

Original Research Article

Impact of *Barrahlla* on North West Region of Cameroon, 1975-1993Charles Tardzenyuy Jumbam^{1*}¹Conflict, Identity History and Socio-Cultural Historian, Senior Lecturer (CC), University of Buea, Cameroon

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Abstract: This paper presents some dynamics and impact of the seven-day heritage dance, *Barrahlla* that was introduced into the North West Region of Cameroon by Fulani youths in the late 1970s. *Barrahlla* was a simple animation dance spiced by beating drums, singing, and dancing in a concentric circle as part of a cherished culture. It neither discriminated between the sexes nor imposed initiation rites. It was staged only on eventful days. In some settlements, one could hear the drums of the traditional *barrahlla* dance, singing and dancing echoing periodically and especially during eventful days of the Ramadan and the Tabaski. Fulani youths reformed the norms of the traditional *barrahlla*, introduced new organization and dancing skills, imposed seven days for the dance, and short-listed host towns and localities in the region. The paper argues that although the seven days imposed for the dance were no part of Fulani history, it left a profound impact on the region. The dance was introduced against the background of the demographic explosion that occurred after the Fulani took up settlement in the Bamenda Region (C.1916) and the spirit of competition that characterized them between the 1920s and 1950s [i]. The youthful seven-day public display only ran for one and a half decades -1978 to 1993 and was banned because of some of its intolerable concerns. This paper seeks to showcase some of the impacts of the seven-day public youthful display, and for this to be achieved, we tried to answer the question “What constituted the impact of the seven-day public *barrahlla* dance on the North West region of Cameroon.”? The study blended qualitative and oral sources and proceeded with surveys involving some dancers and eyewitnesses. Our study revealed that the seven-day *barrahlla* dance served as a factor of unity and social cohesion in the entire region not only among the Fulani but also between Fulani and the indigenous populations. It also contributed to economic development and provided a potent platform for resolving social problems and eradicating some ills plaguing the Fulani youths.

Keywords: Traditional *Barrahlla*, public *barrahlla*, Fulani, North West Region.

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INTRODUCTION

Barahlla was a traditional dance brought to the North West region of Cameroon by the Fulani [¹]. With this dance, only two or three specially designed small-

sized armpit drums each with a rope fastened on it and made to cross the shoulder of the drummer were played. The person intoning a song was often placed at the center beside the drummers.

ⁱ They settled in different and diverse areas far off from each others and also avoided indigenous settlements. Each group wanted enough spacious land for pasture and also to avoid friction with others over land space. They lived in isolated settlements and had little or no meeting agenda.

¹ According to CT Jumbam (2012 :1-2), Fulani are generally known as Mbororo (pl. Mbororoen). The word “Mbororo” is a pejorative description of the Fulani. This is because “Mbororo” in *Fulfulde* (Fulani language) meant a group of cattle. The Hausa people called the settled or town Fulani as *Fulbe wuro* and those who moved behind cattle in bush as *Fulbe Lade*. The former

who felt superior thus nicknamed the latter (their cousins) as “Mbororo”. Thus the name “Mbororo” originated from amidst the Fulani themselves. French people refer to them as peuls while the English call them Fulani. In this study we have adopted the name “Fulani” given that it is the name widely used by authors, researchers and administrative correspondances. Fulani are nomadic herdsmen who who migrated from Senegal eastwards to other African countries like Senegambia, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Cameroon just to mention a few. Also see Jumbam (2021: 6-14) for more details on Fulani identity.

