

## Original Research Article

## Processes of the Sedentarisation of the Mbororo in North West Region-Cameroon

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**Abstract: Objective:** It is to analyse the processes of the pastoral Mbororos' transition from nomadism to sedentarisation in the North-West Region of Cameroon. **Methods:** From observations, all the cultural core surrounding the pastoral Mbororo have had a tendency which has faced changes and has “obliged” the Mbororo to transit from their mobile (nomadic) way of life a sedentarised one, including their principal activity, cattle rearing. The study was carried out in a period of four years including twenty seven (27) months of data collection in the field. Succinctly put, this study covered the wide and extensive culture of the Mbororo in the North-West Region of Cameroon with particular focus on the transition process from nomadism to sedentarisation. **Results:** The major findings can be summarized as follows: Sedentarization is usually accompanied by larger cultural change. Despite ties with the pastoral communities, the settled pastoral Mbororos are undergoing dramatic changes in customs and relationships. This includes a departure from communal and kin-based relations in the nomadic period to a more individualized identity in the sedentarised system. Sedentarization represents an alternative economic strategy as part of a larger set of diversification strategies. A mechanism connecting the ‘government’ of the Steppe Empire and pastoral tribes was the institution of the Gift Economy. By manipulating gifts and distributing them among comrades-in-arms and tribal chiefs, the ruler of the Steppe Empire strengthened his potential influence and prestige as the ‘generous khan’. Simultaneously, he bound the persons receiving gifts by the ‘liability’ of the ‘return gift’. Concerning the plight of the pastoral Mbororo, the government of Cameroon has ventured into several policy areas on nomadic pastoralism. These include plans aimed at improving the well-being of the Mbororo and those of their animals. The successes or failures of this model and its assumptions are debatable.

**Keywords:** Mbororo, Sedentarization, Pastoral nomadism, Integration, North West Region.

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### INTRODUCTION

Ardo Gaaji, whose itinerary of migrations focused on, recently left the Biiri and the greater part of his lineage behind to establish a new home range near the Tolon village of Elak, in Oku Sub-Division. The Mbororo community of the North West Region consists basically of two sub-groups: *Jaafun* and the *Aku* which have formed a community of close co-residence. The first subgroup, in the chronological order of arrival, is a lineage segment of Mbororos under the leadership of Ardo Saga. They were part of the migration group who left Lompta due to internal rivalries. They arrived on

the Bamenda Highlands in the late 1910s, and established themselves in the Grass fields chieftdom of Babanki Tungo where they located four salt springs. Their settlement was named *Sabga* after its initiator, and later became the headquarters of the Mbororo community in the Western Grassfields. Ardo Sabga's authority was endorsed by the colonial administration which recognised him as Mbororo representative (Pelican: 2006).

The second sub-group that constitutes a lineage segment are Mbororo *Aku*. According to Pelican (2006: 158), they were drawn to the Grassfields

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at the request of Ardo Mucolli, a popular and successful Aku leader who had settled at Wum. Most of them followed the established cattle-trade route from Kashimbila to Wum. Boutrais (1995/96: 137-139) impressively describes the difficulties and dangers entailed in that journey. Besides facing natural obstacles and climatic hazard, the migrants were confronted with the hostility of the forest population. Moreover, they were welcomed by the local Grassfields authorities and the administration on account of their envisaged cattle tax contributions which significantly augmented the revenue of the Native Council, (Awasom N. 1984: 124-127, Kaberry 1960: 22). When they eventually reached Wum, most herds were reduced to half of their initial size. While some Aku graziers settled at Wum, others continued to the Misaje area. In both regions, they met favorable grazing conditions that supported the rapid reconstitution of their herds and their permanent settlement.

The term “*semi-sedentar*” is used to characterize the emerging form of local stabilization of the Mbororo of the North West Region, yet we refer to the process leading to this form as a process of “*sedentarization*”. In this, we follow Salzman’s (1980: 10) proposition to define sedentarization rather widely as either “*the change from nomadism to sedentism, or a shift in degree from nomadism toward sedentism*”. This explains why a life in mobile tents is so far maintained instead of constructing permanent houses. Others reason are hygienic factors. After some weeks on the same spot, the surroundings of the homesteads become polluted by dung and faeces and it is preferable for humans and animals to move to a new site and let the other site some time for regeneration.

This article presents the processes of the sedentarisation of the Mbororo pastoralist in the North West Region of Cameroon. It is classified under different factors, ranging from political, social to economic. The latter part of this article is devoted to the analysis of the challenges that the pastoral Mbororos of the North West Region encountered in their sedentarisation process. Throughout the twentieth century, the Mbororos have roughly corresponded to the mobile community: they were predominantly mobile pastoralists, specialized in the breeding of zebu cattle. It was only in times of economic crisis that they took up agriculture as a failback activity. As of the 1980s, urban migration has played a far greater role in terms of economic diversification than agriculture, and pure pastoralism has remained the seldom realized economic ideal to our days. In recent years, a trend towards stronger local stabilization, and indeed territorial appropriation, has become more manifest.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative research in Social Sciences, mainly in Cultural Anthropology. The techniques and tools of investigation used in

anthropology have been mobilized. Data was collected from many towns and quarters as: Kumbo, Wum, Kambe in March 2021. The sample population was made up of two administrative authorities, four traditional authorities as land managers who were based in this region during the research period, both twenty male and female sedentarized Mbororos. The research process was participant-driven and iterative, and non-numerical data (words, concepts, phrases, themes and categories) were tape-recorded from this Mbororo community. An observation was supported by a participant observation within the multi-sites in the North-West Region whose objective is to ameliorate the life style of the Mbororos. This study was carried out along the western flanks of North-West Region where pastoral activities are prominent. These multi-sites are justified because of their proximity with other Sedentarised Mbororos. The use of an interview guide permitted us to get data from pastoralists since there is no official data base and to appreciate practices carried out at individual levels. Primary data was collected on the field from the informants through the techniques of data collection in Anthropology. In this study, interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders like community leaders, traditional authorities Mbororos pastoralists, farmers, other members of communities, government and non-government officials. During the field or data collection period, a number of things and actions were observed directly. Following an observation checklist, we observed the sedentary life style of the Mbororos. Our research was in this sense inevitably multi-sited in the North-West Region of Cameroon, not only because we focused on a variety of different actors who were located in different sites, but because many of these actors were highly mobile across sites, in their daily life and in the pursuit of their economic activities.

In order to obtain information on the interactions between pastoral sedentarised Mbororos and the local communities, the traditional authorities, the farmer-graziers and others, a total of four FGDs were conducted. Each group discussion brought together a minimum of six to twelve participants. Some of the participants were mixed while in Muslim dominated communities, women were separated from men. Communication with the interlocutors took place mainly in Fulfulde. Most of them, (especially the younger ones and those who have stayed in cities) spoke English or French more or less fluently and with ease since we are “*Fulfulde speaking*”. An approach was to travel directly with them, that is, to conduct research while accompanying them during their mobility, visited their families in the pastoral context. On such occasions, news was generally exchanged, discussed and relevant information passed on, which offered opportunities to collect data. Mobility became a central principle of the research. Interviews and FGDs were transcribed from tapes directly into the computer’s word processing software. The same applied for Theses

and dissertations as well as field notes and summaries from monographs, book reviews, published articles on Mbororo life style. Electronic transcripts were coded by use of highlighters in the computer software with sub-headings attributed to each section of the information. The different themes, concepts and ideas were put together in order to verify and get the emerging details. We also examined behaviour of different actors during observations carried in the research area, interactions and declarations during Focus Group Discussion in the communities. To triangulate the findings, more interviews and conversations in subsequent field activities were used. This process produced more ideas that kept on emerging as we gained more in explanations and insight into local habits, perceptions and concepts. In addition, the data from the in-depth individual and group interviews were analysed based on the classic content analysis as prescribed by Quivy Campenaudt.

In order to make sure that these people had their rights and liberties preserved and respected, all the rules guiding the conduct of research were observed and implemented. In this respect, an ethical clearance was obtained for the study to be carried out in the North West Region. During the study, all interviews were done with the prior consent of the informants. For those who could not read or some who already understood what was going on, we still obtained their oral consent before proceeding to the interview process. Field visits were carried out during periods marking important activities that affect pastoral life such as transhumance period, the beginning of rainy season, and the beginning of crop farming. These periodics permitted us to appreciate the difficulties encountered by the sedentarised mbororo pastoralist.

A scientific work of this nature cannot be carried out without difficulties. The major problem was that of accessibility to the informants we intended to interview. In this community, there is strict cultural respect for persons. Women had enough to tell us, but unfortunately, discussing with married women is not allowed.

The interpretation and analysis consisted of processing using the Kobo software collected data transcribed literally, in English to identify the themes, the sub-themes, the verbatims. This exercise aimed to identify, through a series of short themes in the conceptual framework of analysis, the essence of the statements in the corpus submitted for analysis. The units of meaning have been extracted from the original text and reorganized under the appropriate themes or sub-themes.

