labourers, make alliances or vassalages as well as pursue the prestige of territorial aggrandisement. Their advantage was possession of horses and weapons of mass destruction (firearms not excluded) from across the Sahara, linguistic abilities in Arabic and acquaintance with techniques of managing violent situations. Such operations sometimes divided communities into hostile camps. Nevertheless, the lessons learnt from long distance travel, the displacement and regrouping of populations from diverse origins and knowledge acquired from exotic cultures stood in favour of a broad-based civilisation and identity construction.

The map of the region, for this pre-Fulani period, indicated that those who did business outside their immediate territory came from the surrounding Muslim states of Kanem, Borno, Baghirmi, Mandara, and Wadai, etc. These states are all located around the Lake Chad Basin area. Why Muslim states had this lead over the others as builders of multi-ethnic societies require more global and comparative research, which this paper has not attempted to do. It is suspected that this has to do with early knowledge of the classical caliphate as an inspiration and practical conception of organising advanced statehood as well as considerations for Muslim brotherhood enshrined in the mission to spread Islam according to the teachings and tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and compassion on him). At a time when population was small, the assurance of such possibilities of fraternal welcome outside one's habitual residence gave the itinerant Muslims a good head start over several other communities in long distance travel and interactions. It eventually resulted in the formation of states, which reflected both political and economic imperatives of the times, i.e., to dominate and find the resources

³ See, for instance, R.A. Adeleye, “Hausaland and Borno 1600-1800”, in J.F. Ade-Ajayi and Micheal Crowder, (eds.), *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, Longman, London, 1971, pp. 485-530; D. Lange, *A Sudanic chronicle: the Borno Expeditions of Idris Alauma (1564-1576)*, Stuttgart, Franz, Steiner verlag, 1987. Adu Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara, and the Western Sudan, 1788-1861*, O.U.P., 1964.

to survive as strong states once a nucleus is underway. Rulers of these states were very much in need of labour to support expanding economies, supply porters for long distance travel, domestic workers, and military personnel to warrant distant expeditions. Such activities sustained the prestige and credibility, which buttressed much-desired diplomatic exchanges with the Arab and later European countries. The frequency of the expeditions, coupled with distances over which they went, according to local Chronicles (H. R. Palmer, *History of the First Twelve Years of the Reign of Mai Idris Alaoma of Bornu (1572-1583)*) launched, as it were, a regional phenomenon from these early times. On their part, the displaced populations, which had lost their native cultures, were assimilated into the more dynamic and expanding cultures of neighbouring centralised states. Such forced emigration broke the synergy of local and parochial knowledge development as well as the sense of kinship at the peripheries of “kingly cities” in favour of expanding regional linkages.

As it was for the Lake Chad area, so was it for the river Benue basin with the singular exception that before the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate, the principal agents of transformation were non Muslims. One of these, the Kwararafa or Jukun developed an Empire near the confluence of the Benue-Niger, on the north and south banks of Lower River Benue. It flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with nucleus around present-day Numman. According to the Kano Chronicles and Jukun traditions, Bachama and Chamba were the leading communities in the Jukun Empire (Meek, 1931, vol.1, 25-49; Njeuma, 1978, 9-19). The importance of these peoples and their products in shaping a new regional civilisation was underscored when the rulers of Borno and Mandara sent expeditions to about 400 kilometres away. The reported clashes between Borno expeditions and non-Muslim Kwararafa could be interpreted as competition for regional hegemony. Today, the Chamba have been reduced to small communities that share common affinities, and they are found scattered as far south as the Bamenda grasslands, but since the sixteenth century, they exercised influence over a vast sub-region. Their authority and civilisation spread because of attraction of their cult practices, centred on divine kingship customs, intensive agriculture and techniques of fishing and hunting big game. Thus, in all, identity construction became evident as governments increased centralisation and spread their powers and authorities far beyond the central points.

The Fulani concept and contribution

The next series of events that historically led to widespread regional identity building in northern Cameroon was the conception of what Fulani sources referred to as Fombina, the South lands⁴. Fombina should not be confused with what the German/British explorer, Heinrich Barth, imagined as an ancient Batta Kingdom of Kukomi, which seemed to have carried on diplomatic relations with Borno. Therefore, Fombina was not a political concept in the sense of Borno or Hausa communities, which had well-structured central administrations. Fombina had neither capital nor ruler. It should rather be seen as an ecological and economic conception related to areas of dry season transhumance for cattle herders. Naturally its physical location included Mandara territorially, but early hostility in the 18th century between Mandara and Fulani were such that Fulani seldom made stops in Mandara as they moved to the “South” for the annual transhumance. Thus, geographically speaking, Fombina actually lay beyond Mandara territory, and by custom was located in the river Benue sub-region, in the same area where Adamawa Emirate emerged in the beginning of nineteenth century.

