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Incidental Socio-Cultural Outcomes of Precolonial and Colonial Long Distance Trade in the Bamenda Grasslands, Cameroon

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Abstract:

Material relics like beads, cowries, iron brass, Dane guns, tie-dyed garments in some households and families in the Bamenda Grasslands today bear proof of a period of specialized professional trade. In the same vein, repeated and consistent narratives of travels and contact experiences by some commercial retirees, especially with centers like Nkongsamba and Douala in former French Cameroun, Takum, Kentu, Calabar and Yola in Nigeria provoke a desire to explore not only the circumstances that contributed to these developments but to appreciate the unintended outcomes that the commercial activity engendered. It is in this connection that this paper devotes attention to examining the socio-cultural bearing of long distance trade¹ in the Bamenda Grasslands, the area conterminous to the North West Region of Cameroon. The paper argues that although long distance trade was centrally masterminded by a siege mentality for profit maximization, it produced inadvertent but strongly imposing social outcomes. The methodology used has been mainly qualitative historical analysis.

Keywords: Incidental, socio-cultural, outcomes, precolonial, colonial, long distance, trade, Bamenda Grasslands

1. Background

The Bamenda Grasslands by the end of the 19th century was a major receptacle to bands of migrant communities who claim different, albeit in some cases, common origins. As a settled community, the people exploited the opportunities predominantly provided by the natural and social environment. The region greatly accommodated diverse agricultural productions and was privy to technological specializations in different craft and artistic products. The commodities produced were either consumed at household levels or exchanged in local or distant markets. Some of the commodities that were traded out of the region included, kola-nuts, ivory, palm oil, kernels and kernel oil, gum, tobacco and honey. These products were often complemented with subsistence commodities like corn, beans and cow peas (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982: 42-53).

Livestock such as pig, sheep, goat, dog and fowl were equally important trade commodities in the region. Besides agricultural production in the region, the people were also engaged in craft works. Craft works such as carved stools, plaited mats, pottery and weaving of baskets reflected the natural endowments and specialized talents of the different parts of the region. Among the works of art produced, smelted iron objects like hoes, hatchets, harpoons, bows and arrows and knives were considered as objects of high value. These objects were sold by traders far beyond the region especially towards the Mamfe-Calabar trade axis. (Warnier, 1975:297). As a complement to goods produced for exchange, slaves were highly valued trade commodities. This was due to the fact that communities were still involved in human trafficking long after treaties were signed between the colonial authorities and the Cameroon coastal chiefs between 1840 and 1862 for the immediate abolition of slave trade (Chilver and Kaberry, 1965: 117-120). Fanson (1989:76) confirms this evidence when he says that even as late as the 1920s and the 1930s the British authorities were still trying to end slave traffic from Cameroon to neighbouring Nigeria but the activity continued even into the World War II period.

Although endowed with varied potentials of specialized agricultural and craft production, the Bamenda Grasslands was not self-sustaining. The absence of a self-sustaining setting forced the people to expand their economic sphere of influence by engaging in trade with distant communities. The desire to embark on trade with distant communities was intimately linked to the skills and capital that some local traders could mobilize from internal and regional trade. In deciding to participate in long-distance trade the people had as special needs the acquisition of scarce articles. These goods included, salt, woven clothes, guns and gun powder, beads, stainless steel objects (such as spoons, knives, plates and pots) and gadgets of different kinds. These goods, most of which were European manufactured, came through the Atlantic coasts of Cameroon and the Niger Delta region in Nigeria (Rowlands, 1979:10). The source of the European manufactured goods was so strong that it determined the direction of trade flow from the Bamenda Grasslands.

The region was connected to long distance trade network by four major outlets. The first outlet that flowed north of the region through the north-western window of the Nkambe Plateau was geared at reaching the colossal markets of Takum, Kentu and Ibi in Northern Nigeria. The second window led to French Cameroun in the east and went through the Chiefdoms of Nso', Bamumkumbit and Bali-Nyonga fandoms. The Nso' passage linked-up the markets of North Cameroons via Banyo. The third corridor was through Widikum to the south west of the region. It canalized the region with the coastal Calabar trade axis that ran through Mamfe. Lastly, the fourth passage was in the south-eastern part of the Bamenda plateau. It opened up through Babadjou and ran across the Bamileke country to Nkongsamba and then to the coast of Douala and Victoria (Nkwi, 1996: 30; Rowlands, 1979:2). The control of goods on these trade axes was in the hands of middlemen from varied backgrounds. These middlemen included Hausa, Bayang, Bamileke, Bali, Nso, Kom and Igbo traders. Long-distance trade as a commercial activity introduced remarkable auspicious social changes in the Bamenda Grasslands.

