

## Review Article

# The Horse in the Bamenda GRASSFIELDS: Stating New Roles and Reframing History, 1916-2008

Charles Jumbam Tardzenyuy (PhD)\*

University of Buea, Cameroon

### Article History

Received: 05.01.2021

Accepted: 18.01.2021

Published: 25.01.2021

### Journal homepage:

<http://www.easpublisher.com>

### Quick Response Code



**Abstract:** The paper examines the horse in the Bamenda Grassfields by stating its roles in an attempt to educate and preserve the equine heritage history. This is to ensure that the developments that horses facilitated throughout history are recognized, embraced, and taught to future generations. The paper argues that beyond war and transport or quick displacement, horses in the Bamenda Grassfields were used for entertainment, ornamental and aesthetics functions. By doing so, the paper reinserts the horse into the broader historical narrative. Thus the idea of equine heritage history is tested in order to draw the Bamenda Grassfields history into the wider global dialogue equine historiographical issues. In order to achieve this, a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research was used. Our findings revealed new perceptions on the role of horses in the region. These perceptions revealed that far from being instruments of war, horses were veritable actors of sports, entertainment and more. The organization of horse races and fantasia events in the region bear testimony to this. Besides horse races organized, horses staged public displays to decorate social events. Also, the horse impacted as they provided employment, created business enterprises and companies, developed the Bamenda Grassfields, added to its touristic potentials, and promoted unity and solidarity between Fulani and local inhabitants. On the flip side, it boosted prostitution, led to sporadic fights among spectators as they scrambled for vantage positions round the field. Cases of thievery and pick pocketing were also frequent.

**Keywords:** Bamenda Grassfields, Fulani, Horse race, Old Roles, New perception, Impact.

**Copyright © 2021 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, horses played a monumental role in the development of the modern world. The use of the horse revolutionized agriculture, helped develop cities, improved transportation and communication, facilitated nation-building, revolutionized warfare, contributed to battle victories and remain a cultural icon to this day. Africans south of the Sahara perceived horses as primarily destined only for war and distant transportation. Despite horses' enormous contributions, they remain strangely absent from history across the knowledge landscape in the Bamenda Grassfields. Literature on the holistic function of the horse is fit-fit and scanty. This gap exists because scholarship has focused more on horses as instruments of war rather than their socio-cultural and economic function. This limitation accounts for the numerous controversies, stigmatization and the categorization of horses as beasts of burden in many African societies. Thus the article traces the way horses were introduced in the Bamenda Grassfields and the subsequent diversification of their functions from the military to the non-military aspects as they shifted roles integral to civic functioning on

various levels especially as tokens of status, entertainment and socio-economic domains. Since memory holders are fading away and archival sources dilapidating, this study intends to document these sources before it is too late.

## CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

### The Bamenda Grassfields

The appellation "Grassfields" is a broad term used to refer to the whole region of West Cameroon (North West and Western regions) between the Cross River basin and the two affluences of the Benue (Katsina Ala and Donga) in the North and the Mbam and Nkam in the East [1]. This region is dominated by a vast expanse of grasslands, from where it derived the name Grassfields. The Grassfields is characterised by exposed ridges and unforested rocky slopes and forest galleries along the river valleys. According to Dankler, cited by Paul Nkwil, the Grassfields refer to "a sea of grass" which stretches for hundreds of kilometres

<sup>1</sup>M. M. Ayi (1994). Notes on "Conquete et Resistance au Cameroun", U.V.2111, University of Yaounde I.

providing one of the most magnificent panoramas on earth [2]. The Bamenda Grassfields formed part of the British Cameroon. The British Cameroon was made up of Northern Cameroons and Southern Cameroons [3]. Our concern here is the Bamenda Grassfields (the study area) in the Southern Cameroons conterminous to the North West Region of Cameroon [4]. The people of the Bamenda Grassfields are categorized into six major ethnic groups: Tikar, Widikum, Chamba, Tiv, Mambila and later the Fulani who constitutes the last wave of immigrants into the region.[5] The article accords more space to the Mbororo Fulani because horse rearing was part of their lifeline and they owned most of the horses in the Bamenda Grassfields.

The word Mbororo (pl. Mbororoen) is a pejorative description of the Fulani. This is because "Mbororo" in Fulfulde (Fulani language) means a group of cattle [6]. French people refer to them as Peuls while the English call them Fulani. They are however given different names in different places such as Foulah, Ful,

---

<sup>2</sup> Dankler, cited by P.N. Nkwi(1989). *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891-1913: A German Colonial Account*, Leiden, African Studies Centre, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>The British Northern Cameroons never had a separate administrative existence. The territory with an area of 17,354 square miles (44,928sq.km) was administered as an integral part of the three provinces in Northern Nigeria: Benue province with its capital at Maiduguri, Adamawa with its capital at Yola and Bornu with its capital at Makurdi. Also see T. Eyongetah and R. Brain (1979). *A History of the Cameroons*, London, Longman, pp. 95-10.