However, it was not the pursuit of the idea of Fombina, which was ultimately responsible for the singularly historic role that the Fulani played in Adamawa. The Fulani-based civilisation started with the fact that the Fulani were the only racial group whose settlement were dispersed in many parts of the territory as well as with the kinds of relationship, which Fulani developed with non-Fulani just before their communities rose to prominence in 1809. The need for each other's resources encouraged symbiotic relations among non-Fulani and Fulani settlements. Today, the details of these relationships, for example, who initiated them and how they were enforced, are mostly a matter of conjecture and extrapolation from recent happenings under similar conditions. From non-Fulani accounts, the Fulani presence did not seem to have stirred widespread hostilities or competitions with their neighbours because Fulani peopled the region at different times in small bands coming from many directions and their activities posed no threats since there was no scarcity of land. Though Fulani objectives converged in pastoralist ventures, they never congregated together in one area. They were dispersed into several communities principally due to leadership imperatives. Some among them had either reduced or abandoned nomadic proclivities on conversion to Islam to live in towns (urban centres).

⁴ Sa'ad Abubakar, *op.cit* He uses the term Fombina for the title of his book, instead of “Adamawa Emirate” may be to emphasise the multilateral historical growth as against a focus on the specific role of Modibbo Adama, which won him an unsurpassable respectable place. M. Z. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa) 1809-1902*, CEPER, 1978, Yaounde, pp. 68ff. See also J. Boutrais' interesting comments in *Peuples et Cultures de l'Adamaoua (Cameroun) op.cit.*, pp. 7-8. He claims, unconvincingly, that originally the word had a political and historic content, but it became a geographical and administrative entity in Cameroon.

They mixed the religion of Islam with Fulani values and cultures, collectively referred to as *Pulaaku*.⁵ Among themselves, they practised spouse competition (otherwise called *hiirde* and the *soro*) in cases of endogamous marriages, bilingualism in Fulfulde and rudimentary classical Arabic, which they also used for religious and magical purposes. It was principally with this Muslim group that non-Fulani peoples interacted in significant ways to transform the parochial society. Because they possessed few cattle to physically care for, their elite had ample time to study the Quran and Islamic sciences and to acquire more than ordinary knowledge. This enabled them to adapt to new environments with courage and serve as multipurpose consultants and instructors to others and earn extra means of livelihood. The principal role that Fulani communities and villages played was to profoundly change the character of the region from little settlements and villages to societies with cosmopolitan visions. Firstly, the Fulani period defined the content of the new identity by institutional building, participation in developing a mixed economy and, finally, by exercising leadership in Islamisation.

Fulanisation: institutional building

The Fulani attachment to Uthman's jihad brought them into political limelight construction, superseding all other communities in the process. This started in 1809, five years after Uthman dan Fodio declared jihad in Sokoto. Historically speaking, the most important innovation and dramatic turn of events was creation of common leadership among independent and scattered populations of Fulani led by group headmen called Ardo'en. In this respect, Uthman dan Fodio appointed Modibbo Adama of Yola supreme leader and instructed the Muslims of the principal states of northern Cameroon, (Garoua, Maroua, Rai, Chebowa, Gurin, and later Ngaoundere, Tibati, Kontcha and Banyo) to form one community (Emirate) with him. As subsequent events showed, it took some time, and resort to war (as in the case of Rai Bouba vs Yola; Tibati vs the alliance Ngaoundere-Yola) for the old leadership to submit. The firmness and consistency with which Uthman supported and repeatedly prayed for Adama's success demonstrated the mutual love, respect and special admiration, which conditioned the relationship between Uthman and the Adamawa Fulani. The nomination of Modibbo Adama is not unconnected with his personal

⁵ *Pulaaku* is the foundation of Fulani unity "Tabital Pulaaku" is an international association of Fulani which was founded in Bamako, Mali, in 1998 to keep alive the ideals of Pulaaku. For an anthropological study, see Catherine VerEecke, "Pulaaku: Adamawa Fulani identity and its Transformations". Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 47ff. So far this is the most detailed study on the subject for the region; also D. Stenning, "Cattle Values and Islam Values in a Pastoral Population", in I.M. Lewis, (ed.) *Islam in Tropical Africa*, Bloomington, 1966, 194-205. Fulani have held that *Pulaaku* as very compatible with the Laws of Islam.

achievements as an erudite scholar, but also that the Fulani of Adamawa represented the purest form of their race on many counts. It was a matter of confidence and destiny because the Muslim Fulani had simply heard of the Uthman revolution when they spontaneously decided to send Adama as their messenger (not leader) to travel to Sokoto to meet and ask him to tell them what to do to become a part of his movement, which had attained (1808) parts of neighbouring Borno territory.