2. The Social Dimension of Long Distance Trade

Though visibly an economic activity, the trade produced fundamental socio-cultural changes which remained indelible in the Bamenda Grasslands. Conscious of the fact that the social ramifications were numerous, attention will be given to some of the critical social changes that the trade engendered. Emphasis is placed on, but not restricted to, the development of multilingual communities, matrimonial connections, religious espousal and promotion of the gift system.

2.1. Promotion of Polyglotism

An inescapable impact of long distance trade was the production of multilingual persons and communities in the Bamenda Grasslands. This grew out of the need of getting a medium of communication in trade transactions. The ease with which people became acquainted with different languages was due to a conscious and at times opportunistic processes. With regard to the conscious process of linguistic acquisition in the region, the establishment of trading enterprises conducted by household heads involved the maintenance of formal trade friendships for purposes of security, food and shelter, marketing, credit and the supply of trade goods. For trade to be smoothly carried on there was need for a commercial language which Warnier (1979:410) regrets its absence when he says;

There was no lingua franca in the nineteenth century Grasslands. The Bali language (or mungbaka) spread as a lingua franca in the Bamenda area only after the Germans had established Bali as the paramount authority over most of its neighbours, and after the Basel Mission had subsequently selected it as a teaching medium. Pidgin English started being spoken in Bali, when Zintgraff, reached the Grasslands in 1889 with carriers and interpreters from the coast.

In the absence of a trading language, trading households had to rely on their capacity to maintain and increase their linguistic competence. Multilingualism was promoted and considered as an asset of critical importance. It was achieved by inter-linguistic marriages and adoption. Warnier (1979:410) is of the view that a genealogical inquiry in most of the Ngemba-speaking chiefdoms show that at the end of the 19th century, from 20 percent (in Mankon) to 50 percent (in Akum) of the women married in a given village came from another one. This feature was explicitly connected to trade. The most frequent pattern was for a man to give his daughter as a wife to his foreign trade partner or to his partner's son. The woman would join her husband together with a young relative of hers who would help her with household chores and with the rearing and education of the children. The children were brought up to communicate in the language of their parents. A small foreign speaking community constituted by the wife and relatives was thus formed within the household. Establishing a trading household was not a short term undertaking. It was usually handed over from father to son following a principle of succession.

A peculiarity about the development of multilingual culture was its directionality. Most traders tended to concentrate in mastering the languages that they used along their trade trajectories. In most cases it was the language of the middlemen community that became so pronounced. Mungaka (the Bali language) and Hausa (the Hausa language) favourably took hold as a result of this. More still, peoples such as the Ngie who were at the periphery of the main trading routes, spoke almost exclusively Moghamo, the language of their middlemen neighbours as a second language. This was also the case of Aghem which became a popular second language of communication among the Menchum valley communities. It is important to underscore that in states like Bafut, Mankon and Bali that dominated the middleman trade on the Bamenda plateau, the density of interactions with the different trading communities produced a more cosmopolitan form of multilingualism. (Warnier, 1979:415; Gembu 2008).

The basis for the acquisition of a multilingual culture was obvious as shown by Fanso (1982:232-233). Firstly, those who spoke the languages of different communities easily identified themselves as members of those communities. Many informants in Nso and Ndop claimed that their knowledge of Bamum often made it easier for them to pass from one side to the other and not be delayed by the colonial patrol team. British and French preventive officers along the frontiers were less severe with people who spoke the language of the communities on their side of the frontier. In other words, multilingual people used their skills in local languages to enjoy the privileges of local residents of both sides of the frontier and to engage in activities across the frontiers such as smuggling. The local inhabitants protected them as a result of this linguistic bond. Traders equally identified themselves to be citizens of the social communities they traded across.