<sup>4</sup> The introduction of horses into the Bamenda Grassfields was however done by the Bali Chambas who invaded the entire area beginning from 1820. Their horses were used only for raids, and even so, after raiding the Bamenda Grassfields they moved out of it right to the edge of the forest region where they were later defeated. They later took their few horses to their new settlements and have no history of having distributed or sold horses in the Bamenda Grassfields. Also N. B. Nyamndi (1988) *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon: A Political History*. Paris: Editions Cape, pp. 1-11; E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry (1967) "Historical Notes, Bamenda Grassfields", London p. 43 also states that the introduction of a horse in the Bamenda Grassfields is traditionally credited to Gawolbe's Bali-Chamba invaders or the fore-runners. The two authors however comments that such horses were only a few

<sup>5</sup>P.N. Nkwi (1987). *Traditional Diplomacy: A Study of Inter-Chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon, Yaounde*, Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde, p.3

<sup>6</sup>NAB.(National Achieves Buea) (n.d.). File No. B3062, "Fulani Intelligence Report", p. 36.

Fulbe, Fellata, Pullo, Fula Macina and Mbororo [7]. In this study, we have adopted the name Mbororo Fulani given that it is the name widely used by authors, researchers and administrative correspondences. Even though their original home was for long a matter of heated controversy amongst scholars, recent studies are definite that their cradle as a race and a group is Futa Toro in northern Senegal. They migrated from Senegal to northern Nigeria before coming to Cameroon [8]. They are the ones who brought and spread horses in to the Bamenda Grassfields. Each Fulani family came with horses and in the later years they developed the habit of giving out horses either as gifts or by selling them to the local inhabitants [9]. Consequently, horses began to spread all over the region and its usage was no longer limited only to the Fulani. Local inhabitants developed interest in its usage for transportation displacement, and later displays. However, the Fulani still dominated in its ownership and usage.

### The Old Roles of the Horse

The first role of the horse in the Bamenda Grassfields was as war ally to the Bali Chambas who invaded the region in 1820. The second group of warriors who invaded the same region twice (in 1835 and in 1870) [10] on horse backs were the Fulani. These warrior groups were in search of slaves and booties [11]. They attacked villages with the aid of horses, burnt down houses and palaces in some cases and also took away captives [12]. Through raids, the Fulani discovered the lush pasture lands of the Bamenda Grassfields and consequently in 1916 they came back and negotiated peacefully for settlement grounds with the local traditional rulers [13]. From 1916 onwards the

---

<sup>7</sup>Fanso, V. G. (1989). *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Vol. 1, From Pre-colonial Times to the Nineteen Century, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan Press Ltd., pp. 28-29; M.D. Nama, D. Forbin et al. (eds.) (2007). *Stay Tuned*, Second edition, Student's Book, 4eme, Cambridge, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup>J.H.D. Stapleton (1948). "In Their End is Their Beginning – A Fulani Crisis", *The Nigerian Field*, Vol. xviii, No. 2, p. 54. *Majankeho* Clan is one of the clans that make up the Jafun people, Stapleton was a British Colonial administrators in the then Bamenda Division which was later raised to a province (Bamenda Province) in 1949. He participated actively in improving relations between Fulani and graziers

<sup>9</sup>NWRAB. (North West Regional Achieves Bamenda) (1953), File No.Si1953/1, "Bamenda Race Club: General Meeting", p1

<sup>10</sup>Ayi "Conquete et Resistance" :Also Nyamndi *The Bali Chamba*, p.11, Chilver Kaberry "Historical Notes"p. 43

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Jumbam, C. T. (2012). "The Fulani impact on the Bamenda Grassfields, 1916-2008: A Historical

population of Fulani and of horses kept increasing as many more came. Later, the local inhabitants developed interest in the horse especially as they saw Fulani using it as a means of transportation and for quick displacement. While some local inhabitants received horses as offers from Fulani, others bought it from them. As such horses became a means of transportation and for quick displacement. Colonial administrators also used horses to supervise road construction from 1948 onwards. The general conception in the Bamenda Grassfields until 1950 was that the horse was only good as war ally, transport means and for road construction supervision. After 1950 new roles of the horse began to emerge and constitute the focus of our discussion.