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From 1916 when the first Fulani settlement was established in the North West Region of Cameroon to the 1970s, social cohesion and inter-community interactions were at a record low. They created settlements at great distances from each other. This could be explained first, by the need to exploit the readily available expanses of grazing land and second, by the need to stay clear of entanglements with indigenous farming populations [2]. Adebisi E. Kayode (2019) opines that “inter-cultural relationships between the Fulani and other tribes alike have their pros and cons primarily edged on farming.” The author further argues that any encroachment by either of the two often led to crop destruction and ultimately, conflicts between the two. Jumbam, (2023:145) equally submits that the “Fulani settled in bushy and hilly areas, far remote from towns and indigenous local settlements”. This therefore helps to justify why Fulani avoided indigenous settlements and farm areas choosing far-off distant settlements. A. Hampate and J. Daget (1962) state that “One cannot speak of the Fulani without mentioning their in-separable companions, cattle.” Thus it was very difficult for Fulani to intermingle with indigenous people whose source of livelihood was crop farming as their cattle would always invade farms for feed. Fulani in far-off settlements had no common forums to communicate or discuss common problems (personal communication with Ardo Karimo, (22 June 2004)). However, visits at times could be exchanged between settlements by those who easily moved on horseback. In most cases, many trekked for the same purpose. Initially, during festive events like the Ramadan and the Tabaski feasts, each settlement celebrated at its level but with strict respect for Islamic norms and practices. Kith and kin from nearby settlements could however join others in one settlement for a celebration during which they staged their traditional *barrahlla* dance but often few (personal communication with Ardo Garla, (8 February 2010)). During the Ramadan and the Tabaski feasts, they went to prayer grounds in the morning and on return celebrated at home. They displayed on horsebacks in some areas and staged traditional *barrahlla*. In a personal communication with Garla, (8 February 2010), he was categorical that *barrahlla* dance took place only on the day of the Ramadan and or the Tabaski feasts and ended in the evening of the same day of each of the events.

So far, no written literature exists on the *barrahlla* dance talkless of the seven-day youthful public display that lasted just for one and a half decades, 1978-1993. *Barrahlla* is mentioned in passing by some writers just to suit the context of their discussions but there is no

written work with a focus on the dance and it impacts on the North West Region of Cameroon. However, Lucy Davis (1995:217-457) writing on the *pulaaku* ethics (Fulani code of conduct) perceived the seven-day youthful public show as “a new generational form of arrogance and distinct lack of *pulaaku* ethics. The author however does not state the nature or the form of “arrogance” given that it was not her focus. Our focus in this paper is therefore to examine the dynamics and impact of the seven-day heritage dance imposed by Fulani youths in the North West region of Cameroon.

Traditional *Barrahlla*

Fulani came to the North West Region of Cameroon with the *barrahlla* dance. Unlike most indigenous dances of the region characterized by masquerades, initiation rites, and other distinctions, *barrahlla* neither discriminated between the sexes nor imposed initiation rites. It reserved no special lodges for its members. It was a simple animation dance that enabled the public to enjoy beating drums, singing, and dancing in a concentric circle as part of a cherished culture [3]. Other Fulani dances besides *barrahlla* included: *warmardeh*, *Allakita*, and the *nyinderieh*. The *warmardeh* dance was usually staged at home in Fulani settlements (Personal communication with: Adamou Issa, (14 August 2006), Karim A. Sheik, (28 June 2014), and Ousmanou Adama, (28 December 2006)). It was organized during birth celebrations and as a traditional way of welcoming a newborn into a family. It was often accompanied by the drinking of *subband* (mixture of corm flower boiled with cow milk) and *kwasham* (yogurt) (Jumbam, 2005:96)). The *nyinderieh* dance on its part was often danced at night. Adama (personal communication, (28 December 2006)) opined that during this dance, a woman with a thrilling voice was usually placed at the center to intone songs while men and women danced around her joining in the chorus of the songs. This dance was staged at night to crown the daily activities of an event (birth or graduation celebration). During its manifestation, songs of praise were sung in honor of a newborn or to the graduate wishing him/her well (Karim, personal communication, (28 June 2014)). Traditional *Barrahlla* was often staged only in Fulani settlements. It was never taken to the open public except on special cases when invited and was staged only on the day of the event. With this dance, only three specially designed small-sized armpit drums each with a rope fastened on it and made to cross the shoulder of the drummer were played. The person intoning the song was often placed at the center beside the drummers. Men and women danced together following the rhythm provided

² Far more remote areas distant from other Fulani settlements grounds were indispensable in avoiding friction over grazing land with other Fulani rival groups. This facilitated the practice of transhumance (grazing of cattle in the valleys and river banks during the dry season and grazing on hilly areas during the rainy season) by families.