Thoroughly moved by this faith in him, Uthman would do all in his power to ensure that the Fulani became united in a local central administration. Uthman's wisdom in putting so much emphasis in filling the leadership vacuum was at the same time a creative and conservative move. Creative in the sense that unity among the Fulani was crucial to establish the Emirate over such a vast expanse of territory inhabited by non Muslims. In addition, conservative in that unity among Fulani put them firmly in the saddle against any eventual usurpation of the overall leadership. In order words, the message was clear that Adamawa was Fulani land in such a way that the immigrant populations, who were a necessary component in the construction of the entirely new Emirate, no matter their status in their respective areas of origin, had to pay allegiance and submit themselves to the local Fulani establishments. Thus a stabilisation process and strategy was put in place, which has then and now kept the leadership of the Emirate in the family of Modibbo Adama, irrespective of all odds from internal and external sources, since 1809. The quality of their leadership is measured by the longevity of the Lamibbe in office: Adama (1809-47), Lawal (1847-72), Sanda Umaru (1872-90), Zubeiru (1890-1902), Bobo Ahmadu (1901-09), Muhamadu Abba (1910-24), Muhammad Mustapha (1928-46), Ahmadu Yerima (1946-53) and presently, the venerable Lamido Aliyu Mustapha (1953-), the great grand son of Bobo Ahmadu, the youngest son of Modibbo Adama. The organisation of government was gradually modelled after patterns in the rest of the Sokoto Caliphate to streamline the mission of the jihad. Still about structural innovation, the Emirate witnessed the coming into prominence of a plethora of title-holders and advisers, Islamic religious officials, poets, musicians, praise singers, jokers, and palace historians of mixed origins. Each, in its own way, consolidated Fulani leadership by placing the essentials of imported as well as local knowledge and popular acclamation at the service of the new empowerment of Muslims. The new experiences did not contradict basic Fulani customs, e.g.

cattle and leadership values and *pulaaku*. On the contrary, they complemented these customs from the roots by bringing to the forefront their universalistic application.

A problem of interpretation that requires clarification is the perception that Fulani rise to power was tantamount to foreign impositions, a charge that makes the Fulani into foreigners. For them to be described as foreign in the northern Cameroon context, at least three conditions would have been observable. First, Fulani came from another geographical region where they had a base that served as headquarters. Second, they worked for foreign interests vis-à-vis local interests. Third, they were supported and financed from without so that their actions were like those of mercenaries. Though the Fulani were a distinct group, by their beautiful physical built and light skin colour, by their attire, by their skill as horsemen and attachment to cattle, it was not foreign invasion seeing that the Fulani and the other inhabitants in whose midst they settled were all immigrants in the region. In addition, they had broken with their past ancestry, if this could be objectively established. Furthermore, in Africa, principles of first occupancy of an area as was the case with several migrant Fulani groups are significant in legitimising ownership claims to territories. Their longevity and uniquely ubiquitous settlements in the different ecological zones gave them the status of indigenous peoples with claims to “droit du seigneur”, particularly because their institutions of empowerment were highly dynamic and incorporative, i.e. they were open to participation of all, including “conquered” peoples.

However, inability of Fulani led forces to subdue all peoples in the geographical region, completely and at the same time, as it were in one sweep, created an incongruous situation of protracted warfare, which was hardly the case in many other parts of the Sokoto Caliphate. This in turn delayed effective occupation by Fulani over heavily segmented accephalous populations, which would not easily submit to Fulani demands by a single or so victory. The wars against Mandara, Mbum, and Bamun, especially, reflected this inability of Fulani to backup initial conquests with effective occupation. In this regard, a distinction could be drawn between two societies of Fulani regionalism: the peoples inside and outside Fulani direct influence and control. Those inside the central lands were situated south of the Logon River at Mayo Kebbi and Lere, and the Diamare, centred on Maroua. Also included here were the areas of Benue River and its tributaries to as far south as Adamawa plateau, locally referred to as Lesdi Hosere, stretching from Banyo in the west to Ngaoui on the frontier with Central African Republic in the east. The principal non-Muslim communities outside Fulani jurisdiction and

alliance were the Tupuri, Massa, Kotoko, Mundang, Shuwa Arabs, and the Kingdom of Bamun in western Cameroon, on the transition between the savannah and forest zones of Cameroon. These peoples lived on the peripheries of Fulani civilisation, independently as before Fulani hegemony, and held firm to their ancestral heritage, though often they borrowed aspect of Fulani leadership patterns and symbols, e.g., in the organisation of court etiquette.

Borno and Mandara (two Muslim kingdoms in the extreme north of Cameroon) were also situated outside Fulani sphere. Though in the beginning the sources and content of their Islam differed from the new Fulani experiences since 1809, as Muslim kingdoms, they all shared many common values and operated under Islamic law. Therefore distinction between these two categories of Muslim populations was more theoretical than practical so much so that viewed over a long period the Muslim communities were tolerant and supportive of each other. One element of their unity was that they mostly perceived their position in society as that of conquerors and free men. The fact that most of the wealthiest and enlightened persons belonged to this class and naturally promoted scholarship and provided support to the theocratic models of government gave additional fillip to close cooperation among the Muslims, no matter the ethnic background.

Another socio-political issue that defined the nature of the Emirate at the take-off and consolidation stages was that in the quest to take advantage of the new peace in favour of Fulani use of space, Fulani expanded too fast and so widely that available human resources to effect rapid changes were inadequate. This limitation rightly explains the jihad's political option of pluri-ethnic broad-based participation at all echelons of administration. Certainly, and of necessity, humanitarian expediencies conditioned Fulani policies, principal among which was the question of how to integrate indigenous forms of knowledge into construction of the new society without at the same time losing sight of Islamic ideals.