Multilingual persons were less worried about possessing travel papers when they crossed from one side to the other. Their tongue was their vital travel document. Some notable polyglots that emerged out of long distance trade included; Rev. Philip M. Mamngong of Rom-Nwa whose trade interactions gave him acquaintance with the Yamba, Fumteh, Hausa,

Mambila and pidgin English languages (Mamngong, 2008). Similarly, Alhaji Eliasu from Mbem village in Nwa who traded in kola nuts between the Wimbun plateau, Nso' and Nigeria became fluent in Fulfulde, Limbum, Lamso, Mambila, Hausa, Pidgin English and the Bamoun language (Eliasu, 2008). Menyong Haddison who traded in cattle between Sabongari and Yola communicated fluently in Yamba, Fumteh, Hausa, Fulfulde, Limbum, Lamso, Mambila, Pidgin English and French (Menyong, 2008).

So far Multilingualism has been discussed at the limit of the ability of traders to learn different local languages. Although this proved to be a vital asset for trade beyond linguistic frontiers, it was not as advantageous as the diffusion of Pidgin English. Pidgin English developed as a lingua franca and became the major language of communication between peoples of different linguistic communities all over the region. The language spread from the coast into the interior and the hinterland. It was a useful and easy contact language to learn. The movement of traders helped to spread and popularize the culture of Pidgin in most parts of the Grasslands. The widespread use of Pidgin eased the language problem and reduced communication difficulties. It became the common medium of communication widely used and understood across colonial boundaries (Fanso, 1982:395-396).

There is every indication to think that multilingualism was an indispensable asset in long distance trade. The formation of polyglots although meant to ease trading transactions, went ahead to socially integrate communities that hitherto had little to share in terms of social and cultural similarities. The plural language culture of long distance traders could therefore be seen as vital tool that facilitated commercial transactions. This suggests that the sweeping generalization concerning silent trade in Black Africa is not valid. It contradicts the ease with which African trading communities overcame the apparent cultural and linguistic differences. It is equally important to note that side by side trade or prior to the establishment of significant trading contacts, the communities in the Bamenda Grasslands had intense cross cultural exchanges especially in terms of intermarriages between people from different trading communities.

2.3. Matrimonial Connections

For trade to move on smoothly with a certain degree of security, traders had to be equipped with different strategies that could quickly socially integrate them in their trading communities. Besides the acquisition of multilingual communication skills, traders held that getting women along trade nodes would bring them certain advantages. This of course was well thought-out as women married in trading communities became the commercial connection that guaranteed the success of trade transactions. The notion of trade and inter-marriages appear to have attracted the interest of anthropologists and Sociologists like Nkwi and Warnier ¹. Most of the conclusions made on this issue have been on the royal exchange of wives. While it is conceivable that inter-palace trade brought about intense nuptial alliances, the overwhelming presence of foreign wives in different palaces was not limited to inter-palace exchanges. Chilver (1960) corroborates this position in her findings in the Chieftdom of Bali when she says "concerning the acquisition of foreign women in Bali, the Chiefs of Bali-Nyonga increased their stock of women by capture in raids, kidnapping [...], intimidation to turn off attacks and as part of the surrender terms [...]". Such an emphasis masks the much heralded picture of marriages that were contracted in the palace precinct as a result of long distance trade connections. This is indicative of the fact that besides the visible royal exchange of women, several nuptial contractions were made by traders involved in long distance trade. This was more so because controlling long distance trade was a pathway to social status reconsideration. It was largely a means to acquiring wives and dependents. These wives and dependents stood to serve as symbols of wealth, prestige and power. It was certainly the desire to take advantage of anything in the biosocial realm to which social significance was attached that long distance traders like Alhaji Issa in the Ndop plain, Mallam Gembu in Old Bamenda and Alhadji Umaru Chayoh of Mbem, got women who became their wives.

An important characteristic of the marriages contracted by long distance traders was that they were polygynous as most men opted for more than one wife. ² The rationale behind this social practice was that women brought prestige and increased the household size. Conscious of the fact that long displacement from the family meant sacrificing household chores, (Hopkins, 1973:53) the traders in getting a large family fold were guaranteed the labour force to maintain and expand the domestic economy of farm work, craftsmanship and local trade. In some cases male children were trained to assume future roles in regional and long distance markets. The contraction of multi-nuptial marriages as presented here was not only for diplomatic consolidation nor was it for prestige, it rested on an assemblage of factors, the most important of which was 'wealth in people'. The marriages stood to give the different traders, avenues for economic expansion. (Chayoh, 2009). Intermarriages and the interactive atmosphere that long distance trade exposed stood as basis for the integration of people of different backgrounds.