³ Dancing is definitely fun and enjoyable to those performing it anywhere and at any time. (Benefits of dancing .nn.<https://www.prudential.co.th/corp/prudential-th/we-do-pulse/> nd. retrieved on 4 February 2024.

by the beatings of the drums and songs. There was no restriction in the dance mode. A Fulani man or woman could choose to dance with or without a partner and there was no restriction as to the style of dress to wear. The seven-day public *barrahlla* dance that emerged in the late 1970s was seen as a reformed traditional *barrahlla* dance.

Emergence of the Seven-Day Public *Barrahlla*

Traditional or cultural practices of a people of a common origin or ancestor constitute their binding force or identity and of course a propelling factor to their unity, integration, and solidarity anywhere they find themselves. Manfred B *et al.*, (2013: 50) argue that humanity faces the vital task of finding alternatives as soon as possible through common action in a spirit of solidarity. This certainly compounded one of the reasons why living in diversity and in isolated segments, Fulani youths in the North West Region of Cameroon reformed the *barrahlla* dance and took up its drums to enhance their togetherness. According to n.n. <http://www.gowestafrika.org>, (Retrieved on (4 February 2024)), “Dancing is very popular among Fulani children, and their dances are performed for close friends and kin.” With the increasing Fulani population witnessed in the late 1970s and with additional representative polities of their settlements created, a high degree of curiosity on *barrahlla* dance developed among their youths and pressed for the redefinition of the norms and roles of the traditional *barrahlla* dance which they had cherished so much (personal communication with Sali Django, (21 January 2024)). They developed the anxiety to reform the *barrahlla* dance by: changing its mode of organization and purpose, introduced new dance skills, and taking the *barrahlla* drums out of settlements to the open public. Consequently, it was decided that after each Ramadan and Tabaski feasts, *barrahlla* drums should be taken to the open public in the indigenous milieu and staged seven days after the Ramadan and Tabaski feasts. They intended to showcase Fulani culture and also as a way of creating interactions and communing with their kin and kith of other settlements. As a new role, they agreed that in all dance events, two males or females were not to be permitted to dance together. During each event, females were required to first showcase generally their dance skills with each dancing in a high degree of dexterity to provoke admiration and anxiety among male partners. All male dancers stood in one straight line about 15 to 25 meters away from the dance scene waiting to be selected for the dance by only by female partners (personal communication with Bouba Salifou, (2 January

2024), and (Mallam Nuhu, (15 January 2024)). While beginning a dance session, female dancers were each required to dance facing the males, while at the same time looking at each for a particular choice (partner) to go and pick from among them. Women only selected men well dressed up and handsomely looking in sparkling and attractive outfits. The pride of every female was to select and dance with the most attractive male and vice versa. Spectators and onlookers often gathered to applaud couples who showcased appealing dance skills. Any male dancer not chosen was expected to return home and change his attire/s to win the heart of a female admirer dancer who after soliciting him would then usher him into the dance scene. It was always a pride for any man who was scrambled at by females. According to C.T. Jumbam (2005), “Women scrambled over men who had themselves well dressed up and looking smart and rich”. Any man poorly dressed was sidestepped until he returned home and dressed well to reappear looking good and attractive [⁴]. This dance brought together both married and unmarried Fulani men and women from their different settlements in the entire North West Region of Cameroon.

Before each dance event, selected horsemen disseminated messages in all Fulani settlements to confirm or clarify that either a venue shortlisted for the upcoming event is maintained or has been changed. This was often done to avoid confusion that could come from an abrupt change of venue. There was a need for proper sensitization before a dance event. A dance event was never altered but a venue could be changed often for security reasons (personal communication with: Salifou, (2 January 2024), and (Nuhu, (15 January 2024)). Consequently, Fulani seven-day public *barrahlla* dance emerged and gained prominence in the North West Region of Cameroon. This dance however lasted just for about one and a half decade (view shared by several other informants that we discussed with notably: Ali Anugu (25 July 2008, Assanatou Biba (28 January 2024), and Ali Garga (8 February 2010)). Particular towns and localities were shortlisted as host venues for the dance (see Table 1 for some of the shortlisted towns and localities).