Naturally, several practical problems surfaced as transition to Emirate-type government was taking shape and as the Fulani adapted psychologically and otherwise to their new roles as rulers and no more as cattle herders over a vast extent of territory. Over 95% of the population (that is, assuming that the estimated 8% Fulani in the region was mostly Muslim) had never experienced Muslim government and, no doubt, some Fulani who assumed leadership roles,

thanks to the jihad, were also strangers in the Emirate system.⁶ Put in context, what preoccupied the ruling aristocracy at the time was not being versed in Islamic principles of government, but how as neophytes in the system, it was going to synchronise the old and new environments? For instance, what form was integration or assimilation to take in view of the fact that several widely dispersed communities were involved at different stages of development? Under these circumstances, how was a Muslim environment going to be concretised in a regional setting without compromising ideals?

The answers to these questions could only be relative to contemporary socio-political realities of the sub-region. Much depended on competent leadership that combined the old and the new hands on deck. Uthman dan Fodio and his descendants had instructed the Lamibbe (plural of Lamido in Fulfulde) of Adamawa to rely on diplomacy and war to stimulate new loyalties, alliances and obedience. They operate through a system of mutual assistance that was facilitated by the chain of community linkages, referred to above. Uniformity of government structures was desirable since legitimacy sprang from one source, Islamic precepts. Local leadership skills and the importance of the non-Fulani population in some areas made variations inevitable. This was the case in Ngaoundere, for instance, where Mbum rulers (Belaka) allied with Fulani and maintained a position of strength in the government of the ruler (lamdo) of Ngaoundere. Also, Batta of Demsa and the Dama of Rai remained important elements in their respective sub-regions. Therefore to ensure stability, they were made to feature prominently in the councils of the new government from where they oversaw developments in their ethnic groups. They participated in government to the extent that they progressively acquired principles of Pulaaku and became either Fulani “assimilados” or remained persons who posed no threat to Fulani integrity. They also learnt Fulfulde, the Fulani language, which quickly became the lingua franca for inter-community communication. However, in Maroua, where Fulani Modibbe were numerous, the Lamdo, himself a Modibbo, was always a prisoner to a council (Faada) composed of scholars, who from all accounts, had earned great prestige in the community. Thus, unlike say in Ngaoundere or Tibati, concessions towards a common identity with non-Fulani populations were less pronounced. These and other

⁶ Administration in Northern Cameroon has been studied from many angles. See Njeuma, 1978, *op.cit.*, and Sa’ad Abubakar, 1977. On building solidarity and the function of identity maintenance see Philip Burnham, 1996; Paul K. Eguchi and Victor Azarya, 1993; Louis Brenner, 1993. Kees Schilder, 1994.

few exceptions from the general rule did not result in a drawback to the essentials of an overall regional identity, geared on the rise of Islam and the skilful management of Fulanisation.

In these ways, the vague notion of “Fombina” gradually gave way to a wider creation, the Emirate. In conception at least, the Emirate had frontiers and a legal status in Islamic law. (The Classical Caliphate Islamic Institutions by Musa Abdul). And this fact motivated the community to defend its institutions. Besides, the Emirate was made up of over 60 sub-Emirates which looked up to Yola for material protection and spiritual leadership. In this sense, the jihad was unmistakably fired by ethnic-type solidarity because all newly installed “dynasties” were of Fulani stock. An additional aspect that facilitated institutional building all over was that structures of the Emirate were a replica in miniature of the Caliphate government in Sokoto, Nigeria. The Emirate traditions gave a sense of legitimising the position of the new authorities. The Lamido or Emir was both chief and “Commander of the Faithful” and this was so with the Lambbe in sub-Emirate governments. They were all assisted by a host of appointed officials on whose loyalty and personal devotion the system relied. In this way, the structures were organised, depending on the particularity of the area at two levels: councillors or very close collaborators of the Lambbe and non-Fulani titleholders. The main difference between the first and second levels of title holders was that policies were discussed and elaborated in the former, while the functions of the latter were to execute policies, which reached them in forms of orders from the hierarchy. These structures ensured that the essential function of state were taken care of permanently and that non-Fulani populations were just as active and involved and felt responsible as were the Fulani. Institutionally, the system was held in place by personal ties of loyalty and subordination and, especially, reinforced by value congruency among the various leaders, irrespective of origin.

As the Emirate system became established throughout, Muslim immigrants constantly swelled the rank of Fulani leadership and transformed it into a bulwark for consolidating a universal culture. For instance, between c.1840 and 1872 a substantial number of scholar immigrants came to various parts of the Emirate to stay permanently, some in the hope that they will be among the first ones (Ansar or helpers) to meet the Mahdi once he manifested himself. They operated private business and were associated with government in a variety of capacities as advisers, judges, or creditors. They came voluntarily by invitation, or on their