## RESULTS

The different local Mbororo groups have all constituted themselves around pastoral water points and they have developed a relatively permanent presence in

the vicinity of these water points. With regard to the study group, there are now many such water points around which local communities have formed. In Bui Division, some water points are owned by individuals from the study group. A common distinction is made between modern water points or cemented water points on the one hand, and traditional ones on the other hand. "Modern" in this context means that these water points are constructed with durable and reliable materials like cement to make them resistant to possible environmental hazards. Such water points can be either collectively or individually owned, and their construction can be a private initiative or a public project. In the case of Kumbo, the first pastoral well was publicly constructed by a government program and its management then attributed to the Mbororo community under the leadership of Ardo Kadiri. A second well (Kumbo II) was later privately constructed owned by Ali Jaoro. It can be considered semi-modern in the sense that only the brim is cemented.

The gradual process of sedentarization is the most pronounced, within the study group, among the Mbororo community of Kumbo. In the following section, we shall therefore focus on this local Mbororo community and give a description of their newly adopted economic strategies. Although the water points in Bui Division owned by Mbororo) similarly serve as points of spatial fixation, important parts of the respective communities continue to be more mobile and undertake longer pastoral movements.

### Semi Sedentarization

If we refer to the form of reduced mobility characteristic of the Mbororo community with the term "semi-sedentarity", this label demands some clarification. So far, the increased local stability has not yet led to a full sedentarization of the households in the sense that permanently fixed dwellings would be constructed and villages emerge. During the time of our fieldwork, the form of habitation in use are the brick constructed houses, the typical round and tent-like shelter called *bongooru*. These three forms of houses can easily be found in one large *wuroor* where you may find one or two in the same *wuro*. Despite a reduced mobility of the majority of the households, camp relocations were not completely abandoned but occurred in variable intervals of generally not more than about four weeks. The situation of pastures for the herds presents at each time we witnessed camp relocations would not have necessitated the movements, which, for the most part, were limited to a distance of less than one kilometer.

Instead, other reasons for the maintenance of a minimum of mobility were given. One of them is the seasonal alternation of the advantages and disadvantages that specific areas offer. The relative density of the vegetation on the foot of a slope which descends to a seasonal riverbed offers more protection

against the cold and wind during the winter months. Such a site is impossible to use during the rainy season when the riverbed temporarily transforms into a stream. On the contrary, during the hot season, open spaces are preferred in order to profit from the cool night air and breeze.

### **Development of contemporary pastoral strategies**

Located at the foot of the western Grassfields on a gently sloping plain, the pastoral area of the North West Region is a thorn savannah characterized by a relatively dense vegetation of bushes and shrubs, intensifying in the depressions and towards the temporary riverbeds, which cross the area. Some large *acacia radiana* trees offer generous shadow, which serves for the men as a meeting place to spend the afternoon hours after work at the well is done. The homesteads are generally located a bit further uphill to the north, moving about regularly but in a relatively small radius with minimal mobility. A more extended mobility of the households has been given up for various reasons. The one cited by most is that migration to Sabga had been put into effect in order to establish a school and offer the children of the community the possibility of a basic education. Another important reason for remaining in the surroundings of the well is to maintain a permanent presence in the newly established home-range. Too long periods of absence from the site might encourage other groups of pastoralists to more permanently install themselves in the area with the aim of appropriating the pastoral space themselves. The spatial fixation has gone hand in hand with livelihood diversification. Many of the Mbororo in the North West Region have taken up cultivation (mainly corn, potatoes and beans) as a supplementary economic activity next to pastoralism. The regular care and labor-input that the agricultural activities demand during a part of the year are another factor limiting the mobility of households. Although common practice, agriculture is not enthusiastically embraced. Rather, it is rationally seen as a necessary subsidiary activity and many, would prefer to pay a local farmer to do the farm work for them if they have the means, (Hagberg, 1998: 74, for a similar attitude among Mbororo agro-pastoralists in Burkina Faso).

The negative attitude of Mbororo against agricultural work that has been documented by several authors (Bovin, 1990b: 38f; Loftsdóttir, 2004: 56) can generally be confirmed for the study group although it is increasingly perceived as a normal part of economic activities. Agriculture cannot be regarded as a temporary strategy for herd reconstitution any more as it used to be in the 1970s and the 1980s, or after the Rinderpest epizootic at the end of the nineteenth century. Most Mbororo do subsistence crop cultivation which is far insufficient to provide for their needs in cereals. As a result, they resort to further purchases from the local market. Müller-Dempf (2014: 20), with regard to the Turkana in Kenya who nowadays also

often take up farming, which, does not play a significant role in the overall livelihood, has pointed out that the term “agropastoralists” cannot reasonably be applied in many cases since the amount of crop production is too small. This objection seems reasonable in the case of many Mbororo in Kumbo as well. Self-ironic mockery about their own lack of farming skills is often heard.

The pastoral economy, which used to be highly specialized in the breeding of zebu cattle, has been diversified as well. The breeding of small stock, such as sheep, fowls, and imported cattle species, has been intensified. The pastoral zone of Kumbo is well suited for the grazing needs of sheep, which feed well on the leaves. They multiply well and thus contribute importantly to the family economy. This is one reason why their husbandry has been developed here, together with occasional goats who favour a similar diet, yet are kept rather as prestigious mount animals than actually being raised in numbers. “*Cattle and sheep, on the other hand, predominantly need pastures of grass and herbs, which are not sufficient both in quality and in quantity in the immediate surroundings. For this reason, the Mbororo in Kumbo have adopted a system of separation of their different herds. While the cattle and sheep are led to more distanced pastures depending to the seasonal conditions. The goats are at all seasons kept in the surrounding of the main camps*”. (Life stories realised on 15.07.2017 in North-West). Driving the cattle to the open rangelands of the pastoral zone during the rainy season is primarily motivated by nutritional considerations, but another aspect that makes the herd relocations away from the main camps imperative is the proximity of the latter to the farms of the neighboring villages. If the rains do not come in time and the herds are forced to stay near the farms, a close supervision is necessary even at night, since the animals are used to getting up and returning independently to the pastures. “*Without such supervision, crop damages in the newly sown fields would be a constant risk. A too close distance to cultivated farmland would thus mean a considerable additional labour input for a supervision of the nocturnal grazing, which is regarded as very demanding. The goats, by contrast, are tied to ropes and kept in kraals at night*”. (Life stories realised on 15.07.2021 in North-West). Pastoralism has thus changed its character from a nomadic mode to a semi-sedentary mode, characterized by a separation of the herds, or parts of the herds, which remain relatively mobile, from the bulk of the households, which become spatially more stable. A system of associated mobility, in which herds and household move together, has given way to one of dissociated mobility, where they are separated. It is based on the principle that generally only a few herders accompany the cattle, while the households remain either stationary or follow a different itinerary with other parts of the stock in cases

where different species are raised which have diverging grazing needs.

### Using the year cycle to guarantee milk supply

Herds and households form a unit at the beginning of the rainy season. That is around June or July, and again from mid-November to December. The reason is to wait for the harvest activities in the lowlands (*lugeere*) to be concluded. As soon as abundant fresh pastures are signaled, the cattle and sheep move to these lowland areas for optimum grazing. Generally, only a few lactating animals remain back at the main camp with their calves to guarantee a minimum supply of milk for households. The herds are accompanied by two or three young men (*wainaabe*) and normally one woman with her household unit, forming a highly mobile satellite camp. The exact itinerary and duration of the rainy season transhumance is variable from year to year because the main criteria for decisions about pastoral movements are the highly unstable climatic conditions of the availability and quality of herbs, as well as the availability of surface water, i.e. ponds, which form in depressions after sufficiently abundant rainfall.

The proximity of the latter helps to reduce work-intensive watering at pastoral waterpoints and is therefore also a central parameter. During the rainy season transhumance to the north, only water for domestic needs is drawn from the well. The time of fresh pastures is short, typically lasting only about three months, but the dried-up herbs remain a good source of nutrition for the animals. The herds remain in the lowland areas as long as the surface water permits easy watering and then gradually return within the vicinity of a well, keeping up shorter distance movements which allow to drive the animals to the well for watering every two days. *“If the pastures permit, the herd is kept in a shorter distance from the main camps that allows for regular visits, supplying the households with milk. When harvest activities in the area south of Kumbo are well advanced, generally in November, the animals eventually return towards the main camps, waiting for the corn and potatoes to be harvested and opened for grazing by the pastoralists’ herds. As soon as this is the case, the herds are driven south in order to feed on the crop residues, mainly stalks and leaves that the farmers have left behind with open access”.* (Interview realised with Informant 77 on 23.07. 2021 in the North-West). This source of feeding has since long been an important component of the herds’ nutritional cycle. The downward movement after harvest equally demands a dissociation of herds and households. Generally, a significant concentration of herds is encountered in the area during this period, and a pronounced competition about the best spots occurs, resulting in a temporarily extremely high mobility of the herds with constant moving. During this period, the young herders are generally not accompanied by a household Unit., The herders of the different economic units within the

Mbororo community normally stay in close association in order to be able to assist each other in case of conflicts or other problems. Contact via mobile phones is sometimes maintained, depending on the accessibility of networks and prepaid cell phone credit. The young men are equipped with cooking pots and a stock of millet and rice, and they prepare staple food for themselves in addition to feeding on the milk of their cattle. Generally, the young men have at least one mounting horse with them and every two or three days, depending on the distance to the main camps, one of the herders returns home with a supply of milk for the households, who face a shortage of milk during this period for reason of the absence of the herds. Even lactating cows are generally driven south to profit from the important nutritional resources of the crop residues to make them fit for the dry season. Gradually, the herds will get back closer to the homesteads and the system of one or two household units accompanying the joint herd is taken up again. A close contact is maintained with distances between the main camp and the herd being relatively short (often less than 5 km), and the animals are again watered at their own pastoral well. Milk can again regularly be brought to the main camp by the herders to supply the families.