### Stating the New Roles of the Horse

The myth that horses could only be used at war and for transportation or quick displacement remained ubiquitous in the entire Bamenda Grassfields region until the British colonial administrators created the Bamenda Race club (BRC) in 1953 [14]. The Bali Chambas had invaded the region using horses in 1820 and the Fulani did the same twice, in 1835 and in 1870 [15]. Later, Fulani with their horses increasingly entered into the region and created settlement grounds. Many local inhabitants developed scary attitudes given that the sad experiences of the Fulani early invasion were still fresh in their memories. Indeed, few would have imagined that the same Fulani and horses that scared them, will one day transform the region into a theater of amusing public horse displays and with them (local inhabitants) also participating actively.

In the beginning, Fulani displays on horseback attracted the attention of some colonial officers. The displays were often staged on Muslim festive days like Ramadan and the *Tabaski* for Muslim faithful. Colonial administrators soon began to invite Fulani horse owners to come and stage similar displays during official ceremonies. Some British colonial officials even bought horses from the Fulani, made friends with them, and began associating and participating in some of their displays [16]. By 1953, the colonial administrators began organising and sponsoring public horse displays.

---

investigation”, PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaoundé I, p.7

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, Also Interview with shuufaay wo Kongir, aged 70, lineage head and great lord of dead in Nso, Kumbo, 05 July 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Ayi (1994). It’s also worth mentioning that the Chamba horses were used only for raids, and even so, after raiding the Bamenda Grassfields they moved out of it right to the edge of the forest region where they were later defeated. They later took their few horses to their new settlements and have no history of having distributed or sold horses in the Bamenda Grassfields.

<sup>16</sup>Jumbam “The Fulani impact” p.7

Local inhabitants who owned horses also began participating in the later years. It started with the creation of the Bamenda Race Club (BRC), evolved to the Sabga Lamidate and then progressed to the Bansa Horse Races. It ended in the decoration of social manifestations [17]. These events also left lots of impacts in the Bamenda Grassfields.

By 1953, horse displays in Bamenda were no longer staged only during Moslem feasts. Horse riders gracefully displayed in honour of important guests like the Governor of Nigeria, the Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons and others. The need to prepare for such visits led to frequent meetings in Bamenda, during which plans and programmes for the event were drafted. It was from such preparatory meetings that the idea of a race club was born. It eventually led to the creation of the Bamenda Race Club (BRC) on Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1953 [18]. A committee was immediately set up to pilot the activities of the club.

The BRC had objectives, rules and regulations. First, the club organised race meetings for the purpose of promoting better breeding, care and management of horses in the then Bamenda Province. Second, membership to the club was open to anyone resident in the Bamenda Province. Third, race meetings were to hold twice yearly and no horse was to be permitted to participate unless its condition and equipment were approved by the veterinary officer [19]. At the end of 1953, a race meeting was organised to mark the coronation of the BRC. Cuthbert Mayne, the Senior Resident of Calabar, was invited and made patron of the event. Other administrative officers from Buea took part. Marvelled by the organisation of the event and particularly the fanfare generated by the horse display, Cuthbert disclosed his feeling by stating that “you will doubtless have happy memories of attending a race meeting in Bamenda” [20]. This certainly meant that the BRC meetings were memorable events pleasing to any visitor. Such memories compelled him to request for more race meetings to be organised. Thus in 1954, he requested for a race meeting and on the occasion, Wakili Buba bi Chiroma, a Fulani youth from Nkambe, won [21]. As from 1954 onwards, Cuthbert offered a trophy for the best horse.

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp.99-100

<sup>18</sup> NWRAB., File No. Si.1953/Ref. 1532/1 Bamenda Race Club: General Meeting, 20 April 1953,p1.

<sup>19</sup> NWRAB., File No. Si.1953/1. Minutes of the Bamenda Race Club Committee Meeting held in the Resident’s Office, 23 April 1953, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> NWRAB., File No. Si.1953/1 Buba bi Chiroma, winner of the Mayne Cup, 2 January 1954, p. 14.

In later years, the Bamenda Race Club expanded in its activities. The prizes offered in the subsequent years attracted many more competitors from within and outside the Bamenda Province. Competitors were both Fulani and local inhabitant jockeys, provincial administrators (mostly whites) and jockeys from Bamoum and Dschang, among others [22]. Jockeys from outside the Bamenda Province were obliged to apply and only selected applicants were invited to the event and race meetings. They equally paid a registration fee per jockey [23]. Race meetings were often massively attended as invitations were usually sent to all the Fulani Ardoen, local councils, administrative departments, principals of schools, Rev. Fathers and Fons. The race was advertised on notice boards of the Post Office Bamenda, PWD (Public Works Department), Abakpa Hospital, Government Schools, Magistrate Courts, the Bafreng Community Hall and so on) [24]. The sale of tickets for Race Meetings generated much money for the Race Club. Consequently, a bank account for its activities was opened with the Barclays Bank. (Dominion, colonial and overseas) [25].