own, principally from Borno and Hausa land, people whose ancestry practised Islam. As a result, they were absorbed into Fulani aristocracy.⁷ By their knowledge and skills and inter-territorial reputation, the Fulani regimes quickly gained respectability and legality with much assistance coming from the spiritual centres of Sokoto and Yola as the case might be. But there were institutional constraints against aspiring for the supreme leadership because one must reckon that a Fulani ruler was both leader of a political community (confer the concept of Ardoship in Fulani cosmology) and a designated “Commander of the Faithful”. The latter quality made him an acknowledged and anointed leader for Believers. In this context, the “Commander of the Faithful” enjoyed considerable immunity, for instance, from ridicule in public and public prosecution in civil matters.⁸ Significantly, though the immigrant populations became an indispensable part in strengthening Fulani leadership, and no matter the need to promote cosmopolitan and global perspectives within the multi-ethnic aristocracy, they could hardly qualify on both these counts to compete for the supreme office of Lamido of Adamawa. Besides, the important sections of the immigrant population were segmented and could reach the Lamido in council only through the bureaucratic pyramid of respective headmen. (I think scholars would have a hard time to decipher the logic or emerging theory that animated Fulani rule, whether to divide and rule or to rule while divided?)

The economic *raison d'être*

Political power and status also resulted in inventing institutions that were economically oriented to a region system. The Holy Wars, as a rule, had led to much disruption of the old order, especially since it was conducted on several fronts at the same time. Families and villages were in many places put asunder and ravaged in pursuance of economic goals. The problem, which arose, was how to distinguish the good and bad motives of the campaigns against non Muslim populations and manage them before and after the events and, ultimately, how to dispose the booty. It was always a potential source of conflict and tension, even among the ruling class how to keep armed campaigns on an official footing from start to finish. Resort

⁷ P. Burnham and M. Last, « From Pastoralists to Politicians: The Problem of a Fulani Aristocracy », *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 133-135, XXXIV-1-3, 1994, pp. 313-357; For details about the content of the aristocracy, T.M. Bah, « Cheikhs et marabouts maghrébins prédicateurs dans l'Adamawa 19e-20e siècle »; E. Mohammadou, « l'Empreinte du Borno sur les Foulbé de l'Adamawa »; and for an analysis of more recent developments, J-L. Dongmo, « Evolution récente de la scolarisation des jeunes dans l'Adamaoua », all three articles appearing in the Journal, *Ngaoundéré-Anthropos, Social sciences Review of the University of Ngaoundere*, vol. 1, 1996; P. Burnham, L'ethnie, « La religion et l'état: rôle des peuls dans la vie politique et sociale du Nord-Cameroun », *Journal des Africanistes*, 61 (1), pp. 73-102.

⁸ M. Z. Njeuma, 1978, p. 138; Sa'ad Abubakar, 1977, p. 79. Most of the civil case concerned lending, and borrowing and unfulfilled promises; also harbouring absconded wives and labourers.

to Islamic unconstitutionality prevailed and there are recorded cases, which were brought before justices of the peace (Alkali) for redress (Njeuma, 1978, 137-139). This accounts for great divergences of opinions, depending on whether an observer focuses more attention to official or unofficial happenings in evaluating the economic implications of the jihad (Kees Schilder, *Quest for self Esteem: State, Islam and Mundang Ethnicity in Northern Cameroon*, Aldershot, 1994, 115-18). In any case, concern to meet up with expenses for widespread hospitality, social and traditional obligations to send tribute or pay taxes to hierarchical superiors in the vast administrative structures, which had Yola and Sokoto at the summit, was overriding. Consequently, there was always a desire to increase the population of the Emirate and implicate every able body in production and accumulation of wealth. There was, however, a problem between exporting labour in form of what European sources refer to as « slaves » and keeping the cream of labourers locally in state and private farms. At the base of the problem was the fact that the Emirate was the most extensive and blessed with an unusually high and hard working population. It cannot be said that this problem was solved by the end of the period because the practices of sending peoples on exile, whether deliberate or not, consciously or unconsciously, have continued though in different forms.

Nevertheless, where stability was guaranteed, the ruling elite quickly combined cattle and agricultural economies under the single leadership of the Fulani by establishing plantations called, in Fulfulde, *rumde*.⁹ This institution was a way of protecting and, at the same time, controlling displaced populations gathered from here and there and giving rein to their previous competences. Thus Fulani used and transmitted their skills in cattle husbandry, the Hausa and Kanuri organised local and long distance trade and exchanges of high valued industrial and military products (in Ngaoundere, informants added tropical medicinal herbs to the list), while cultivators and craftsmen of all sorts found new stimulus to produce for an ever-expanding market. The *rumde* were par excellence new production centres, fully animated by their own administrative hierarchy that were adapted and geared to mass production. As new settlements that can be compared to kibbutzim in Israel, they created surpluses that supported nascent Fulani political and social institutions. Thus for a long time, the Emirate enjoyed a distinctive

⁹ For more details see Njeuma, 1978, pp. 138-141. See T.M. Bah, « Guerre, pouvoir et société dans l'Afrique précoloniale (entre le lac Tchad et la côte du Cameroun) », Thèse, Doctorat d'État en Histoire, Université de Paris IV, 1985 ; *Rumde* also formed a part of the defence system.

identity as one of the richest and most generous in the Sokoto Caliphate. (Njeuma, 1978, 183-85)