### From State Evasion to Selective Integration

As shown above, nomadic mobility has often been interpreted as a strategy of state evasion. Although this aspect has certainly been of some significance with regard to the Mbororo, the concept must, however, be applied with some caution and in a more differentiated way. At least since the droughts of the 1970s, a one-sidedly evasive strategy would turn the historical to a certain extent deliberately chosen marginality by conscious withdrawal into a clearly undesirable state of exclusion from political and economic participation. Henceforth, the State, hand in hand with international aid and development organizations and some local organizations, has more or less regularly been acting as a distributor of aid and development resources. Participation in this process of distribution constitutes an obvious interest at least in a minimum of integration into administrative structures.

The question today is less how to evade the state than how to integrate aspects of the state where they seem rewarding: how to access the resources and services which the state has to offer – schools, development projects, infrastructure, health supplies and aid. The Mbororo try to selectively appropriate specific aspects of what is locally often quite undifferentiated referred to as ‘the state’ (*gomnati*), while they reject others and try to keep at distance from them. Such an attitude towards the institutions of the state - the effort to try and profit from the state services wherever possible, while at the same time aiming at keeping up a maximum of autonomy may look opportunistic. However, there are many constraints that make this ideal difficult to achieve, one of the most

important probably being the contemporary marginalization resulting from their mobility: for a long time, efficient as a mechanism of escaping environmental and political constraints, mobility has today in many cases turned into a political handicap (Botte & Schmitz, 1994: 17; Boesen, 2009a: 71, 77). The reason, as we will show immediately, is that the lack of a permanent physical base materialized in a concrete place leads to exclusion from many offers of the state and development programs that are generally designed with a sedentary logic and ignore the needs of mobile populations. This is why, today, many Mbororo have opted for the model of a locally fixed “camps”. The contemporary tendencies towards a reduced mobility and semi-sedentarity in the vicinity of a pastoral well can thus be interpreted as a strategy of resource appropriation, one principal interest being participation in processes of distribution of resources by state and development actors.

### **Creation of the rural “camps”**

Not only the state’s institutions, but non-governmental development programs as well have difficulties to adapt to the mobility of pastoralists, which reveals that they are often perceived with a sedentary bias and in consequence often play hand in hand with the state’s efforts to settle pastoralists. Most authorities and development organizations, in order to distribute aid, demand from mobile groups the reference of a permanent place at which the population can be reached as a pre-condition for their interventions (Greenough, 2003: 105f). Grémont (2011, 2014) has documented the same interdependence between this requirement of development actors and the emergence of villages or ‘*sites de fixation*’ that it entailed, among Tuareg pastoralists in Northern Niger and Mali. For Mbororo in central Niger, see also Boesen (2009a: 75) and Lassibille (2009: 318, 329). On the sedentary logic of development programs in the Sahel, their failure to adapt to the logics of mobility and their impact on spatial structures, see also Retailié and Walther 2011. The essential requirements being asked for are generally a permanent local presence, a locality name, and a head of community. These requirements do not go together well with the necessities of pastoralism. But due to the interest in the resources at stake, many Mbororo today make concessions and organize themselves, at least partially or temporarily, in so-called “camps”. Thus, the creation of “camps” is at the outset a direct reaction to the exigencies of state and development actors.

However, for many Mbororo, the distribution of relief food and other potentially attractive interventions by external actors were and still remain the only reason for staying in the “camps”. They concentrate in the “camps” if a specific offer of resources makes their presence rewarding, but they disperse anew as soon as they see no more interest in staying and especially, as soon as the requirements of

their herds necessitate new movements. As it was the offer of resources that had occasioned their presence, it seems only consistent within the logics of mobility that they will move ahead in search of new resources elsewhere. Their response to the request of the state and development actors for local presence thus consists in a minimal adaptation. It has not, from the outset, led to sedentarity or even to a significant and sustaining decrease in mobility.

On the one hand, this indicates that the phenomenon is directly linked to the intervention of development and humanitarian programs, as statements of Mbororo also confirm. On the other hand, it indicates that: “*government and development initiatives, in their efforts to approach mobile pastoral populations, at the outset did take into account cultural particularities such as periodical gatherings in a specific place. In practice, such pretensions for adapting to the realities of the target groups are often not matched, but rather, adaptation to the conditions imposed by the program is made a prerequisite for participation*” (Boesen 2009a: 71). Apart from mere aid distribution, however, over the years, there have been other interventions of development projects, introducing projects aimed at sustainably increasing the economic situation of the population. A typical offer by development programs is the Tadu Dairy Cooperative Society which has given an insightful analysis of a case of involvement of a Mbororo with such a project. They are made as the main actors in running the project including the management board. The degree of mobility remains generally high and the process of sedentarization concerns only particular parts of the society. According to Gupta & Ferguson (1997b: 7), “*The artificial creation of the “camps”, its invention by development associations and its highly fluctuating population make the notions of “community” and “locality” with regard to it rather difficult to grasp. It is probably best to understand the community of the “camps” as temporary and partial manifestations of a community that is constituted on a wider scale, on a translocal level*”. Gupta & Ferguson (1997b: 7). Again, these interventions generally work with the premise of a sedentary population and make the steady presence of the population imperative. In consequence, the creation of the “camps” has led to the emergence of new cycles of concentration and dispersal, occasioned by the presence and by the activities of development projects. The households group together at the sites of the “camps” and demonstratively manifest their presence if an organization announces an activity, but often, a considerable part of the group quickly disperses again, according to the requirements of the herds, as soon as the external actors have left the site.

### **Increased interest to primary education**

One example for project interventions that are embraced with keen interest by the Mbororo are educational projects, notably the installation of primary

schools with canteens. School education is also an excellent example of how the attitudes among Mbororo have changed from state evasion towards a greater concern for integration into state structures. *“For long, there has been a great reluctance from the part of nomadic populations more generally against efforts of the colonial government to put nomadic children to school. The model of the so called “écoles nomadic” was first introduced in Niger in 1944. These “nomadic schools” were in fact locally fixed and for nomads, rather than being conceived as mobile units themselves”* Clauzel (1992: 109).

These schools were designed with canteens provided as a strategy to make children stay on the spot and obtain education. . Although such offers would be considered very attractive today, at the time it was not. One reason was that the children’s work force was needed in the pastoral economy, yet a more general scepticism against modern education was also prevalent. The time of the introduction of these schools coincided with a period of relative wealth for the Mbororo and the interest for letting their children profit from modern education, which would eventually make them drop out of the pastoral economy, was not as evident as it seems today. *“However, the colonial policy towards schooling was one of strict enforcement. Many elders recall that children were seized and put to school with force, even against the will of their families. The most prominent example is that of Ali Dofta, who has been seized as a child and put to school by force”* (Interview realised with Informant 29 on 11.01. 2021 in the North-West).

Another example is Anugu of late memory from Sabga. From the contemporary perspective, this situation seems paradoxical, since the opposite of the above scenario is a current reality. *“These two examples of influential politicians and spokespeople for the Mbororo’s cause attest to the influence that this offer of school education might have had on the nomadic societies, had it been more widely embraced. The examples thus indirectly confirm the thesis that the contemporary political marginality of the Mbororo is to an important part, linked to the long-term refusal of formal education”* (Interview realised with Informant 34 on 16.02. 2015 in the North-West). Most Mbororo today are well aware of the benefits of modern education, and they are *“not only welcoming every effort to reach them, but are also increasingly taking the matter of acquiring “modern education” into their own hands”*. Statements as the following are frequently heard: *“Whether in town or in the bush, we are way behind. What has retarded us is that we have never sent our children to school; even today there are still only very few. The way I see it, this is the reason for our problems. Before, there was more rain and the bush was abundant. Schools were not of our concern. Today the rains have diminished, the trees have been reduced and pressure on land is accelerating. This is why today*

*the pastoralists are seeking to get farmland and to send their children to school. As far as I see it, it is our ignorance that has caused our problems. Our grandfathers lived in ignorance, our fathers as well and so do we. It would not be a good a thing if our children remained in ignorance, as well.* (Interview realised with Informant 65 on 16.02. 2021 in the North-West). One reason for the interest in modern education is thus to open up economic alternatives to the young generation in a time when, for many, pastoralism alone is not a realistic option any more to make a living. Another important interest in school/education is to be able to communicate with the administration directly and without relying upon outsiders/intermediaries. Many parents would like to enroll their children, but the access to schools in the rural areas outside villages is difficult.