2.4. Basis of Integration

Long distance trade routes were friendship and socialization links. Through them communities were intimately linked to one another. (Fomin, 2001:147). Through long distance trade, boundaries became more or less mental constructions than

¹ P.N. Nkwi and J.-P. Warnier are emeritus Professors of Anthropology and Sociology who have carried out extensive research on diverse anthropological and sociological issues concerning people and societies in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon.

² There was an exception to this role especially with those who had become assimilated into the Christian religious values. Most of those who were Christian adherents kept the principle of the faith by getting married to a single wife.

lines of demarcation. It was a strong indication to prove that the frontiers of the modern states were imposed and were far from being congruent with the culture and tradition of mobility in Black Africa. The continuous trans-border trade, even in the smuggling unregulated economy between the Bamenda Grasslands and Nigeria can best be seen as a culture historical continuity of an aged practice of distant displacement by traders. Long distance trade enhanced and tied nodes of communities and established a regional system where interdependence and reciprocity could just be considered as a social obligation (Ngege,2008). Through this mode of interaction, other interesting formal elements followed, an important one of which was national integration.

It will be quite exciting to notice that with long distance trade went population re-location. Many Nso' moved to settle in Banyo, while some joined the Wimbun and Mbembe groups to settle in the Taraba and Bayelsa States of Nigeria. Alternatively there were other population relocations where traders began settlements in some transit or exchange localities. This was the case of the Kom in Bikom quarters in Wum and Bum in Mankon Bamenda. The most spectacular settlements were those of the, Hausa, Bamileke and Igbo who established communities in different parts of the Bamenda Grasslands. The presence of these trading communities contributed to cultural exchanges at varied levels, the most important of which was intermarriages (Ngege, 2008). As people conglomerated through trade, they got interested in adhering to some advancing religious views.

2.5. Religious Espousal

Long distance trade was a subtle avenue through which some religious beliefs filtered and won adherents in the Bamenda Grasslands. Christianity and Islam were two of such widely adhered religious values that were espoused through commercial contacts and which became standard religious practices in the region.

There is very little to dispute about the role played by early missionary societies like the London Baptist Missionary Society (L.B.M.S), the Basel Missionary Society (B.M.S) and the Roman Catholic missionaries in planting Christianity in Cameroon. Traders besides being conveyors of goods were purveyors of Christian proselytization. A classic example of a long distance trader who fits this description was a Nso' indigene, Sanguv who travelled from Nso' to Tibati and Banyo and then to Douala shortly after the First World War to sell kola nuts. In Douala, he learned the Christian doctrine and was baptized in 1918. (Fanso,1982: 285-286). Closely linked to Sanguv's experience was that of Mamadou, who brought the Baptist faith to Bum. Mamadou (from Nsongka in Bum) was equally a long distance trader in kola nut who joined the German and later British plantations from where he was baptised and ascetically embraced the Baptist religion that had its base in the coastal confines of Victoria. Through his trade and spiritual contacts, he became the link by which the Baptist faith spread from Bum, across Nso' and the Nkambe Plateau to the rest of the Bamenda Grasslands (Gwe, 2006). Sanguv and Mamadou's baptism and adherence to the Christian faith was just one in a myriad of religious contacts that long distance trade created for the gentle implantation and spread of Christianity in the Bamenda Grasslands.

A cursory look at the contacts across inter-frontier relations between Nigeria and Cameroon, exposed that the movement of religious pilgrims were most often aided by long distance traders. This was more so because traders had good knowledge of routes that connected communities within and across the international borders. It was also because caravan commuting provided security and made travelling over long distances less stressful. Besides, much of the vital information about Christian ideas and centers of practice out of the Grassfields were popularized by traders as a result of their contact experiences.