The winners of the race meetings earned prizes contingent on the money raised from the sale of tickets and registration fees charged for the participating horses. The prizes offered ranged from £10 for the 3<sup>rd</sup>, £20 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and £30 for the 1<sup>st</sup> positions. All the participating horses received encouragement prizes of £1 each. Given the risk involved in the horse races, the Bamenda Race Club, supported by the Resident of Bamenda, insured the participating horses with the United Africa Company of Nigeria Ltd. in Port Harcourt for a period of seven months. A receipt No. 536858 for all the participating horses was issue [26]. Also in 1954, A.B. Westmacott, the SDO ordered the purchase of saddles and bridles for participating horses from the United Kingdom (UK) at the cost of £30. Tickets with serial numbers were printed in the UK [27]. Some of the tickets were also ordered from City Press and Rubber Stamp Co. Ltd, Calabar as well as from the Basel Printing Press in Victoria [28]. In spite of the spiralling trend of the BRC competitions and the accompanying activities from 1953 to the early 1960s, they died down by 1970.

As the Bamenda Race Club and its activities died down [29], the Sabga Lamidat horse race took over in the late 1970. It was organised annually at the end of the Ramadan fasting month. The Sabga Lamidat [30] was chosen because it had for long served as the headquarters and coordinating centre of all the Ardorates in the Bamenda Grassfields. In preparations for the race, invitations were usually sent to all the neighbouring Ardorates requesting every Fulani horse owner and equestrians to prepare the best horses. On the day of the Ramadan feast, jockeys presented themselves with their horses at the Sabga Lamidat playground. During the competitions, jockeys mounted their horses and were expected to run round the playground four times in each race. Winners and the best horses were selected and classified according to their arrival. The competitions drew spectators both from within and outside the Sabga Lamidat. In 2005 the Sabga Lamidat horse race ended with the following winners selected and classified in order of merit as indicated in Table-1.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> NWRAB., File No.Si.1953/1. Minutes of 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting, Bamenda Race Club Committee, 22 April 1954, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>29</sup> After Independence and the Reunification of the French and the British Cameroons, the British colonial officers who stood at the fore front of the Bamenda Race Club and its activities left. As a consequence, the club was later closed down due to lack sponsor and able supporters.

<sup>30</sup> The Sabga Ardorat was later changed to a Lamidat. This was because Ardo Sabga, its founder was made the supreme leader of all the Fulani people and was supreme over all the Ardoen in Southern Cameroons. It was similar to those in Kontcha, Rai, Adamawa and Lompta. The Fulani in Kom, Ndop, Meta, Babanki, Nso, Wum, Santa among others all fell under his indulgence; Also interview with Lamido Adama.



**Table-1: 2005 Sabga Lamidat Horse Race Winners in Order of Merit**

Name of Jockey	Rank	Community of Origin	Divison
Usman Aben Anugu	1 <sup>st</sup>	Sabga	Mezam
Jauro Manjo Hammadu	2 <sup>nd</sup>		
Alhaji Isari Gojeh	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Bamunka	Ngoketunjia
Alhaji Allaidi	4 <sup>th</sup>	Chup-Mbengwi	Momo
Mbakana Ardo Buba	5 <sup>th</sup>	Binka	Donga-Mantung

**Source:** Constructed by author from interview with Mohammed Bawuru, Islamic Cleric and Program Coordinator for MBOSCUDA, Bamenda, 4 January 2007; interview with Sali Django, aged 46, Deputy Program Coordinator for MBOSCUDA, Bamenda, 4 January 2007.