Each town/locality shortlisted was to host once a year and again only after other shortlisted venues had been exploited (personal communication with Bamnjoh, (15 January 2024)).

⁴A male dancer not sidestepped in two or three rounds of the dance was required to go home and change his dressing mode by putting on new dresses. If he returned to the dance scene and was still not solicited by a female dancer, he returned home again severally and change until he appeared looking attractive to a female dancer.

Each male was required to wear three pairs of new dresses during each day of the seven days dance. This implies that each of the male dancers attended each dance with twenty-one sets of new dressing of different colours and designs.

Table I: Some Shortlisted Host Towns/Localities for the Seven-day Public *Barrahlla* Dance

Council Area	Town/Locality
Nso	Kumbo (Fon palace)
	Mbiame (Market)
	Jakiri (field)
Ndop	Bamunka
Bafut	Bafut
Bamenda	SabgaLamidate
	Bambili
	Mbengwi
Bali	Bali-kumbat

Source: Constructed by the author from personal communication with: Seidou Bamnjoh, (15 January 2024), Inocer Kewir, (9 December 2023), Sally Django, (21 January 2024) and Rabiadou Hawaou, (25 January 2024).

In preparations for a dance event, those aspiring to attend were each required to raise enough money. Much money was needed to: buy sets of new dresses, perfumes, and shoes, settle hotel bills and house rent in the host town/locality, and reserve enough for feeding during the seven-day event. The dance event entailed a lot of expenditure. Some dancers lavished money on drinks after each dance day while others used the event as an opportunity to showcase wealth. To attend each dance, a youth (male) was expected to buy at least twenty-one sets of new dresses and new pair of shoes. Sets of new dresses were needed because, during each day of the seven-day event, all male dancers were required to go home and change dressing styles three times (in the morning, afternoon, and evening). The intention according to the new roles was to attract female dancers who solicited and danced only with males who were well dressed up, putting on very expensive dresses and shoes (personal communication with Bouba Salifou, (2 January 2024)). A male dancer who wore one dress in the morning and didn't go to change was sidestepped by all women until he appeared in a different new style of dressing. Men also bought expensive perfumes which according to some informants attracted women when used. The pride of dancing with a beautiful woman was also too high among men. Married women who participated were not obliged to dance only with their husbands and vice versa. But in most cases, couples danced together (personal communication with Mallam Nuhu, (15 January 2024)).

The organization of the dance at the Nso palace forecourt took a different twist. The Fon of Nso Ngah Bifon II developed a kind interest in the dance and declared in his own words "...*barrahlla* dance often keep my palace highly decorated, colorful and busy thereby making me a very proud Fon..." (Personal communication with Lawrence Langwa, (7 July 2013.))

In appreciation of the dance, dancers, and all the Fulani of his *fondom*, Ngah Bifon II decided to add the eighth day to all events of the *barrahlla* dance staged at his palace forecourt with effect from 1980. The eighth day was reserved for the appointment of Fulani sub-chiefs (Ajourro) by the Fon himself and as a day for the delivery of his special message to all Fulani communities of his *fondom* (personal communication with Langwa, (7 July 2013.)). Realizing how hospitable and fatherly the Fon was, Fulani reciprocated his gesture by reducing the number of *barrahlla* host venues while increasing the frequency of staging at the Fon's palace. The dance at the Fon's palace forecourt however witnessed its rupture after the 1982 event. On the eighth day, the Fon after appointing Fulani Ajourro and delivering his traditional message slept and died that same night (personal communication with Lawrence Langwa, (7 July 2013.)) Fon Ngah Bifon III who succeeded him did not cherish the dance and eventually banned it from further being staged in his palace. It however continued in other places for about eleven years before being banished. However, they could still be seen very few with *barrahlla* drums at the fon's palace forecourt only when invited to animate in the decoration of political events and also during traditional festive events like the ngonso festival besides others but strictly on invitation (this view was shared by several informants that we discussed with notably: Sheik A. Karim (28 June 2014), SheeyNdze, (26 December 2023), and Yaya Yacubu, (20 April 2023)). By 1992 Fulani leaders: Imams and Ardos of the Bamenda Grassfields Region with the support from MBOSCUA [5] took concerted action and banned the seven-day public *barrahlla* dance out rightly. It was however allowed to operate at the level of settlements with strict respect to the traditional norms and could be allowed in public only on invitation and restricted to a one-day dance. Public *Barrahlla* dance consequently returned to its original mode of staging as it previously obtained before being metamorphosed by youths. Since then Fulani seven-day public *barrahlla* dance ceased to continue in the entire North West region but left a lot of impact on the area.