The cultural identities as well as socio-economic structures of Fulani were built upon possession of cattle. In the economic field, Fulani put cattle industry on a regional plane following political raise in status and a much greater spread into new lands. With inputs from Shuwa Arabs, who were also big scale pastoralists in Lake Chad sub-region, out of reach of the Fulani world, cattle knowledge and culture inevitably spread to the Diamare and Adamawa plateaux, respectively the best areas for grazing. Large herds of cattle considerably increased economic activities. It united Fulani as a group within the plural society and engendered a high degree of solidarity, which transcended both kinship and clanship. Their pastoral needs, especially in transhumance, required extensive land tracts (open fields and water) and therefore an additional dimension to regional identity construction. They and their herds could be accommodated even when transhumance territory became inhabited because population was sparse and there was virtually unlimited land carrying capacity. Numerous cattle Fulani, especially those who go by the names Mbororo and Jafun, were encouraged to migrate and spread all over Northern Cameroon where cattle, horses and asses played a special role in the lives of the people. The demand for these animals was very high because they were the three most important regional beasts of burden.¹⁰ Because of the important investments involved, only wealthy families engaged in production and management in the industry. Therefore, this work carried much prestige and was a principal source of income for identifying aristocratic cultural spread.

Another dimension was cattle transhumance. It gave a fillip to new demographic spread. The annual movements of cattle were often from north to south and from high to low lands and vice versa. This practice was indispensable as it was in response to the regime of dry and wet seasons, which were sharply marked, and cause much variation in availability of water and green pastures. The pressures to succeed in good cattle management were always there in a highly social oriented and competitive profession where failure in one man's herd of cattle could result in the demise of everybody's. A sense of collective responsibility was implied to develop necessary veterinary skills to guard against health hazards. Since no single group had

¹⁰ H. J. Fisher, « The Horse in the Central Sudan », *Journal of African History*, XIV, 3, 1973, pp. 355-379, argues that breeding of horses took professional dimension when horses became an effective weapon of war with the introduction of good harness and equipment.

the monopoly of medicinal production, the economic imperatives induced active inter-community co-operation. The objective merit of all these activities was their trans-ethnicity, which became specially reinforced and widened as common economic ventures expanded from the centres to reach peripheral and marginal societies.

Islamisation

What was new in northern Cameroon identity history was an awakening in Islam. Many persons tailored their activities under the stimulus (or pretext) of Islam. Following the appeal of Uthman dan Fodio, Fulani Muslims started insisting that Islam offered a superior God to whom all must submit, and that obedience to Allah's Messenger was obligatory. This was the novelty, the revolutionary idea, precept and political agenda, which set the stage for a new vision of society. As already indicated, progressively, this set up new religious leaders, legal system, and social stratification in which a core of local Muslims placed themselves at the top of the pyramid. What were the strategies that raised Islam from small showing to a regional identity mark? By their lay out, sub-Emirates formed a potential chain of authorities for conversion of those who were not born Muslims. They built up resources, which they put at the service of Islam to transform themselves from simple nomadic herdsmen to Muslim teachers, to build impressive mosques, and to give a good and universal image to Islam.

A British officer once remarked that a concrete regional ethos arose out of a "civilising mission", aimed at transforming paganism to Islam.¹¹ As already mentioned Fulani in Adamawa were summoned to reform and expand Islam when the idea had already gathered momentum as a popular and successful cause in the Nigerian Sokoto Caliphate. Thus Muslim domination in northern Cameroon was largely made possible because it was carried out within this context of messianic Islamic revival. It brought into play long experiences that date back to traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (to whom be glory and peace). Existing communication infrastructure opened for pilgrimage, trade and transhumance to reach distant places facilitated this ambition. This is what Pierre-François Lacroix erroneously refers to as Fulani monopolisation of Islam.¹² In fact Fulani Islam went further as it provided extensive and

¹¹ J. F. Lacroix, « Islam peul de l'Adamaoua », in I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Islam in Tropical Africa*, London, 1966, pp. 206-212 ; E. Mohammadou, « L'implantation des peuls dans l'Adamawa (approche chronologique) », in C. Tardits, (ed.) *Contribution de la recherche ethnologique à l'histoire des civilisations du Cameroun*, CNRS, Paris, 1981, pp. 91ff.

¹² D. J. Murffet, *Concerning Brave Captains*, London 1964, p. 36. This statement constituted popular British attitudes, which explains why the administrators established a hierarchy of cultures and beliefs in which Islam was higher than "paganism".

essential knowledge linkages. By the end of the nineteenth century, there was definitely an evolution in the sense of actually engaged in a Holy War. This explains why the “divine” figured so much in Fulani jihad traditions, and why they insisted on a theological viewpoint to be guided and to justify their collective and individual activities. For instance, victory in the wars was attributed to God’s will and not to the personality of individual actors. It is understandable in the sense that Islam is a religion, which prescribed total submission and uniform code of conduct for all its adherents, no matter race or status. Relying as Muslims were on foreign assistance to build competence, Islam considerably widened the information matrix and kept a lively interest in trans-regional pan-Islamism. The scholarly community often generated much interest and pride in its wide contacts and development towards Islamic sciences. In the colonial days nervous colonial administrators who, as a consequence imposed a vicious regime of surveillance against what they called, “Mahdist activities”, misunderstood such openness, sense of self-fulfilment and independence.