### **School enrolment**

Where schools exist, in remote areas like Ntour and Mbooteegol, children have to abandon school when their families are forced to move away because of herd requirements. Although a certain reluctance against school is still prevalent, this is mainly linked to the fact that the existing offers of schools are poorly adapted to the needs of pastoralists as is the problem in many African contexts (Schlee, 2005: 30; Siele *et al.*, 2013). Part of the reluctance against school enrolment that still prevails among Mbororo is also due to the fact that the teachers are generally outsiders to the pastoral milieu and do not speak Fulfulde, while the pupils generally do not sufficiently speak English. This renders basic communication difficult and retards the learning process for the beginners. For the moment, this does not seem realistically possible in Cameroon for lack of potential teachers from the pastoral milieu who have the required education.

### **Other mobile solutions**

Other mobile solutions that are presently being experimented with both in the east- and west-African contexts are distant learning based on widespread media like the radio and mobile phones (Aderinoye *et al.*, 2007; Krätli and Dyer 2006, 2009; Siele *et al.*, 2013). For the moment, however, these do not represent a functional alternative in the context of Cameroon. The only realistic approaches to obtain schooling for their children is either to settle down in or near a village where the Mbororo children could be enrolled at an existing primary school, or, again, to establish a ‘camp’. If a sufficient number of children at the age of being enrolled can be confirmed towards the administration, a school is officially created. This generally means that the community is provided with a teacher and a minimum of equipment. In return, the community generally provides accommodation for the teacher and a shelter as a classroom. The example of Njigaari attests to the importance that is accorded to school enrolment today. Here, the process of officially acquiring a school

was difficult and took some time. Before the administration finally agreed to put in place a headmaster, the community organized itself and took the initiative to support the salary of a teacher called a parent/teacher (PT) who was employed with their own means between March and June 2011. They later engaged parent/teachers with affordable monthly salaries supported by the Mbororos and their Nso neighbours.

Today, at all the major sites or 'camps' of the Mbororo, school projects both government and private, have been initiated and have advanced to various degrees. The first local Mbororo community to have its own school accredited was Kingomen in 2008. Since then, the community succeeded to acquire a financial grant for the construction of a school building, a house for the headmaster and a store-room for the stocking of provisions for the canteen that is financed by an external donor. The school is financed by an Islamic charity association.

#### **Project-financed in relatively short time**

At Sabga, the school initiative that started in 1986 has equally acquired a project financed in relatively short time. At the third site, Wum, the number of pupils is the smallest with only 29 children. In all the three sites, the school projects have championed the construction of clay houses that serve as residences for the teacher. Also, in the cases of Kumbo and Wum, school buildings (class rooms) have been constructed with an external funding. *"In both Kumbo and Sabga the construction activities have further entailed private initiatives of house construction. By this, the nuclei of sedentary villages have been established. Hence the school, just as the pastoral well is a crystallization point for the formation of a more permanent concretization of locality, or local community"*. (Interview realised with Informant 19.02.2021 in the North-West). In contrast to the distribution of aid which is punctual and regular, the regular distribution of school meals in community-run canteens has a stronger effect on permanent local residents, if not generally for complete families, but at least for the core households. The example of schools shows that governmental and non-governmental development programs do not only distribute welfare and donations in the form of relief food, but they introduce physical constructions (class rooms, store rooms, waterpoints, and cereal banks) and thus have an important impact on the current processes of spatial fixation. For the Mbororos, the acquisition of such infrastructure is not just a reaction to the offers of development organizations. The interest goes beyond the merely economic interests of obtaining a share of the numerous offers of donations and aid, which are constantly distributed by the diverse institutions. Although such considerations certainly play an important role, there are others beyond them.

As we will show in the following section, the establishment of schools and other physical structures like cereal banks and store-rooms, must also be understood in the sense of a political strategy to establish a permanent and visible presence at a specific site. This guarantees access to pastoral resources of the respective area. In order to understand this aspect, it is important at this point to introduce the notion of attached territory.

#### **Awareness on the need of the attached territory**

One of the basic problems for pastoralists in the North West Region concerns the legal security for access to the natural resources on which they depend for their existence and which today are more and more competed for. The problem is partly based on the fact that since colonial times, the status of pastoral land has not been positively defined, but only negatively as vacant, unclaimed land, which has not been transformed by cultivation. As *'vacant and no man's land'* that are the domain of the State (Bonte, 1999: 217f; Hagberg, 1998; Hammel, 2001: 5). The dichotomy of ownership rights in land and mere rights of access finds its expression in the fact that the sedentary' populations are represented by local indigenous chiefs and quarter heads who administer clearly delimited territorial units and decide about the attribution of farmland, while the 'nomadic' populations are administrated by these chiefs who do not have any formal rights over the attribution of land and whose competences are limited to administering their tributaries territories. This administrative division introduced by the colonial power also had the effect of artificially essentializing and dichotomizing the categories of "sedentary" and "nomadic" along ethnic lines, although in practice, in the region they had rather been poles of a continuum on which groups and individual actors moved with considerable flexibility. Although the dichotomy of "sedentary" and "nomadic" is in many cases obsolete, the categories continue to have significant legal consequences as far as access to land resources is concerned.

According to Dyer, *A central aspect of the recognition of an attached territory is that it does not grant property rights but merely privileged use rights. The land remains part of the public domain and thus in the property of the state. The local group enjoys privileged access to the pasture lands and water points, but on the other hand, cannot entirely hinder access of other groups to these resources.* Dyer (2008: 17). This is made explicit in an article that defines the pastoral space as belonging to the public domain and as such as of common use and open to access by anyone. Although the recognition of priority use-rights is an important step towards a legal protection of the right of access to pastures, the issue is not without controversy. The Mbororo, as other groups of pastoralists in the North West Region and elsewhere, are today aware of their possibilities and constraints in securing priority use



rights or claiming land-titles. If the potential for translating legal options into definitively recognized land rights is not yet consequently used, this is generally due to a lack of knowledge about the legal requirements.

For official recognition of priority use rights in the sense of an *attached territory*, inscription in the land tenure register, held by the land tenure commissions is necessary. Although the localized groups of Mbororo in the Jakiri, Sabga, Wum and Oku Sub Divisions consider their respective sites as 'their land' (*lehidi amin*), much in the sense of *territory* as an habitual grazing area, none of them has so far taken measures to legally assure their claims by obtaining written titles as prescribed by the legal texts. "Many pastoralists today are well aware of the problem of a relatively permanent presence for claiming priority use rights not merely of the pastoral resources in the surrounding of the waterpoints in which they have invested, but also of these waterpoints themselves" (Boesen, 2009a: 78). In the northern zone of Jakiri, it has often been pastoralists who, in the past constructed waterpoints which later attracted farming settlers, who moved north with the advance of the agricultural front, and established villages in the vicinity of the pastoral waterpoints (Hammel, 2011: 13). The already mentioned example of the village of Door market near the well of Sabga is a case in point. Originally, Mbororo pastoralists had constructed a well here, but finally a farming village emerged and today the Mbororo even tend to be denied access to water. As the main reason for their exclusion, interlocutors identify their relative mobility, or more precisely, their lack of a permanent presence and of territorial appropriation.

In a time of increasing pressure on resources, an effective claim for rights over them can only be defended by a relative permanence. A prolonged absence gives other groups the opportunity to settle in the area and claim the resources for themselves. Even very mobile groups of Mbororo generally make an effort to come back to the core area of their home range regularly and at least for a short period, even if the pastures are not very abundant (Schareika, 2007: 207). This becomes even more important today, as the continuity in the use of local resources or infrastructure is recognized as an important argument for legal claims. Hence, also, the importance of the often-repeated claims of having been the first arrived in a certain area and of having been the first to use specific pastures or water points.

The reflections and statements of our informant concerning this point indicate that: "the concerns of assuring claims of priority use rights have played an important role in the contemporary trend towards a closer geographical attachment and a more permanent local presence at least of a part of the group. Clearly, they are not the only factor but pose as

one important aspect" (Schareika, 2007: 207). Hence, local stabilization in the surroundings of pastoral waterpoints should not only be interpreted as a reaction to the loss of livestock but also as a rational and strategic effort to secure control over pastoral resources and priority use rights over land. The phenomenon of the emerging local "camps", although it reflects, on the one hand, a rather reactionary or opportunistic, primarily economically motivated attitude, has, on the other hand, also a more strategic and political side to it.

### **Creation of lamidat**

As we saw in chapter one of this work, the Mbororo in Cameroon are placed under three main lamidats otherwise known as Mbororo paramount leaders. They included the Figuil in the North, the Didango in the West and Sabga in the North-West Region of Cameroon. Immediately after the identification of Sabga as a favorable environment for cattle and human settlement, the first Mbororo created a traditional political center in Sabga. This lamidat represented all the Mbororo people in the region for quite a very long time and served as a medium between the community and the administration. During the colonial period, the Mbororo were less involved in politics as enough land and migratory routes were still available. There were no border limitations and movement from one country to another was not restricted. Though the creation of the lamidat according to some people we interviewed during our study have not played a major role in the political transformation of the Mbororo, it was the beginning of political transformation of the Mbororo community in Cameroon and especially that of the North-West Region.