Table-1 presents the best five winners of the 2005 Sabga horse race competition classified in order of merit. The best five were from Mezam, Ngoketunjia, Momo and Donga Mantung Divisions respectively [31]. Besides the Sabga Lamidate horse race, the Banso Horse Race later emerged. The Banso Horse Race organised annually, was provoked by the presence of many horses in Nso [32]. The competitions were organised and sponsored at the Tobin Municipal Stadium by Guinness Cameroun S.A. It did so successfully in 1988, 1993, 1994, 1995 and in 1998. The Guinness Banso Horse Races were managed by Guinness's Representative Trading Company. Under Guinness Cameroun S.A., the competition was named "Banso Guinness Horse Race." The sum of fifty million (50,000,000) FCFA was budgeted for the event. This money was often apportioned to activities like security, decoration of the municipal stadium, building of shades for staking, purchase of veterinary drugs for horses, buying of drugs for the Red Cross, radio announcements, animation, printing of invitations, end-of-race party, preparatory meetings, a trophy for the best jockey (overall winner), prizes for the winners (cash and kind), hundreds of Guinness T-Shirts, buying of drinks and other [33]. In each of the competitions only thirty registered horses participated. The registered horses were often taken to the veterinary department for medical check-up before they were considered qualified for the race. On the day of the event, five races of six horses each were organised. In each case, the six horses were expected to run round the municipal stadium four times (distance of 1.6km). The first two horses in each race were selected for the final round of 2km. At the final stage, ten horses competed and the following prizes were awarded in order of merit [34] (see Table-2 for details). Also, all the jockeys were each given Guinness attires to put on with numbers to facilitate identification.

<sup>31</sup> C.T. Jumbam, (2007) "The Fulani in the Bamenda Grassfields: Social, Cultural, Economic and Political Impact, 1916-2005", D.E.A. Dissertation in History, University of Yaoundé I, pp. 72-73; interview with Django; interview with Bawuru.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Amadou Mayenin, aged 56, Lord Mayor of Kumbo Rural Council, Kumbo, 15 June 2004 and 20 December 2010.

<sup>33</sup> ABBGCRTC., Banso Guinness Horse Race, pp. 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

**Table-2: Guinness Cameroon Prize Awards Schedule in Order of Merit, 1998**

Rank	Prizes ( FCFA)
1 <sup>st</sup>	40,000 + a trophy
2 <sup>nd</sup>	35,000
3 <sup>rd</sup>	30,000
4 <sup>th</sup>	25,000
5 <sup>th</sup>	15,000
6 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup>	10,000 per competitor
<b>Total</b>	<b>195,000</b>

**Source:** Constructed by author from ABBGCRTC (Archives of the Bui Branch of Guinness Cameroun Representative Trading Company), Banso Guinness Horse Race Scheduled for 31 October 1988 at Kumbo, 20 October, p. 2.

Table-2 indicates that only the first five winners received cash prizes above ten thousand FCFA. The other five winners, no matter their positions, each received a fixed amount of ten thousand FCFA. After the last 1998 edition organised by Guinness Cameroun S.A, *Pari Mutuelle Urbain Camerounais* (PMUC) took over the organisation and sponsorship of the horse races.

Under the PMUC, many innovations were made. The name of the competition was changed from Banso Guinness Horse Race to Kumbo Horse Race and Marathon. The first edition was organised in 1999. Besides estimating a huge amount of money as budget for the event, prizes for winners were increased when compared to the races under Guinness S.A. (see Table-3 showing PMUC prize awards schedule).

**Table-3: PMUC Prize Awards Schedule in Order of Merit**

Rank	Cash Prize (FCFA)	N° of Trophy
1 <sup>st</sup>	100,000	1
2 <sup>nd</sup>	50,000	1
3 <sup>rd</sup>	30,000	1
4 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup>	10,000 (per competitor)	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>250,000</b>	<b>-</b>

**Source:** Compiled by author from interview with Hilary Mbiybe Kibveshi, aged 37, Bui branch Manager of PMUC, Kumbo, 7 June 2007.

Table-3 shows that PMUC budgeted 250,000 FCFA as cash prizes for the best ten winners. It shows that the prizes were given in order of merit where the first three winners each received a trophy. Equally, seven winners from the 4<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> position received 10,000 FCFA each. In each edition, PMUC registered 60 horses checked and scheduled by the veterinary department of the division [35]. Besides the cash prizes and trophies, special prizes were offered to the best regions that registered greater numbers of winning horses (see Table-4).

**Table-4: Special Prizes Offered in Order of Merit to Regions with Greater Numbers of Winning Horses in 1999**

Region	Rank	Prize (FCFA)	Beneficiary	Official Handing the Prize
Tunir (Jakiri)	1 <sup>st</sup>	75,000	Ardo Manjoh	Senior Divisional Officer for Bui
Tubah	2 <sup>nd</sup>	70,000	Boaba Madaki	Sub Divisional Officer for Bui
Ndawara	3 <sup>rd</sup>	50,000	Ardo Bello	Lord Mayor for Kumbo

**Source:** Compiled by author from ABBPMUC. (Archives of the Bui Branch of Pari Mutuelle Urbain Camerounais), Budget for the PMUC Kumbo Horse Race, p. 1.