Impact of the Seven Day-dance

The impacts of the dance were many and for proper analysis and understanding, we categorized them into positive and negative impacts.

Positive Impact

The dance acted as a contributing factor towards Fulani unity and integration in the North West Region of Cameroon. Initially, unity and solidarity did not exist among Fulani in this region partly dictated by how they established their settlements. Each group or family got installed in an area far off from others with very little or no communication. They had no agenda of holding meetings or coming together as the local

⁵ MBOSCUA is an acronym which stand for Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association.

inhabitants or ethnic groups of the region did. However being Muslims, feasts like the Ramadan and Tabaski could in their way bring some of them together but this was done in segments and just once a year. The seven-day *barrahlla* dance, an initiative of the youths brought together Fulani at times from almost all their settlements in this region (personal communication with Django, (21 January 2024)). This togetherness brought by the dance was of great significance as it promoted unity and solidarity among them in the region. According to n.n.<https://www.prudential.co.th/corp/prudential-th/en/we-do-pulse/benefits-of-dancing/>, retrieved on (4 February 2024)) "...dance class is a great way to make new friends and branch out socially...Having positive relationships is a major contributing factor to increase feelings of happiness". Thus the public *barrahlla* dance prompted the discovery and development of good relations between Fulani youths when they met with their kith and kin from far-off settlements and increased their feelings of happiness in the Bamenda Region. Besides coming in to contact and knowing some of their kith and kin from far-off settlements, some Fulani men and women easily found their wives and husbands respectively from the dance event (personal communication with Alhadji Jibo, (9 December 2023)) [6]. There are some examples of the Fulani people marrying based on "love and affection (n.n. <http://www.gowestafrika.org>, (Retrieved on (4 February 2024)). Besides, the dance also helped to promote integration and interactions between Fulani and

the indigenous populations of the region. This in its way helped to tighten the bonds of uniting between the two thereby helping to reduce the tension between farmers and graziers of the area. The tension between graziers and farmers is incessant everywhere in the world (Ahmadou Hampete (n.d.) [7]. This was the view shared by several informants that we discussed with them notably: Karim, (28 July 2009), Dango, (21 January 2024), and Ali Anugu (25 July 2008).

Economic impact

The benefits reaped by local populations of host towns/localities from the dance were enormous. At the end of each dance period, many Fulani men and women went bankrupt. Some could not even afford the transport fares to return home given the long distances from where they came. They as such resorted to auctioning dresses and other belongings to the local inhabitants. Local inhabitants bought: dresses, shoes, beads, glasses, and other items at relatively cheap prices compared with the original prices at which they were bought. A *gandouragafaleji* [8], for example, which was bought at a price range of 80,000 to 100,000 Frs CFA was auctioned sometimes at between 10,000 and 15,000 FrsCFA (personal communication with: George Omiah, (8 January 2024), Bouba Salifou, (2 January 2024) and Mallam Nuhu, (15 January 2024)) (see table 2 for some of the items sold at auction prices to indigenous local inhabitants of host towns /localities).