### **Political and economic marginalization**

Both prior to and post-independence pastoralists have been sidelined in decision-making processes in East Africa. The result is chronic under-investment in pastoralist communities across the region. The cause of this marginalization is in part geographical. Pastoralist communities tend to be remote and highly mobile. Ethnicity is also another factor that has fueled marginalization. Most of the major pastoralist groups move across international boundaries between Nigeria and Cameroon and regional boundaries between the West Region and the Adamawa Region.

### **Pastoralist marginalization**

These cross-border identities render Mbororo pastoralists vulnerable in the political cultures of nation states. Mbororo Pastoralists are sometimes believed by their fellow-nationals to have divided loyalties, and are highly vulnerable when such accusations suit other political interests. However, perhaps the greatest source of pastoralist marginalization is the outdated idea, which dominated much of the development thinking in the latter part of the twentieth century and in many areas continues today; that pastoralism is an outmoded

way of life that needs replacement with 'modern' livelihood systems.

### **Social institutions**

Despite having some strong social institutions, in general the Mbororo pastoralist areas are politically weak and disorganized, due to their social and economic marginalization and governments' rejection or misunderstanding of their traditional systems of authority and leadership. Although pastoral civil-society groups are beginning to establish themselves across the North-West Region, they remain relatively weak. In many cases they are ill equipped to articulate and defend the interests of their members. These groups have difficulty in establishing a united front among themselves or forging strong institutional links with others, and they have limited financial resources and poor management skills according to some informants we came across in Bamenda town. Furthermore, in many instances these groups have been set up by an urban elite that does not necessarily represent the interests of the broader pastoral community.

### **Education**

All too often Mbororo pastoralists are not aware of their rights and have no experience of accountable government. This has meant they have been unable to defend their traditional land rights and request the improved provision of basic services. Education is critical not only for improving the ability of pastoralists and ex-pastoralists to understand and speak out for their rights, but also for creating alternative opportunities for them to go on to further academic and vocational education and to take jobs in other sectors. Girls' education is particularly important to provide increased employment opportunities for women, and a reduction in childhood pregnancies. However, even standard models of service provision fall short of what is required by the sedentary pastoral communities that exist, largely because services are located too far away from these remote communities to be useful. Mobile services and boarding schools are required to serve nomadic pastoralist communities, yet provision of such services is woefully inadequate. Furthermore, there has been a severe lack of either public or private investment in infrastructure and economic development in arid areas, combined with poor access to markets. There are few opportunities for income diversification and this has led to the stagnation of incomes and to unemployment.

The net effect is one of increasing insecurity, in which the more vulnerable people in society - pastoralist women in particular - are the greatest losers. Increasing numbers of men are seeking employment away from home in order to supplement progressively more fragile incomes. As a result, more responsibilities are falling on women, who are often unable to cope with the increased workload. In addition to their many

domestic tasks such as caring for children and fetching water and firewood, women now have to take on responsibility for herding and livestock rearing. In spite of their increased responsibilities, women still have less access than men to resources such as education, credit, and land.

### **Government development policies on pastoralism**

For most of the twentieth century, rangeland management in Cameroon promoted by the Parastatal organ of SODEPA, followed a model imported from the temperate grasslands of North America, where stable weather conditions prevail. This promoted settling communities, with bore-hole (example is the Tadu Dairy Cooperative Society located some 12 kilometers from the Kumbo chief town of Bui division) drilling encouraging communities to cluster around water sources; and the assignment of fixed grazing lands to pastoralist communities, denying pastoralists their traditional land rights. But in Africa's drylands, where the harsh and variable climate causes great variations in pasture availability over time and space, the model caused overgrazing and land degradation. The spatial distribution of livestock must be managed, rather than their number, in order to avoid overgrazing in arid lands, thus highlighting the critical importance of mobility in dryland resource management.

### **Agriculture**

The emergence of crops that can withstand drier conditions has increased competition from arable farming. In some parts of Northwest such as Ndup, Ndu and Ndawara, Rice and tea farming now takes place in former grazing land. Key resource areas, for example dry-season grazing lands, are a target for agricultural use because of their productive potential. Once Mbororo pastoralists lose these key resource areas their whole strategy for dealing with pastoral activities is undermined. At the household level, many pastoralists produce crops such as potatoes and corn on an opportunistic basis. Although this can provide additional income or food, this is often a risky strategy given the susceptibility of crops to rain failure. Small-scale farming can help pastoralists, but large-scale agriculture can be a threat as it can attract farmers into the grazing land due to its high fertility.

### **Conservation**

Although there is evidence that rangeland conservation is entirely compatible with pastoralism, indeed that it is better served by allowing traditional patterns of pastoral movement than by promoting more sedentary lifestyles, the creation of conservation areas has led to pastoralist land loss. In Wum and in Dumbu (*Elba ranch* and the Dumbu Ranche) conservation areas have led to more land being taken from pastoralists than all other factors put together. Many hectares of land in these two localities, which are at the heart of Mbororo settlement, have been set aside for conservation even though all of the protected areas have traditionally

belonged to pastoralist communities. Over the past years, Mbororo pastoralists in the North West have been evicted from their lands in the name of conservation. Large-scale evictions occurred in the North West in the last two decades with many Mbororo losing their lands consequently losing their herds. In Oku there is a similar situation. Part the land in Kilum Mountain Forest has been allocated as hunting grounds or protected areas. Pastoral Mbororo are not secure in the land they inhabit. Securing land rights for pastoral Mbororo in the North West will be essential to their ability to maintain a sustainable livelihood.

### **Population growth**

The livestock population is not growing at the same rate as the human population. According to our informants in the field, *“livestock numbers in the Northwest region have remained fairly constant over recent years because of disease epidemics and livestock starvation associated with the economic value of cattle. The result is more people reliant on fewer livestock. The Mbororo pastoralist of the Northwest region are a case in point. In the absence of census data to compare the human population growth to that of livestock growth, we shall not use statistics but rather qualitative data obtained in the field”*. (Life stories realised on 15.07.2017 in North-West).

Many household heads are selling off female livestock to purchase food, thus depleting their core reproductive herds (female specie). Increasingly, many pastoralists can no longer rely on livestock alone to provide them with a livelihood, yet other income earning opportunities remain limited, as the growing number of destitute ex-pastoralists show. The continuation of successful pastoral livelihoods, and therefore healthy rangelands and ecosystems, will depend on human and livestock numbers being commensurated. This means that some Mbororo pastoralists will have to seek alternative livelihoods as population continues to grow.

### **Conflict**

Resource competition also significantly increases the risk of conflicts between different groups of land users. This risk is greatest during times of stress, for example during the cultivation and harvest periods, when available resources are even more restricted. There are also reports of fighting between communities seeking to access grazing land and water. Community agreements governing access and the sharing of land have been developed to prevent conflicts of this kind through a Project known as the *“In search of Common grounds”* promoted by the Mbororo Social, Cultural and Development Association of the North West Region; but these have not been well disseminated.

### **Conflict-mitigation institutions**

Conflict-mitigation institutions exist at local and national levels, with officers seconded to them from

government, and there are also local peace committees. However, their effectiveness in practical early warning of conflicts and rapid response is hampered by a lack of effective monitoring and animation together with funding and resources from government. Climate change is likely to increase the drivers of conflicts in many livelihood systems in the North West Region, including pastoral production. Governments need to invest in suitable systems and policies now to ensure that they can meet this challenge.

### **Challenges faced by Pastoralist Mbororo in the Process of Sedentarisation**

Pastoralist Mbororo in the North-West Region of Cameroon face a series of challenges that hinder their way of life and stifle their ability to adapt to changes in their environment of sedentarisation. These challenges account for the slow human and development in pastoral societies. They can be grouped into four main categories: climate change, political and economic challenges, development policies, and increasing resource competition.

Communities across the world are starting to learn to live with the reality of climate change, adapting as best they can to its impacts. This is happening even though global average temperatures have not yet exceeded 1°C rise above pre-industrial levels. As temperatures rise further, risks will be magnified. A rise of 2°C above pre-industrial levels is now widely accepted (COP21) as the threshold at which highly dangerous, and possibly dramatic and unpredictable, climate changes become much more likely. Global action is urgently needed to keep global temperature rise as far below 2°C as possible. Rich industrialized countries, which have both historic responsibility and the greatest capacity to act, must take the lead and cut their own emissions first and fastest. The pastoralists who inhabit the drylands of sub-Saharan Africa including Cameroon are among those who are living with the effects of climate change. Pastoralists have been managing climate variability for millennia. However, the unprecedented rate and scale of human-induced climate change is beginning to pose more problems.