Table-4 shows that in the 1999 Kumbo Horse Race and Marathon competition, three regions produced greater numbers of winning horses. In order of merit, Tunir (Jakiri) came first followed closely by Tubah and the third position went to the Ndawara region. The prizes were handed to the winners by the divisional administrators. Some special prizes were also awarded to the best horses selected by a commission of judges. In the 1999 edition, the prize for the first (best) horse (70,000 FCFA) went to Adamou Bouba of the Sabga Lamidat, the second (60,000 FCFA) went to Ardo Sali from Bamti and the third (50,000 FCFA) was given to Bouba Siran of Takui [36]. Encouragement prizes were equally awarded to the youngest jockeys (see Table-5).

**Table-5: Encouragement Prizes to Youngest Jockeys in 1999**

Name of Jockey	Sex	Age	Prize FCFA)	Official handing the Prize
Bariru Yerima Koutu	Male	7 years	40,000	Sub-Divisional Officer of Bali-kumbat
Salimatou Bouba	Female	10 years	40,000	Dr Tefiang Eleanor (MINEPIA Bui)

**Source:** Compiled by author from ABBPMUC., Budget for the PMUC Kumbo Horse Race, p. 3.

Table-5 presents encouragement prizes offered to the youngest male and female jockeys in the 1999 edition of the Kumbo Horse Race and Marathon. The youngest male jockey was seven years old and the female ten years old. It also presents the names of the administrative officials who handed the prizes to the deserving jockeys.

Another variant of the Bamenda Grassfields horse was the ornamental and aesthetic aspect. Horses were used to decorate social events. They were dressed with colourful designs and taken out during festive events. There were three major places where such manifestations took place with intensity: Ndawara, Nso and at the Sabga Lamidate. The Fon of Nso was honoured and dignified during the feast of the Ramadan. He was usually escorted from the hill top Bamkikaii prayer ground in Kumbo to his Palace by horse riders. In this procession the Fon sat on a horse back beautifully decorated and protected from both sides by horse men. The Fon was fanned from both sides, by men dressed in red and white coloured uniform. A very large umbrella was opened over him to protect the sovereign from the scorching sun. The royal entourage was usually animated by Moslem musical artists. They produced a blast of tantara music from trumpet-like instruments called *alakita* and armpit drums. When the procession was over, the palace forecourt yard was usually transformed into a theatre of horse display. Every horse rider demonstrated his expertise with dexterity to the admiration of spectators and the Fon. The same honour given to the Fon of Nso during these eventful days was given to El Hadj Amadou Danpullo in Ndawara and in the Sabga Lamidat to the Lamido of the Lamidat. In other areas of the Bamenda Grassfields, the Ardoen were given similar honour [37].

<sup>35</sup> ABBPMUC. (Archives of the Bui Branch of Pari Mutuelle Urbain Camerounais), Budget for the PMUCKumbo Horse Race and Marathon, 4 December 1999, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> ABBPMUC, Budget for the PMUC Kumbo Horse Race, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Wagua Alhadji Ahmadou Wagua, aged 59, Native of Bali-kumbat, retired Gendarme Officer, and the acting General Director of Ndawara Tea Estate, Ndawara, 12 July 2008; interview with Bawuru. Informants in Bali, Mbengwi and Nkambe commented on similar Fulani manifestations in their areas but with a major difference being the absent of

Progressively, the Fulani began to decorate annual indigenous traditional ceremonies and sceneries. This was directed strictly to the Fons of the region on whose land they were settled and or were grazing. In Bali-Nyonga, the Fulani came out massively to assist in the *Leila* dance and annual festivals. Their horse displays were usually done on the second day of the event [38]. During the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of his enthronement as Fon George Ndikum II of Akum in 2008, the Fulani came out in their great numbers with their horses during this eventful day to give it the colour it deserved. They staged horse display in his palace forecourt and all open places around the palace under the watchful eyes of onlookers [39]. Worth mentioning are the impacts accrued from the new roles of the horse in the Bamenda Grassfields.