Table 2: Some of the Items Auctioned in Host Towns/Localities after the Seven days Public *Barrahlla* dance

Item	Original Price (Frs CFA)	Auction Price (FrsCFA)	Discount(Frs CFA)
<i>Quality Gandouragafaleji</i>	90,000	15,000	75,000
Tape Recorder	50,000	10,000	40,000
High-Class shoes	45,000	5,000	40,000
Bicycle	45,000	5,000	40,000
<i>Quality Saroji (simple gown)</i>	25,000	5,000	20,000
Classic shirt	10,000	2,000	8,000
Classic watch	8,000	1,000	7,000
Trouser	6,000	1,000	5,000
Sunshade eyeglasses	3,000	500	1,500
Etc, etc	etc	Etc	etc

Source: Constructed by the author from personal communication with: Omiah, (8 January 2024), Salifou, (2 January 2024), Nuhu, (15 January 2024), Bamnjoh, (15 January 2024), Kewir, (9 December 2023), Sally Django, (21 January 2024) and Hawaou, (25 January 2024)).

Note: From Table 2 it can be noticed that very expensive items were auctioned at give-away prices and at high discount rates. According to our communication with Nuhu, he like other informants held the view that the auction sales were dictated by the fact that most dancers after spending all the money they took along often went bankrupt and as such needed transport fair to return home. It was only through the auctioning of items that many often raised the transport fares to return home.

⁶After dancing with a particular man or woman severally, love developed in some cases and sometimes ended up in marriage between the two. Alhadji Jibo of Kingomen in our personal communication, 9 December 2023 affirmed that his eldest son, Aruna Jibo got his second wife from a *barrahlla* dance in Ndop in the 1980s.

⁷Ahmadou Hampete, (n.d.), *ABBIA*. No.14, "The Fulbe or Fulani of Mali and their culture", Retrieved on 4 February 2024 from "file:///c:/users/charly/download.

⁸ Voluminous gown worn mostly by Muslims

Fulani equally rented houses and hotel rooms in the host towns/localities to the advantage of the local hotel owners. Many hotel owners often charged high bills to Fulani during the dance period. In Kumbo town, for example, Hotels like Maryland, Banice Home Hotel, and Ring Road Travellers Lodge reportedly increased bills to reap many benefits from *Barrahlla* dancers. According to Fabian Bongdze`em in our communication (29 January 2024) like other informants, the need to inflate bills was justifiable given that some of the *Barrahlla* dancers reportedly messed up rooms and the hotel environments during the dance period. In some cases, many of them scrambled to stay together in some rooms each reserved only for one customer. Consequently, they created a lot of nuances and made noise, especially at night disturbing other customers. Each time they came and left the management of these hotels spent huge sums of money to renovate rooms and destroyed items. Consequently, hotel owners were bound to inflate bills making much profit. Sometimes a room that cost 5000 frs CFA per night was charged at 10,000frs making 70, 000 for the seven days of the dance. This implies that the benefit per room stood at 35000 frs CFA just in 7 days (personal communication with Bongdze`em (29 January 2024)). According to some informants we communicated with notably: Salifou, (2 January 2024), Nuhu, (15 January 2024), and Bamnjoh, (15 January 2024), *barrahlla* dancers came with much money and therefore paying any amount as bill/s no matter the charge did not affect them negatively compared to what they had each saved in preparations. Thus indigenous local populations especially of host towns/localities undoubtedly made much benefit within a short period of just seven days from *barrahlla* dancers. According to Hawaou in our communication (25 January 2024), some business people both from within and out of host towns/localities also got themselves enriched by the dance. They followed *barrahlla* dancers into host towns/localities only to buy things auctioned at the end of the dance event. Bought items were taken to markets for resell at high charges.