During the last World Conferences on climate change (COP21 and COP 22) held in 2015 and 2016 in Paris, France and Marrakech, Morocco respectively made the understanding of climate dynamics clear that in the short term (10–15 years) the climate variability that pastoralists have seen over the last few years will continue. In the North West Region of Cameroon, the main climate-related vulnerabilities over recent decades have been: Pastoralism is well adapted to coping with a single rain failure in a particular area, but when successive rainy seasons fail there is simply insufficient regeneration of grazing land, and pasture shrinks. Pastoralist Mbororo from Kumbo in North-West Region reported to us in the field that the long rains that used to

occur between March - August are now beginning as late as May.

### **Unpredictable and sometimes heavy rainfall events**

These make it difficult to plant and harvest crops (growing numbers of pastoralists plant crops opportunistically on a small scale) and sometimes are partly responsible for causing flash floods. Floods can damage both crops and infrastructure. They, according to our informants also result in a higher incidence of some human and animal diseases.

According to the documents of the COP21 and COP22, *“It is likely that over the next 15 years, agricultural areas in Kenya and Uganda will continue to experience unpredictable rainfall, including both heavy rainfall events and the failure of rains and the loss of crops that comes with this”*. *“In marginal agricultural areas pastoralism may in fact provide food resources and secure a viable livelihood where climate change and other pressures lead to lower reliability of farming”*. Indeed, where climatic conditions become more variable without leading to the destruction of rangelands, pastoral livelihoods have the potential to sustain populations in the face of climate change where other livelihoods might fail.

After the next 15 years the weather patterns will change again. Whereas global climate models have an impressive ability to simulate global climate, they are much less reliable at the scale of region or country. That said, climate models for sub-Saharan Africa show a greater consistency in their projections than is the case for almost anywhere else in the world. This gives a degree of confidence to the predicted trends. Pastoral Mbororo could benefit in some respects from this predicted climate change. A substantial increase in rainfall will bring more dry-season pasture and longer access to wet season pasture. A decrease in the frequency of droughts will mean grazing lands, livestock, and people have more time to recover between droughts and assets can be built up over time. More rainfall also means an increased likelihood of a good small-scale crop harvest.

The strategies used by East African pastoralists to track climate variability in the past are now working less effectively. This is not only due to the onset of climate change and the new weather patterns that come with this, but also to the inability of pastoralists to implement their strategies for dealing with the changes, which is caused by the following challenges.

## **DISCUSSION**

The most recent migration movement of Ardo Gaaji and his sons from Jakiri to Oku Sub Division can serve to illustrate the process of decision-making about migrations. It is also particularly interesting in anthropological terms because it allows for a study of the dynamics of sociopolitical differentiation, of

lineage-fissions and regroupings, in an ongoing process. The establishment of a new home range by a member of the clan opened up new options for the other clan members and thus entailed vivid discussions among the other Mbororo who had stayed behind in Bui Division, about whether to join Ardo Gaaji or not. In May 2011, we visited Banteng and Taakija, the two waterpoints owned by the sons of Buuyo and Ardo Gaaji's younger brother Boyi, respectively, that are situated in relative proximity to each other (about 4 km apart) in the area of Kumbo. Incidentally, two young men, a son and a grandson of Ardo Gaaji, were there at the same time, visiting from Kumbo, and we were witness of a lengthy discussion between Boyi, Baji Buuyo and the two visitors about the potentials of the two sites. Boyi had never been to Oku Sub Division, yet was interested to learn more about its potentials and bombarded the young men with questions.

Information about potential sites for pastoral migration are actively searched for. Information is obtained through planned and improptu trips. The function of the pastoral scout is highly recognized among the Mbororo. During one of our trips to the field, we travelled on a bush taxi from Kumbo to Djottin with a son of Ardō Kadiri, the leader who had come in order to visit the Mbororo community. He sent by his father and his declared that his aim was to get an idea of the pastoral qualities of the area, which Ardō Kadiri had heard about but had never seen. The man was warmly welcomed by the ardo who showed him the surrounding pastures, the conditions for watering the animals and the nearby village market while constantly emphasizing on the great potentials of the area. Baji, who was based in Douala as a migrant worker, was also just visiting, but had first-hand knowledge of both sites and was thus able to provide rich and differentiated information. This discussion drew our attention to the internal controversy about questions of migration and thus inspired us to investigate the decision-making process in more detail. Later, we discussed the matter further on numerous occasions and with different interlocutors and the picture became quite detailed. In this section, we present a summary of the arguments brought forth by different interlocutors for and against a possible migration. They can be roughly categorized as being informed by pastoral, social, political and economic aspects. It has been stated that migrations outside the usual transhumance areas are generally motivated by reasons of serious ecological or political constraints (Stenning 1957; Maliki 1981: 102). An analysis of the discussions within the study group about the potentials of Kumbo, and about the question whether or not to migrate, readily shows that any monocausal explanation for migrations is problematic. Rather, such decisions can be motivated by a mix of different factors: on the one hand, indeed by constraints and considerations of conflict avoidance, on the other hand, by opportunities and by political rationale.

While pastoral considerations remain a central motive, social considerations are equally of importance. In the following section, we will give an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of the two sites that are being discussed as arguments in the process of decision-making about whether or not to migrate. These points are also summarized in table 1 in the end of the section. Among the most important arguments on the basis of which decisions about pastoral movements are made is the quality of pasture. *“One of the main arguments brought forth by the Mbororo of the Bui division against the area of Kumbo in the Oku sub division is that the pastures are insufficient for assuring satisfactory cattle fertility. In Kumbo, the vegetal resources are favourable for the breeding of goats and sheep, yet the cows cannot stay in place but seasonally have to move further north where the pastures are suitable for them”.* (Interview realised with Informant 46 on 25.05. 2021 in the North-West).

Studies of the nutritional value of herbs in different areas of the Sahel have indeed shown that the northern pastures in areas with an average rainfall of less than 300mm are considerably richer in protein than those in the south (Bonfiglioli, 1988: 127f). On the other hand, the pastoral resources of Kumbo are considered to be of equally good quality as those in the Oku Sub Division. The *biggal*-system is designed to compensate for the insufficient pasture conditions for cattle around the waterpoints of Kumbo, but the practice is a compromise insofar as it entails, an absence of the cattle, including most of the lactating cows and thus, of the daily milk supplies, during a significant part of the year, and it thus has an undesirable effect on household nutrition. An argument in favour of Kumbo is that the vegetation of bushes and trees is relatively rich, whereas around Oku, the massive cutting of trees by professional vendors of fire-wood has significantly reduced the ligneous vegetation over the course of the last decades. The Mbororo of Bui Division, conscious of the problem caused by deforestation, foresaw that in a few years, the area will be transformed by desertification. They said that the bush has died (*ladde waati*). Trees and bushes are essential not only as an additional nutritional resource for livestock, but also as protection against sun and wind. Hence, from the pastoralists' point of view, both sites have their strong points and their weak points.

Another important aspect is the respective geographic location of the two sites. While Oku is situated north of the latitude 15°10' N, Kumbo is located below this latitude, which, in Cameroon, officially constitutes the divide between the agro-pastoral and the pastoral zone. Roughly speaking, one can say that in the north of Cameroon pastoralism has priority, whereas in the south the farmers are privileged. The new pastoral legislation in waiting validation by the national assembly confirms the validity of the northern limit and that cultivation above this divide is forbidden.

Land titles attributed in the pastoral zone are declared null and void. Hence, for agricultural activities, this line should theoretically represent a strict northern limit and since the Mbororo's current strategies of local stabilization also take into account the option of farming, one might think that this consideration could matter for the choice of the site. In practice, this principle of the pastoral/agro-pastoral divide has never been applied. Due to demographic pressure in the south, farmers have long advanced into the pastoral zone and in recent decades, the agricultural front has moved considerably to the north. In Sabga as well, not far from the waterpoints of the Mbororo, there are sedentary villages with farming populations, and some of the Mbororo in Sabga have themselves taken up agriculture to a varying degree. Although the latitude 15°10' N represents, at least in theory, a northern limit for agriculture, from the pastoralists' perspective it is clearly not the southern limit of economic activities. This is why a distinction is made not between pastoral and agricultural zone, but rather between pastoral and agro-pastoral. Pastoralism in Cameroon essentially depends on access to the agro-pastoral zone in order to allow for a balanced diet for the animals, and also to avoid seasonal pasture shortages. When harvest has been completed, the agricultural surfaces theoretically return to the status of pastoral land and become an area of open access to pastoralists, a rule which has been reconfirmed only recently by a new pastoral law waiting validation. The crop residues constitute an important nutritional resource for the pastoralists' herds and the liberation of the fields thus causes significant movements of herds from the northern pastoral into the southern agro-pastoral zone. Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Cameroon arise mainly about crop damages and increasingly about the use of resources.

If discussions on farmer-herder conflicts camps around the concept of 'damage', this falsely implies crop damages only. Often, it occurs also that farmers cause damage on pastoralists' animals which they regard as a constant threat for their crops. They might drive them away from their fields with stick beatings that sometimes cause severe injuries. Another type of damages caused by farmers, not on the pastoralists' animals, but on the pastoral resources, is the anarchical cultivation of crops in protected grazing areas or cattle corridors. The increasing trend of cutting and collecting grass in pastoral enclaves for sale to pastoralists at high prices is another problem that generates conflict. The most severe tensions occur when herders are obliged by insufficient pasture conditions, to drive their animals to the lowlands before harvest is completed. Pastoralists regularly complain that the date for granting open access to the fields is fixed very late by biased authorities under the influence of a strong agrarian lobby.