Recent studies on the state of Islamic scholarship in northern Cameroon reveal articulation of Islamic knowledge through men who attained scholarly ranks. In Islamic traditions, scholars commanded much reverence and authority (especially spiritual) in their various communities because Quranic knowledge brought its possessors closer to the divine. They had great latitude to engage in intellectual work and have real influence on the communities. The general belief was that learned persons possess special blessings (*baraka*) which they could invoke to assist people to improve their stations in life, hence the phenomenon of itinerant scholars (*mallams*). These semi-magical aspects made them sell well in the market of fame and fortune seekers. They were consulted by both Fulani and non-Fulani, as resource persons with special knowledge of Allah’s will, capable of solving health problems and inducing success. Essential to scholarship was literacy in Arabic, which permitted scholars and their pupils to have direct access to Quranic knowledge and all that this implied in terms of inspiration, development of personality, and acquisition of spiritual maturity. The Quranic message induced a sense of hope, courage and assurance in the ultimate triumph of Islam over ignorance and confirmed elimination of the zone of wars (*dar al harb*) on earth. Under such psychological conditions, it is easy to understand why Fulani fostered values that were protective of their Muslim heritage, indeed why they were so totally and collectively engaged in a socio-political organisation that strove after universal Islamic ideals.

Thus, as the tenets of Islam became widely known, and enjoyed an expanded audience beyond elite core of the population, knowledge from the Quran, the constitutional precepts of any Muslim society, assumed cardinal importance in fuelling and shaping the dynamics of the new and enlarged society. In this respect, Quranic school and pilgrimage tradition from West Africa played a significant role in creating and strengthening channels of communication for Islamic knowledge. The tradition was that most Muslims, who had learnt more than rudiments in the educational system, opened their own schools or became either part-time or full-time instructors in one of the available schools. Making pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in ones lifetime, when one has means, is one of the five prescribed Obligations for Muslims. The Sudanese scholar, Omar Nagar documented these traditions and their significance among Muslims of West Africa and stated that the tradition went as far back as the fourteenth century.¹³ The region south of Lake Chad fell within one of the routes taken by pilgrims from *Bilad es Sudan* to the *Hijas* and so benefited from pilgrims. Thus, in the extreme north of Cameroon, Sultans are on record as having made Hajj more than once in their lifetime. But, since only a few persons could afford to make the long journey and stay abroad for the length of time it took to accomplish the Hajj from West Africa, laureates and their families earned much prestige and higher social and saintly status. As these were often great events in their respective localities, both departure to and arrival from pilgrimage served as occasions for the masses to perform various services to the caravans and become converted to the cause of a global vision of Islam. All were beneficiaries, even only as simple witnesses to the events. Fulani aristocracy used the tradition for modernising their societies and updating the periphery with concepts from the centre. They reinforced and reiterated common attitudes, habits, symbolism and language with a sense of universal application. The snow ball effect increased to the extent to which Islam took the form of a “popular” culture and, especially, regional commitments.

« Hayatu Balda » and the messianic mission

After half a century of existence, two politico-religious tendencies developed in Islam in the whole of the Sokoto Caliphate. Their importance is that they significantly influenced initial concepts of the Emirate as a closely knit predetermined area in Muslim jurisprudence. Those who glorified in past achievements provoked the first tendency as conservatives who worked to strengthen the status quo. They felt that much, indeed too much, had been achieved and

¹³ Omar Nagar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, London, 1972.

current leadership was to be maintained. On the opposite side, there were those who felt time had come to proceed to another phase, a higher phase of Islam, the Mahdist era, which Uthman dan Fodio, the founder of the Caliphate had predicted would come and, indeed, which he had made a part of his doctrine to his followers. During the last quarter of nineteenth century, contradictions inherent in both positions came to a head in northern Cameroon, especially in the Maroua-Mindif-Bogo sub-region. They threatened to overthrow three-quarters of a century of Emirate system, the institutional foundation of regional identity.

Behind this ambition was the royal figure of Hayatu ibn Said, great grandson of Uthman dan Fodio, popularly known in northern Cameroon Mahdist tradition as Shaikh Hayatu Balda. Some authors have painted Hayatu as an opportunistic, impetuous troublemaker. This is without foundation.¹⁴ On the contrary, he was an ardent, very ambitious and gifted Muslim leader, with fixed ideas about how to improve the calibre of leadership in the Sokoto Caliphate. In many ways, he was a highly disciplined and knowledgeable person about the peoples and politics in the entire Sokoto Caliphate, which he was in the habit of visiting. The fundamental reason for charting an independent course from the central authority of the Caliphate in Sokoto was to seek to strengthen it at the expense of autonomy in the Emirates. This way he envisaged he would emphasise the global mission of Uthman's jihad, then in neglect. Since Atiku, his cousin in power in Sokoto, refused to listen to him, he came to Adamawa Emirate in 1878 with a definite agenda. For this purpose, a large retinue of teachers and students accompanied him to reinforce Islamic teaching and morality. His aim was manifestly to be Sokoto Caliphate's representative to meet the Mahdi whom his great grandfather Uthman dan Fodio had predicted would appear in the East to complete his revolutionary activities. Consequently, he built a substantial and respectable following in the entire Adamawa Emirate in particular, and in the Sokoto Caliphate in general. His efforts to achieve a much radical image of Islam that transcended existing ethno-religious boundaries were crowned with success in 1886 when he obtained a formal appointment from the Sudanese Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmed, then at the apogee of fame and power, to represent Sokoto Caliphate in his movement. Both leaders saw in each other credible agents to extend and impose a more dynamic form of Islam.