Complementing Christianity as earlier mentioned, Islam to an appreciable extent got its implantation into the Bamenda Grasslands through trade. It was a historical coincidence that, a significant population of the itinerant Hausa traders and later Fulani cattle herders who penetrated into the Bamenda Grasslands from the Pre-colonial to the Colonial period were practicing Moslems. This was because they held the view as Hopkins (1973:64) notes that;

Successful integration required a formal moral code to sanction and control commercial relationships. The blue-print for the formation of a moral community of businessmen was provided by Islam, which was closely associated with long distance trade in West Africa from the eighth century upwards. Islam helped maintain the identity of members of a network or firm who were scattered over a wide area, and often in foreign countries; it enabled traders to recognize, and hence to deal readily with, each other; and it provided moral and ritual sanctions to enforce a code of conduct which made trust and credit possible.

To this, Austen (1983:2-5) emphasizes and adds that Islam provided the merchants with a politically neutral identity in the eyes of the general population; facilitated trading operations within the merchant community; and offered a vehicle for articulating conceptions of the world which took into account both the needs of the dilemmas of commercial careers. Islam linked merchants with a cult that transcended the local belief systems. Adherence to Islam was a choice made in consideration of some specific advantages. First of all, by adopting an Islamic identity, a merchant could move with greater security than otherwise around the areas where his presence might otherwise be challenged. Secondly, a Moslem would have access to other Moslem traders as reliable performers of commercial contracts or guarantors of their performers by third parties. Finally Islam exposed its adherents to the technology of literacy, which could be of considerable use in carrying on long distance trade (Austen, 1983:2-5). From the basis of this importance, Islam was undoubtedly the religion which people of the Grasslands embraced before the advent of Christianity. The contact with the religion dates back to the links that Hausa traders established with the region in the course of trade by the first half of the 19th century. Unlike the Northern parts of Cameroon,

that significantly embraced Islam as a result of the jihads of Usman Dan Fodio and his flag bearer, Modibo Adama (Njeuma, 1982), the Bamenda Grasslands embraced Islam through the gentle diplomacy of trade. It is important to note that even the Fulani raids of the 1870s for human resources did not have such a great impact on Islamic proselytization like long distance trade.

The contact with the Hausa trade was so strong an influence that could not leave many Grasslanders indifferent in the acquisition of Islamic values. The religion itself had its own side attraction which stood to galvanize adhesion. Some Islamic values like the washing of feet and face before prayers, repetition of the creed and the early morning worship call coupled with the head-nodding prayer approach, the festive Ramadan and Ram rituals where spiritual fasting and abstinence was made, appealed favourably to a good number of persons who surrendered their lives to the Islamic faith. A good example was Alhaji Umaru Chayoh (Chayoh, 2009). It should be underscored that the ease with which the Hausa traders proselytized and got adherents in the Bamenda Grasslands was to an appreciable extent due to the hospitality and more importantly the mental perception of the trading communities in the Bamenda Grasslands. It rests in their belief that becoming a Moslem will give them some techniques in the commercial ingenuity of the Hausa. The Fon of Mankon, Ndefru II, like his counterpart of Nso', Sehm Mbinglo III (Banadzem, 1996:135) must have reasoned in this manner when they allowed the Moslems to erect mosques in Abakwa town (Bamenda) and Kumbo respectively. The influence that long distance trade had on the dissemination of religious views was also evident in promoting exchange of gifts.

2.6. Promotion of the Gift System

Long distance trade more often created opportunities for a flux of gift exchange. Gifts have been described as the origin of exchanges and trade. This according to Sundstrom (1974:1) is a reasonable assumption considering that they were found in all traditional societies and played a major role in the social life of the people. In the Bamenda Grasslands trade in articles like beads, cowries, carved stools and cloth, most often trickled out of the commercial circuit and ended up as gifts (Kopytoff, 1973:372). Thus it was common place to see traders exchanging gifts with their love ones, among themselves and with others who were not directly involved in long distance trade. The gift exchange was premised on the belief that any accepted initial gift created the obligation for a return gift. The return gift usually bore the magnitude of the initial gift. A number of people clung to this system of reciprocal gifts as part of a general process of exchanging goods.