Impact on Traditional Art and Craftmanship

Traditional Art and craftsmanship of the region also had impacts from the dance. The armpit drums introduced by the Fulani were later used by the indigenous people of the North West Region. Some Fulani craftsmen produced and sold them in local markets. Indigenous, particularly youths and sports fans, bought and played them during inter-village or inter-quarter football competitions. They equally used them as musical instruments during fundraisings and to animate football competitions. During such competitions,

⁹We meet him (Fabian Kwati alias Yoyo) with his friends jubilating after their team defeated the Banten Football Club 4-0. Fabian and his group had Four Fulani armpit drums. They moved into bars and also crowded the frontage of any premises they expected to have support.

indigenous youths positioned themselves around the playground beating the drums in the same way as the Fulani. They sang songs of praise and encouragement to their players. Even after such matches, some youths, especially fans of the victorious teams, moved around the major road junctions and popular spots, dancing and announcing their victory (personal communication with Fabian Kwati alias Yoyo, (16 August 2009)). They also visited the homes of distinguished personalities whom they considered patrons of the victorious team. They did so beating armpit drums and singing praises in their honor while asking for more support (often financial) for the winning team [9]. The impact here lies in the fact that some musical instruments that were exclusively used by the Fulani were later on used by the indigenous youths to animate sporting events like football competitions, fundraisings and to celebrate victories. Yet their dressing and manner of singing distinguished them from the Fulani [10].

Negative Impact

The dance left lots of negative consequences on the host towns/localities as well as on the Fulani themselves. During each dance event, prostitution was rampant. Fulani youths in some cases even clashed with indigenous men over girls. For example, many indigenous free girls who lived in and around host towns prepared to receive the young Fulani men who came for the events. These men were believed to be very rich and paid off any prostitute and any charge without bargaining (personal communication with Hawaou, (25 January 2024) and Nuhu, (15 January 2024)) given that many often came with much money to spend. Thus during the manifestations, these girls abandoned their old boyfriends and ran to Fulani men for money. This situation often led to clashes between their boyfriends and the Fulani. There were equally cases of adultery as some Fulani men used the dance period as an opportunity to have sex with wives of men who had failed to attend (Jumbam, (2005), and also personal communication with Salifou, (2 January 2024), Nuhu, 15 January (2024), Bamnjoh, (15 January 2024)). In a personal communication with Hawaou, (25 January 2024)), she opined that the *barrahlla* dance period was usually the only occasion where Fulani girls/women were let loose by their parents and husbands respectively. Some took the opportunity to mess up around town.

A lot of thievery usually occurred during the *barahlla* dance period. Those who lavishly spent their money and became bankrupt resorted to stealing from others who still had reserves. For example, Daouda Oumarou from Kishong village was arrested and

They equally wanted to express their joy and to send the message of their victory across the town.

¹⁰Fulani were scarcely seen without their caps on. According to the Fulani virtue of the *Pulaaku*(making like a Fulani) it was unislamic to move bareheaded and without dressing in *gandoura*.

detained at the Kumbo police station in the early 1980s for failing to pay his rent to Pa LukongTanyeeh of Tahmbveh quarter in Bui. He was caught attempting to escape. When questioned, he complained that the little money he had was stolen by an unidentified friend given that three of them had hired one room and many girlfriends had come visiting (Jumbam, 2005:91-92). Thus, while some indigenes benefited enormously from the *barahlla* dance, others cried of theft, and some others that some Fulani escaped with their rents and unsettled bills.

The *barahlla* dance also encouraged cattle theft among the Fulani. Preparations for the seven-day dance required a lot of expenditure. Much was spent on clothing, shoes, jewelry, and other ostentatious wears. Money for transportation, house rental, and entertainment during the event was saved ahead of the event from cattle sales, their only source of livelihood. Some of the Fulani youths who could not raise such money stole cows from their family and sold them. This was often done with the complicity of herdsmen (personal communication with Garga, (28 December 2010) and Hawaou, (25 January 2024)). According to Ardo Sali in a personal communication, (7 July 2008) this negative attitude contributed to the decline and even extinction of some Fulani family cattle wealth. As a consequence, some of the youths embraced robbery as a means to survive. Not only did they rob the cattle wealth of other families, but some equally became armed bandits and highway robbers. In February 1983, three notorious Fulani armed bandits, Ahmadoukuude, Musa Gorji, and Mohamadou, were arrested in Ndop. They operated by night and sometimes by day. They raided homes making away with money, clothes, and anything they could sell to make money. They attacked cattle herds regularly and made away with cows which they eventually sold. Money raised from such operations was spent during the *barahlla* dance in host towns, in bars on prostitutes, beer and their indigenous accomplices (NWRAB [¹¹], File No. Og/a.1983:41)). Some registered victims of their operations included Amadou Hobba (lost two cows), Dandi Yerima (lost one cow), Ardo Kudja (lost four cows), and Alhadji Bello (lost one cow and five sheep) (NWRAB., File No. Og/a.(1983:41)). Besides these, several indigenous compounds were raided and money and belongings done away with.