### **The Impact of the Horse Race on the Bamenda Grassfields**

The Bamenda Race Club activities on its part left a huge impact on the entire Bamenda Grassfields region. It promoted the touristic potential of the area as well as solidarity and unity between the Fulani and the local people. Before this time they were torn apart by cultural boundaries and to an extent, farmer-grazier conflicts which till date has not been given a lasting solution. It opened up Bamenda and spread its image to the rest of Cameroon and the wider world especially Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Prior to the Governor's visit in 1956, four horses were negotiated from the Fulani communities in Nkambe and Nso. These would be ridden by the Governor and his entourage. Although the Governor often feared and refused to ride, his daughter spent much time riding with other colonial administrators [40]. By 1954, there were about 1900 horses in the Bamenda Province. They were owned by the Fulani [41]. Race meetings provided

---

decorated escorts like the ones in Wum, Nso, Ndwara and the Sabga Lamidat.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mungeyi Gordian, aged 36, Native of Bali-kumbat and Teacher at English High School Yaounde, Yaounde, 12 January 2007; interview Felix Duma, aged 45, Teacher at Government High School Bamessing Ndop and a Prince of the Bali-kumbat Palace, Yaounde, 23 December 2010; interview with Lawrence Sheey Langwa, aged 64, Lordling, Title holder of Ngwerong and an Attendant to the Fon of Nso, Kumbo, 4 March 2006; interview with Fai Paul Sunjo, aged 48, Second Deputy Mayor of Kumbo Urban Council and a teacher at GBHS (Government Bilingual High School), Kumbo, 15 July 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Scholastica Naah, aged 34, Teacher at Government Bilingual High School, Nkoteng and an indigene of Akum, Yaounde, 16 July 2011.

<sup>40</sup> NWRAB., File No. Fa 1949/1. Ref. VSC. 10/4/5. 19, His Excellency the Governor General visit to Bamenda 9 March 1956, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> NWRAB., File No. Qg/a. 1954/2, Minutes of the proceedings at the second meeting of the Ardos of the

opportunities for the discussion of farmer-grazier conflicts and the general détente that reigned helped to ease tensions. This view was confirmed by the Director of Veterinary Services in Bamenda in 1962 during an annual meeting of all the Fulani. He stated in part that:

...The Bamenda Race afford a good chance for meeting all Fulani in the Wum, Nkambe and Bamenda Divisions, and at this meetings, various matters concerning these graziers are always discussed most especially inter divisional dry season grazings [42].

This claim implies that race meetings provided a forum for the Fulani of the different divisions to discuss problems arising from grazing, especially during the dry season [43]. The race meetings were also used to establish trade links between Bamenda horse owners and business firms producing saddles and tickets in the United Kingdom. The same links were established with the City Press and Rubber Stamp Co. Ltd. in Calabar as well as with the Basel Printing Press in Victoria. Non-permanent employment opportunities were offered to people who sold tickets. There were also menial jobs for those engaged in the preparation of the field for the competitions and other activities. Notwithstanding, other businesses such as selling food items and drinks were profitable and flourished in Bamenda during such events. A businessman famously known by then as Pa Christian created an extension of his bar to the Bambui locality because of the race meetings. He was made a member of the Race Club and the main supplier of beer for the dance party after every event. His bar was one of the most attractive, busy and well decorated in Bamenda. It was visited by many customers and was later re-baptized "Race Club Bar" [44].

The Sabga annual horse race had its own impact. The display on horseback by jockeys was an attractive exercise that appealed to spectators from Bamenda town and neighbouring villages. The Sabga Lamidat thus became an attractive touristic scene to visitors from within and outside the Bamenda Grassfields. The race itself provided an opportunity for

---

Bamenda, Nkambe, and Wum Divisions, 31 December 1956, p.125.

<sup>42</sup> NWRAB., File No. Si.1953/1. Bamenda Races and Annual Fulani meetings, 1962, p. 292.

<sup>43</sup> The Director certainly quoted dry season grazing here because it is often a period of pasture scarcity and cattle are tempted to cause damages to crops in search for feed. It is equally a period when graziers do rival over lush pastured valleys.

<sup>44</sup> NWRAB., File No. Si.1953/1. Minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Bamenda Race Club, 18 October 1962 p. 294; Interview with Muma. This informant stressed on the fact that Pa Christian became very rich and even employed many servants in his bar.

children to earn money from selling groundnuts, bananas, pears, sweets, among other things. Bars and palm-wine houses equally benefited from the sale of their goods. Taxi owners also made profits as they spent the whole day transporting crowds of spectators to and from the Sabga Lamidat.

The horse race competitions organised in Nso by Guinness Cameroun S.A. and later PMUC, impacted on the people of the area in particular and the Bamenda Grassfields in general. The competitions transformed Kumbo into an annual touristic display centre in the Bamenda Grassfields. The display of horses by jockeys attracted many visitors. They came from within Nso, the Bamenda Grassfields as a whole, and other provinces of the Republic of Cameroon [45]. The display of horses by equestrians especially the very young ones below ten years of age was usually very appealing to the mammoth crowds of spectators, administrative personnel and guests (see Plate-1).