For diplomatic reasons, a great deal of gift exchanges went on between traditional chieftains in the region. For example through the 'market bag' mode of exchange the Fons of Bum from Tam to Yai had the tradition of sending emissaries with kola nuts and ivory to the traditional ruler of Takum. In return, the Takum ruler sent clothes and salt to Bum. Similar modes of exchange went on between the Fons of Nso' and those of the Wimbun chiefdoms of the Nkambe plateau. Besides, this inter-royal exchange of gifts, some traditional rulers of the Bamenda Grasslands exchanged gifts with European trading agents. This was the case of Fon Tam and later Kwanga of Bum who usually dispatched elephant tusks to Hewby, an agent of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) at Ibi. In appreciation of the gesture, Hewby sent back through Tum, the head of the Bum emissary, two Dane guns, two boxes of clothes and gun powder. A similar gift exchange took place in 1898 when the Bum monarch handed an ivory tusk to Lich Moseley, a junior agent of the Royal Niger Company who made a journey to Bum on behalf of the company. On return Moseley left the Fon with a gun and gun powder (Fowler, 1998). Such exchanges had overbearing diplomatic significance. When accepted and reciprocated they stood to cement ties of friendship or solvent conflicts. Examples in this context are numerous as expressed by Nkwi (1986:52) when he says;

[...] exchange of gifts and counter gifts among chiefs had diplomatic implications or connotations. The exchanges might follow the settlement of boundaries and be succeeded by the return of run-away wives and the opening of regular trade. Such alliances existed for example between Bali-Nyonga and Nso', Nso' and Bum, Nso' and Nsungli. The chiefdoms of Mbot, Bamunka and the Bamileke chiefdom of Balim, Nsei and Wum had similar exchanges. The small but strategically placed chiefdom of Bamessing exchanged bags with Nso', Kom, Bafut and Baba (Papiakum) [...]. The Koshin chiefs and the Chiefs of the Menchum valley exchanged [gifts in the form of] palm oil for iron objects with Kom and Bafut.

On the other hand a market bag which was rejected and reciprocated with a red piece of cloth was a signal to an eminent conflict between the two villages. It is therefore important to note that most of the goods that attracted interest in the gift exchange culture were the outlandish products of long distance trade. Goods like Dane guns, ivory, beads, cowries and cloths continued to have an enormous impact on the lives of the people. They were usually associated with prestige and reserved for people who commanded leading roles in their communities (Ndi, 2006). Gifts were equally used to lure traditional chieftains into accommodating and providing an enabling environment for traders to function. This was particularly the case with the Hausa traders when they nursed the desire to settle in the localities of their trade partners. The Hausa most often took beads, cloths, and salt to several village heads. After presenting the gifts to them, the Hausa introduced themselves as friends of traders of the Whiteman and expressed the desire to settle in their villages. This strategy was used by the Hausa who left Mendakwe and moved to Bali, Nso' and subsequently Bamunka-Ndop and Sabongari (Awassum, 1984:37). The gifts seen in this way stood as 'passport' to social acceptance and settlement.

It should be noted that these gifts were not always constant. They changed with time responding to the new manufacturing designs and conspicuous consumption tastes. For example, the tie-dyed (doma) cloth in Bum brought by traders from Wukari in Northern Nigeria was most often present in gift exchange but was losing its favour to gifts in the form

of Velvet embroidery that heightened a decade before independence with the widening of the British cloth trade from the Niger-Benue region of Nigeria.

The discussion on the promotion of gift exchange reveals that the swapping of gifts did not take place haphazardly. It respected the nature of social hierarchies of the society. Traders exchanged gifts horizontally with their peers. On the other hand there were vertical exchanges between powerful and influential chiefdoms like Bali, Bafut, Bum, Kom, Nso and Mankon with their political peripheries or vassal states. Conversely, powerful states like Bafut, Kom, Nso' Bali-Nyonga and Bali-Kumbat established their own level of exchange. They exchanged gifts of different values and significance. Nkwi (1986) discovered that the chief of Bali-Nyonga and Kom used to exchange a variety of gifts like the Bali gown, honey, leopard pelts and elephant tusks. Among these items, elephant tusks and leopard pelts were more significant because they were among the most visible accoutrements of power. Only powers at this political ranking could carry out such a mode of exchange. Long distance trade in great measure contributed to the introduction of a new aesthetic and social divide in the Bamenda Grasslands.