A major problem for pastoralists is the way conflicts of crop damages are handled. State law

provides legal procedures for compensating damages, but in practice, they are often not applied. Instead of measuring the actual damage, generalized fees are often raised by local authorities according to the number of animals that have presumably entered into a field, independent of the damage they have actually caused. The civil jurisdiction is generally in the hands of the local authorities, which in the case of crop damages means that the farmer in whose fields the damage has occurred is normally represented by his own village head, while the mobile pastoralists often do not have their representatives nearby and thus often do not enjoy a fair legal assistance. Some farmers consider the monetary compensation from herders whose animals enter into their fields as an insurance against crop shortfalls in years of insufficient rainfall. Wum farmers in Menchum Sub Division, with whom we discussed in 2021, readily admitted that after locally severe rain shortages they did not even plan to harvest, since the production would be very low. Instead, they were hoping for pastoralists to enter into their fields in order to obtain compensation payments from them. Similar practices are frequently reported. For example, instead of leaving a non-cultivated field as fallow ground with open access for pastoralists, farmers may sow just a feeble seed without the intention of harvesting, yet which allows them to claim the field as cultivated land and tax pastoralists whose herds might cause ‘crop damages’ on such pseudo agricultural surfaces. The stocking of crop residues in the fields is another problem for the pastoralists. If a labour input has been made to bundle the stalks and to collect them in one place, they are considered as private property and hence, farmers can demand compensation for damages even after the fields are officially cleared. With regard to the question of conflicts about crop damages, what difference does the location of a site either in the agro-pastoral or in the pastoral zone make? Theoretically, the legal status of the pastoral zone should exclude the possibility of crop damages. Where agriculture is prohibited, damages in fields should logically not entitle to claims for compensation. However, since the agricultural front has *de facto* long transgressed the legal divide, the same rules are applied in the north as in the south: once transformed by cultivation, the land becomes recognized as farmland and crop damages are handled accordingly.

The new pastoral code pending validation by the national assembly even clearly states that the *status quo* of the already existing agricultural surfaces in the pastoral zone can be maintained, hence, they are *ex post facto* legalized. Against this background, the agro-pastoral zone of Kumbo did not make a great difference, since the more recent developments in the area of Sabga had transformed it *de facto* also into an agro-pastoral area. However, one important difference is that in Kumbo, open pastoral spaces are situated to the north and the density of fields close to the well is lesser. The site of Sabga, on the contrary, is more or

less surrounded by fields, which in practice means that the cattle cannot always stay nearby and which makes the above-described practice of separating herds and households necessary. While, in Sabga, this constraint is not of a particular concern, in Kumbo, crop damages constitute a major source of conflict with the neighboring farming populations. During the agricultural period, the relationship between Nso farmers and Mbororo are thus rather strained. Although the *biggal* system of separation of cattle herds and households is in part designed to avoid crop damages, such damages, nevertheless occur regularly. In the immediate surroundings of the main camps, it is not the cattle, but rather the goats and sheep, which are constantly kept in place and often insufficiently tied at night, who cause damages. On the other hand, the newly emerging quality of closer and more permanent neighborhood relations as a result of the process of local stabilization also facilitate the resolution of conflicts.

Numerous interlocutors have pointed out that “*knowing the field-owners personally and being engaged in day-to-day relations makes negotiations easier than they would be between strangers*”, (Dafinger & Pelican, 2002: 13). However, the southward movements after harvest into the agricultural areas also regularly cause clashes between the herders and farmers, or, increasingly, with armed forces that are mobilized by the district chiefs, officially to protect the harvest activities of the farmers. This is most often done with arbitrary and legally questionable measures, restricting the mobility of the pastoralists even if no damages have occurred. The restriction of pastoral mobility under pretext of preventing damages, when such damages have not yet occurred, is problematic. For local authorities, this practice is a lucrative means of deriving financial advantage from pastoralists’ widespread lack of legal knowledge with strategies of blunt intimidation (Haruna *et al.*, 2010). Some of the herders who are inexperienced young men who generally accompany their families’ herds in small numbers and in isolation from their social groups and the legal support of their leaders, have reported having been exposed to arbitrary arrests by armed forces.

As the utilization of pasture land is conditioned by the access to water, (Moutari, 1999: 429), when surface water gets scarce shortly after the end of the rainy season, the access to waterpoints is a prime criterion for evaluating the potential of a site. Where the pressure of the advancing agricultural front is more and more felt, pastoralists today pursue strategies of making accessible new pastoral areas by creating new water points. The construction or acquisition of pastoral waterpoints has thus become a common trend in the study area since several decades. Although the Mbororo groups in both Sabga and Kumbo are in possession of their own pastoral waterpoints, the regular herd relocations necessitate

frequenting different waterpoints and the pastoralists generally depend on a network of waterpoints that they can rely upon for constantly having decently good access to water. According to customary and religious laws, “*strangers should not be refused access to water, but in times of high frequentation, long waiting times at the water points can occur and strangers are generally the last in the line*”. Ardo Gaaji’s brother Boyi, for instance, who had stayed behind in Bui Division, had manifested an interest to join the other group, provided that he would be able to acquire or build a well, which he considers as very favourable. Boyi’s concern is that he does not want to rely on other well owners for watering his herds. In the pastoral zone of Bui division, conflicts with Nso about access to waterpoints are a recurrent problem.

Nso pastoralists had inhabited the region before the Mbororo migration into the region in several waves during the course of the twentieth century. In contrast to the Mbororo, the Nso had since long followed a more territorial strategy of space appropriation with a more exclusive understanding of use rights over water points and pastures. Since the colonial transition, the struggle over the control of water points and other water points has been a way of acting out power relations. Conflicts over the access to water points and to pasture land are intrinsically linked, because denial of access to water means *de facto* exclusion from the surrounding pastures (Hagberg 1998: 60). Although competition and latent conflict are characteristic of the mutual relations between Nso and Mbororo in Bui Division, they remain, however, ambiguous. In many cases, the daily routine work at a jointly used well leads to close neighborhood ties. The Mbororo community in Sabga is an example of a group of Mbororo that are closely allied with their Bambili brethren.

In contrast to the situation in Bui Division, for the Mbororo in Oku Sub Division conflicts with Oku are not a major concern. This can be explained by the relatively insignificant number of Oku at the southern fringes of the area where the main camps of the Mbororo are situated. In the pastoral area north of the Oku mountains, however, the situation is largely comparable to Bui Division. This explains the anxiety of Boyi to make his decision on migration dependent on the question of having a well of his own. For Ardo Ije and his sons in Kumbo, the question of water does not really pose a particular problem, since their close ally Ardo Ali from the Banteng possesses a well near in the northern pastoral zone, which can be jointly used during the rainy season, when the cattle of both groups move to the northern pastures. On the basis of mutuality, Ardo Ije’s well at Kumbo is jointly used by both groups to supply their households and water their animals when they are in the area of the main camp. Hence, these two groups have resolved the question of access to water across two zones by way of a cooperative arrangement.

The conditions for the access to water are thus rather favourable for the Kumbo group. Ardo Gaaji’s privately owned well, although of relatively small diameter and only with a cement coated brim instead of fully cemented, largely contributes to this state of affairs. The public pastoral well managed by Umaru, depending on the season, is sometimes highly frequented, which can entail extended periods of waiting for the generally thirsty and thus nervous herds. Farming land is attributed by a ‘traditional’ authority and in most cases on the local level by the *village head*. Since the Mbororos do constitute an arm of village administration, they have sought their mediation of district heads for the attribution of land.

This has generally been granted with exchange of money and customary gifts of animals. In the case of Djottin, Musa obtained farmland from the *village chief* in Giptang, smaller portions of which he has later attributed to other members of the local group on the basis of informal grants of use rights (*ardo*). Ardo Gaaji and his sons, although all involved to some extent in agricultural activities, have so far also just borrowed land from Umaru, but never approached the authorities to acquire farmland themselves. In the case of Sabga in Bui Division, Nano Buuyo at first tried to acquire farmland for his community at the nearby village of Big Babanki, but after negative experiences with the village population who wanted to exclude the Mbororo from cultivation, he addressed the Bambili *paramount chief*. In the meantime, Nano has affiliated himself politically to this *chiefdom* and he obtained farmland near the market site from him, which the village population could no longer refuse after the intervention of the Isa Manjo (2014) administrative authority.