**Plate-1: A Jockey Aged 7, Attracting the Attention of the Administrative Personnel and Invitees Seated in the Grandstand**

**Source:** Boma Edwin's Archive, 22 December 2005.

Plate-1 presents a very young rider aged 7, admired by the administrative personnel and distinguished invitees seated in the grand stand. Such young riders were usually cheered and encouraged with lots of financial gifts by the spectators. According to Mayenin Amadou, the Lord Mayor of Kumbo Rural Council, "The Banso Horse Race competition is the most eventful activity in the division that no one can afford to miss". This sporting activity was encouraged by the presence of horses made available mostly by the Fulani. The Nso Fondom and the Bamenda Grassfields in general became attractive to visitors and tourists.

Equally, the Horse Race competition generated revenue for businesses in Bui Division. Animators were paid heavy sums of money at the end of the competition. PMUC often set aside 50,000 FCFA just for animation. This was no doubt a big sum of money made in one day [46]. Children selling all kinds of food items benefited enormously from this competition. Hotels like Ring Road, Maryland, Central Inn and Barnis were flooded with customers. Bars and palm

wine joints did good business. Taxi business flourished within the week of the event. On the day of the event, taxi drivers ferried visitors to and from the Tobin Municipal Stadium [47].

Temporary employment was offered to the youths. Many were employed in menial jobs to decorate the municipal stadium, carrying sticks and poles to build sheds for staking and constructing the enclosure fence for the race. Others served as night watchmen to protect materials put in place prior to the event. Each dance group invited to animate the event left with uncountable number of T-Shirts and caps. Under Guinness, each dance group was given the sum of 10,000 FCFA and free crates of Guinness drinks. The *Kikum* masquerade and *Njang won nto*' dances were popular dance groups often invited to grace the ceremonies. Cyprain Bah, a *Kikum* masquerade dancer, described the Nso racing event as "Guinness day of drinking sprees" [48].

The Banso Horse Race also had negative impacts especially as anti-social behaviour was heightened. The rate of prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) increased in Bui Division [49], Sporadic fights that usually broke out among spectators as they scrambled for vantage positions round the field. Cases of theft were frequent while wild applauses and rowdiness were common especially when a young jockey appeared to be challenging others. During such exciting moments, thieves exploited the distraction by pick-pocketing. Both male pockets and ladies' hand bags were robbed [50].

## CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the horse in the Bamenda Grassfields was not used exclusively for war and transportation or quick displacement. Literature on the holistic function of the horse is fit-ful and scanty. This gap exist because scholarship has focused more on horses as instruments of war rather than their socio-cultural and economic function. According to our findings, they reveal new perceptions on the role of horses in the region. These perceptions revealed that far

<sup>47</sup>Interview with Mayenin.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Cyprian Bah, aged 48, one of the *Kikum* masquerade dancers, Kumbo, 10 June 2007. He led the *Kikum* dance of *Sarntoh* compound to the Tobin Municipal Stadium during the horse race competition.

<sup>49</sup>Unlike the case with the races organized by the BRC and the Sabga Lamidate with miled prostitution noted, that of Bui Division witnessed an increased because of the involvement of GCRTC and PMUC. These companies invested much money on such events, invited multiple dance and animation groups and consequently brought the ambiance which attracted more spectators.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Bah.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kibveshi.

<sup>46</sup>ABBPMUC, Budget for the PMUC Kumbo Horse Race, p. 2.



from being instruments of war, horses were veritable actors of sports, entertainment and more. The organization of horse races and fantasia events in the region bear testimony to this. The British colonial administration created the BRC, and organized many horse races. With the departure of the colonial administration horse races continued in the Sabga Lamidat and later in Nso. Besides horse races organized, horses staged public displays to decorate social events. The impacts of these new perceptions on the role of horses were many to include: providing openings for jobs and temporal employment, development and modernization of the region, promoting unity and solidarity between Fulani and local

inhabitants and as such helping to reduce farmer-grazier tension, opening up the Bamenda region to the outside world and added to its touristic potentials, promoting business enterprises and companies and so on. If anything negative could be said about horse events in the Bamenda Grassfields, it was the presence of prostitutes observed who nosed around for preys during such eventful days, sporadic fights among spectators as they scrambled for vantage positions round the field. Cases of thievery and pick pocketing were also frequent. For a better perceptive of the foregoing, this paper is focussed on discussing the emerging new perceptions on the role of horses and its impact on the Bamenda Grassfields.

---

**Cite this article:** Charles Jumbam Tardzenyuy (2021). The Horse in the Bamenda Grassfields: Stating New Roles and Reframing History, 1916-2008. *East African Scholars J Agri Life Sci*, 4(1), 6-14.