Realizing the many problems that the *barahlla* public dance was causing to the indigenous people and the Fulani communities themselves, the Fulani elders and leaders made several attempts to completely ban the dance in the early 1990s. They perceived the dance as a new generational form of arrogance and a distinct lack of *pulaaku* ethics (Davis, Lucy, (1995:225)). A call was made on the MBOSCUA [¹²] to ban the dance to no

avail. As a reaction to all failed attempts, a provincial meeting grouping all the Fulani of the Bamenda Region was organized in 1993. At this meeting, the Ardo'en, Imams, Fulani elders, and elite pronounced a ban on the public *barahlla* dance. It was a shock to all of them that while the meeting was still going on, Fulani youths staged a *barahlla* dance outside the hall in protest. One of the dancers boldly declared that "Every time the elders succeeded in quelling the *mbororo* drums in one area, we would start them up in another" (Davis, (1995:225)). This shows clearly that the Fulani youths were prepared to resist their leaders, elders, and elite and were determined to continue with the dance. This attitude of the Fulani youths pushed the wife of the Lamido of Sabga to express a great difference that existed between the Fulani of the older days and those of the modern. She stated in her own words that:

In those days when we were your age, we followed the cows all day, and then when we didn't have any duties we spent time relaxing with our sisters. We didn't go to school and we had more time to relax than you seem today. We knew what a good Mbororo was and what our traditions were and what Islam meant to us ...[sic] these days you young people spend all your time running up and down asking people what it means to be an [a] Mbororo because you've forgotten yourselves what it means (Davis, (1995:225)).

The wife of Lamido was asked a question about the difference between the Fulani of times past and those of today. Her answer shows that the Fulani of the times past were better off. She only complicated matters when she said "We didn't go to school". This is contradictory because a Fulani who had gone to school was expected to be more civilized and better off than one who never did so. The Fon of Nso, NgahBifon III, also banned the dance in his palace forecourt. Since then the forecourt which had been popular with the Fulani on several occasions was now deserted by them. With pressure from the MBOSCUA, Fulani leaders, and elders, and with the action by Fon Nah Bifon III of Nso to ban the dance from his palace forecourt, the *barahlla* seven-day public dance ceased to continue in the early 1990s.

CONCLUSION

Barahlla dance was the Fulani traditional dance. It was only staged at settlements and in commemoration of events, be it to animate Muslim feasts like the Ramadan and Taabaski or to crown the day of childbirth celebration event or graduation from Kuranic Schools. Fulani tradition had no history of organizing and staging the dance for seven days talkless of scheduling it in particular towns and localities except on special invitations. The seven days public *barahlla* dance was an innovation and initiative of Fulani youths

¹¹NWRAB. Stand for North West Regional Archives Bamenda.

¹²MBOSCUA. Stand for Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association.

of the Bamenda Region. They reformed the norms and roles of the traditional *barrahlla*, introducing new dance skills, giving a new phase lift to its organization, taking its drums to the open public, and imposing seven days for staging in shortlisted towns and localities. The dance despite associated ills contributed immensely towards: promoting greatly Fulani unity and integration in the region; provided enormous benefits to the local indigenous populations; and brought Fulani closer to the local indigenous populations thereby helping in the long run to reduce farmer-grazier conflicts in the region. The dance lasted just for one and a half decades and ceased to continue because it was banned. As the seven-day dance ceased to continue, *barrahlla* rejuvenated to its strict traditional norms, roles, and mode of staging.

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