¹⁴ M. Z. Njeuma, « The Uthmanyia System, Radicalism and the Establishment of German Colonial Rule in Northern Cameroon, 1890-1907 », *Paideuma*, n° 40, 1994. B.M. Barkindo, *The Sultanate of Mandara 1902: History of the Evolution, Development and Collapse of a Central Sudanese Kingdom*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1989. Their anti colonialism was no secret and so the colonial forces at the time made many derogatory remarks, which have clouded the correct view.

What was at stake was not only the destiny of Emirate government, but also the direction or redirection of Islam in the entire Sokoto Caliphate, Borno, Mandara and Central Africa (Wadai and Baghirmi included) under the authority of the Sudanese Mahdi, with capital at Omdurman. Whether by coincidence or design, Hayatu's Mahdist exploits in northern Cameroon and the proclamation of Muhammad Ahmed as Mahdi in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (1881), surely made Mahdism a factor of inter-cultural regionalisation. In this regard, the Mahdist Muslim leaders were insensitive to and ignored colonial spheres of influence and limitations on peoples' movements. Firstly, this is seen in Hayatu's contacts and submission to the Sudanese Mahdi and, secondly, the steps he took to enter into an alliance with Rabah, a contemporary Sudanese Empire builder in the region. Rabah had already showed his power when late in 1890 he defeated and captured consignments of arms from a French military column led by Lt Crampell at Massenya in Baghirmi. Crampell was heavily armed, heading to conquer Borno.¹⁵ In this connection, Hayatu's family background, personality, competence and spiritual authority inspired special attention, credibility and respect. These three fervent Muslim leaders (Muhammad Ahmed, Hayatu, and Rabah), with Mahdist motivations, surrounded by dedicated followers and resources at their command, made an extensive regional Islamic transformation plausible. All these activities worked in favour of seeking a broader participation in a radical Islamic culture where northern Cameroon served as an important centre and anchor.

However, the union failed to materialise over time because of advancing hostile colonial forces of Britain, France and Germany. Firstly, in 1889 British inflicted a devastating defeat on Mahdist forces and cut off support for expanding their radical brand of Islam in Northern as well as Central Africa, Borno and Sokoto Caliphate. Secondly, after Rabah conquered Borno in 1893, he over stretched his resources and made so many enemies that his personal survival was under constant threat. In these circumstances, Rabah could not easily assist Hayatu who relied on his agreement with Rabah that soon after Borno was captured; the great and populous Sokoto Caliphate Emirate of Kano would be next. For this reason, in order to follow Rabah's timetable of wars, Hayatu had abandoned his own plan to seize power in Adamawa and accept British overtures to install him Lamido of Adamawa in Yola (1893). As further proof of his

¹⁵ Accounts of this mission and the competition to reshape the regional boundaries are found in two French publications by Harry Alis of the French Colonial Group, Comité de l'Afrique Française : (1) *A la Conquête du Tchad*, Paris, 1891; (2) *Nos Africains*, Paris 1894. On their part the British secret service was concerned about Rabah's anti-colonial movements in the Anglo Egyptian Sudan and Borno territories. See CO 537/II Africa n° 2 in the British Records Office, « A shorts history of Rabi Zubeir » (secret) by William Everret 19.12.1899. The record was compiled from official correspondence including those from the British Consul in Tripoli.

commitment for a regional objective, he cemented his alliance with Rabah by marrying Rabah's daughter, Hawa. By a tragic ending, Fadle Allah, eldest son of Rabah, became tired of Hayatu's "impatience" and assassinated him in 1898, and this brought the alliance to an abrupt end and broke the backbone of Hayatu. His chief scribe and successor, the Sudanese, Modibbo Arabu, who spent many years with him in Balda and Maroua, and Sa'ad, son of Hayatu, struggled in vain to put together followers of Hayatu. Indeed, co-operation among colonial forces did not give them another chance. Instead, French armies from their colonial possessions in west, north and central Africa converged on Lake Chad and brought Rabah's Empire to an end in a very bloody battle at Fort Lamy now (N'djamena). This was the greatest blow to Islamo-Fulani hegemony, which had significantly propelled and sustained the regional identity, begun nearly two centuries back in history. It also ended a gigantic effort to achieve a broader regional identity construction by the introduction of radical Islam as well as a new legal and administrative framework.

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