Other problems that the Mbororo in the Northwest Region complain about are frequent animal theft and more generally a situation of growing insecurity. The insecurity is felt by increasing numbers of attacks on bush taxis connecting local markets with the major town of the North West Region like Nkambe, Fundong, Kumbo, Oku and Ndop. In several cases vehicles, have been stopped by armed bandits and the passengers robbed of their valuables. As far as animal theft is concerned, Bui Division has a bad reputation. Cattle in particular run the risk of being stolen as they represent a major value. Occasionally, complete herds of sheep and recently even horses disappear. Due to an increasing demand for horses especially in Melong in the Littoral Region (for meat and to a lesser extent for transportation), the prices for horses have considerably increased in recent years and their theft has become lucrative as well, especially since horses are usually not particularly secured at night and are thus relatively easy to steal. This constitutes an additional burden for the Mbororos, for whom horses are indispensable for transportation and herding for long distances during draught. In Oku Sub-division, both these problems, theft and insecurity, play only a minor role. Sheep theft has occasionally occurred in Kumbo, but it cannot be

considered as a major problem as in Boyo Division. On the whole, Oku Sub Division enjoys a good reputation, among Mbororos in the regions, for its peaceful conditions. The consideration of many Mbororo of leaving Jakiri for Oku Sub Division for security reasons would thus correspond to Stenning's (1957) definition of migration as flight, caused by intolerable conditions, yet it is only one consideration among others. Another problem was that of taking snapshots of cattle. Our research needed pictures to demonstrate certain realities. However, the conception that the Mbororos have on taking photos or snapshots of cattle is totally different. To them, taking photos of their cattle is a taboo. Thus, no informant allowed us to take snapshots of their cattle but advised us to wait for cattle market days.

Although they might in most cases not be the primary motivation for migration, social factors can play an important role for facilitating decisions. Ardo Gaaji left his brothers Araba and Boyi, who did not want to migrate, behind in Sabga and joined Umaru, a genealogically rather distant cousin with whom they stayed closely together when he moved to the area of oku in the 1980s. Ardo Gaaji's brothers rather discouraged him from migrating to Kumbo as they did not want him to separate from them, while he urged them to join him. The close association of brothers, usually expressed as coresidence, is a social ideal (Schareika, 2007) and this particular split among brothers is still (at least verbally) regretted by all three of them. Although the decision to move away was certainly difficult, it was facilitated by the fact that the existing kinship bond/alliance between Ardo Gaaji and Umaru had been reinforced by a marriage alliance, since Ardo Gaaji had taken Umaru's sister Jaanajo as his second wife while they were staying together.

These social factors have probably played a certain role in Ardo Gaaji's decision to leave Jakiri and settle in Oku. The fact that in the person of Umaru, a kinsman had established himself as *ardo* and as the local representative of a modern pastoral well, was a good starting point. He also offered Ardo Gaaji land for cultivation and for definite settlement, and he greatly facilitated, with his good relation to the local authorities, for obtention of permission for Ardo Gasji to construct his own pastoral well. The co-residence with the group of Banteng under the leadership of Ardo Ali, an acquaintance from a different yet closely allied clan, was also an important factor according to Ardo Gaaji's son Abdua. These already existing relations with the community awaiting him in Kumbo clearly facilitated Ardo Gaaji's decision to leave his lineage mates behind in the Bui Division. The importance of such pre-established relations for facilitating decisions on migrations have already been pointed out by Stenning (1957: 2). However, it seems that social factors have played a role for Ardo Gaaji's decision to migrate to Oku yet in another sense. In particular, a

lineage-internal conflict between Ardo Gaaji and his sons, on the one hand, and the sons of Buuyo, on the other, seems to have been determinant. This conflict, which dates back to 1985, was caused by a quarrel between a son of Buuyo (A) and a son of Ardo Gaaji (B) about a woman who was successively married by both according to the principles of marriage by elopement (*te'egal*).

A claimed that when B married her, he had not divorced her before, thus accusing B of *te'egal* within their own lineage which is very reputed, because it causes conflicts within the lineage group. B's father, on the other hand, was accused of having knowingly supported this 'illegitimate' marriage by carrying out the rituals necessary for sealing it. B's side claimed that the *te'egal* marriage between A and the girl had previously been dissolved and that she was thus marriageable for B. This incident, has marked the relationship between the children of Buuyo and the group of Ardo Gaaji to the present. As a result, the sons of Buuyo, who used to be administratively attached to Ardo Gaaji as their *ardo*, changed allegiance to follow Usman, who, next to Ardo Gaaji, was the only other *ardo* in Jakiri at the time. Although it is difficult to assess whether this incident was really at the basis of the cleavage or whether it was just a symptom and a segment within a longer chain of disputes and quarrels which have finally led to a deeper split within the group, the conflict is often cited by members of the lineage as one reason why Ardo Gaaji and his sons left Jakiri. The mobility of pastoralists is often regarded by sedentary agrarian populations as a source of conflicts and as a threat, since crop damages regularly occur when herds have to pass close by farms in order to access pastoral resources. Here, a different capacity of mobility becomes apparent: it can also function as a means of avoiding or resolving conflicts. (Gulliver, 1975); Schareika, 2004: 177; Stenning, 1966, p. 388, Wilson-Fall, 2000). This principle plays an important role both in the relations with other groups and on the intra-group level. Overly deterministic approaches that try to explain pastoral mobility only in ecological terms, that is, with environmental necessities have variously been criticized (Burnham, 1979; Gulliver, 1975; Ingold, 1987: 178). Although resources like pastures and water points undeniably play an important role in explaining movements of herds and households, the dynamics explaining the complex patterns of mobility and the social reconfigurations that entail cannot easily be reduced to environmental factors alone. Other important factors which come into play are of social and political nature. As already shown above, this socio-political function of mobility has played an important role in the history of the Mbororo. Migration as flight from bad conditions or repression can be interpreted as a means of avoiding conflict or confrontation. The same holds true for the separation of lineage segments. A similar mechanism of avoiding conflict by changing place in order to change company (Ingold, 1987: 177) can also



be observed in the day-to-day nomadic movements of household units. The subtle polysemy of these gradual movements and the new social configurations they constantly bring about have been described by Edmond Bernus.

In the collective rainy season movements, families can flexibly modify their itineraries. It is only a slight variation, since the general direction is imposed by the resources, by water and pasture, but it allows to move closer to the tent of a befriended family or to avoid a family with whom relations are strained. The liberty of the nomad consists in this option of either approaching or avoiding each other without being rude. It means always leaving a door open and even more so as this door is immaterial. (Bernus, 1995: 95). Even without romanticizing this mechanism as an element of 'nomadic liberty', one can still appreciate its potential for diplomatically expressing the distance or closeness of relationships. Mobility permits "to get away from those with whom one is in dispute, and to join up with potential allies", Ingold, (1987: 177); or, in other words, it offers the continual possibility of association and dissociation with particular people and can be used for personal and social purposes, expressing and effecting preferences. Mobility can thus be regarded as a means of resolving external as well as internal conflicts. While many lineage members interpret the migration of Ardo Gaaji and his sons from the Jakiri to the Oku Sub Division as a reaction to the lineage-internal conflict with the children of Buuyo, Ardo Gaaji himself has never openly given this conflict as a reason for his decision to migrate. Ingold has pointed out "that the more sensitive aspects touching on interpersonal relations or conflicts are not easily voiced when discussing the motives for household relocations. Certainly, this aspect might have played a role in Ardo Gaaji's rationalizations. I argue however that for Ardo Gaaji", Ingold (1987: 178). The interpretive vagueness of his move represents also a strategic element. In fact, the interpretation of Ardo Gaaji's migration as a defensive move in order to avoid conflict is by no means imperative. According to Ardo Gaaji's official discourse, it was a push into the frontier area in order to access new pastures: a pioneering move to open up new resources in a different area that offers more favourable conditions - abundant pastures and a well that is owned by himself, a less conflict-dominated environment, in short, a better place to make a living. In this sense, Ardo Gaaji's migration appears less as a passive attitude of conflict avoidance and more like an example for the use of mobility as a political tool, turning a seemingly defensive situation into a strategic advantage. Ardo Gaaji left the immaterial door behind himself wide open. If others decided to follow and join him as their *ardó*, they would be more than welcome, as he never ceases to underline.

## CONCLUSION

Where the pressure of the advancing agricultural front is more and more felt, pastoralists today pursue strategies of making accessible new pastoral areas by creating new water points. Although agriculture remains only of secondary importance as an economic activity, and the access to farmland is not of particular concern for the decision of migration into an area, the question of access to farmland is nevertheless discussed within the community as one among other aspects that make a site attractive or problematic. Over the past few decades' greater pressure has been put on pastoralist grazing lands and water resources, as populations have increased and grazing land has been taken for cultivation, conservation areas, and state use. Pastoral livestock has been squeezed onto lands that are too small to be sustainable for pastoral production, as pastoralists rely on freedom of movement to be able to manage the rangelands effectively. Governments in the region have historically had economic and political interest in promoting Mbororo pastoralists' interests, as they tend to see the Mbororo pastoralists as a 'minority group'. In the North-West region of Cameroon, the Mbororo pastoralists are relatively few in number and occupy what is considered to be marginal land with little economic potential. In this region, where pastoralists are the majority, political power is concentrated in the hands of an elite who tend to use it to pursue their own short-term political and economic agenda rather than for the common good of the majority, which includes the pastoralists.

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