2.7. New Aesthetics and Social Differentiation

A notable transformation that accompanied long distance trade was the intensification of decorative arts and aesthetics. There were just as many objects and designs as to be observed that had inextricable links with long distance trade. Cowries and beads for instance were used to decorate stool and adorn palaces. More still, they became decorative wears as people especially women attached them on different parts of their bodies like the waist, wrist, leg, and hair. Moreover, cowries were used to decorate royal mask in most chiefdoms. Closely associated with the decorative art that gave a new form of exhibitionism was the display of wealth in the form of clothing. Cloth became a strong form of social differentiation. It could quickly show who was in command of the storable wealth of society. In most of the palaces, like in Bum as Mboh (2006) observed, it was very easy to distinguish the princes and princesses from the commoners during public events like the annual dance and funeral ceremonies. These royal off springs were usually spectacularly dressed in the jukun or doma wears. The appearance of these royals gave them care ridden arrogance which Gray and Birmingham (1990: 12), expressed as leading them to lose the care free easy laughter of the commoners.

Coupled with this form of social exhibitionism, was the revolution in the embroidery industry. Travelling brought experiences especially in the domain of cloth patterning and design. A notable example in this direction was the Bamenda gown also known as the Bali, Kom or Ndop gown. These dresses expressed nobility with the decorative elements that represented nobility and royalty. Generally, long distance trade accentuated the social mode of appearance in the Grasslands societies. It exposed different aesthetic tastes as well as the inherent social gulf between persons of privileged ranks like the family head and other members of the family stead. The use of clothes by important personalities exposed the social difference between those who had access to outlandish products of trade or who by tradition had to control the usage of those items. The control and use of cloth intensified the traditional mode of wealth accumulation and prestige. It also built artificial nobility especially among family heads who were involved in the trade. Besides the social mutations that came with the adaptation of a dressing culture was influence that long distance traders had on traditional medicine and the spread of diseases.

2.8. Tradi-Medical Science, Magic and Spread of Diseases

One of the contact experiences that accompanied long distance trade was the knowledge of traditional medicine. In the absence of modern health units, traders were often faced with health problems like dysentery, cholera and diarrhea, ailments associated with insanitary feeding habits and poor quality drinkable water along trade routes. In other cases, traders going through forested and grassy areas were usually attacked by malaria and other infectious diseases arising from poisonous insects. Faced with this situation, traders were like ambulant medical agents who in the course of trade assisted one another and learned diverse methods of handling diseases and illnesses. They were able to treat diseases in the absence of modern medical facilities (Nghamum, 2007).

From trade interactions, traders became very versed with specific herbal medicine. Besides the common knowledge of handling illnesses, traders got in contact with specialized tradi-practitioners reputed for solving complicated health problems. This was particularly the case of Hausa traders who were believed to be endowed and advanced in traditional medical practices and magico-spiritual powers. In addition to their trade activities, they went around with medicines in the form of bark of trees, tree roots and herbs that could be used to treat complicated health problems such as epilepsy, chronic sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea, syphilis and chlamydia. They equally treated such complications as tooth and ear aches. An interesting aspect about these medical aptitudes was that it did not remain with the Hausa trade-medics. Traditional medicine became another area in which traders gained specialised knowledge. After acquiring these medical ideas, a good number of traders became interested in traditional medicine and used their off-trade periods to give medical assistance to those in need. (Neng, 2007).

It is also worth noting that alongside the acquisition of traditional medical techniques, traders equally came in contact with a world of superstition and copied much from the Hausa art of clairvoyance and magic. The Hausas were fond of moving around with amulets which according to them served as protective devices against theft of trade property and as a metaphysical booster for business successes. A good number of traders believed in this amulet and in their eagerness made frantic efforts to learn the mysteries and most especially the science behind it (Awemo, 2009). It will be incomplete to look at traders only as people who contributed to the development of traditional medical science in the Bamenda Grasslands.

Hartwig's 'Disease Factor' replicates itself in this context. Traders were usually vectors of diseases (Hartwig, 1973) particularly those of bronchial nature and Sexually Transmissible Diseases (STDs). The duration of trade trips and the tradition of sojourning to recuperate energy by traders gave them loose time to catch fun. It was in such a context that the traders got in contact with female mates, some of whom exchanged sexual services against amenable compensations. Most often the coital activities were unprotected. This resulted to easy spread of STDs and contaminations of traders who did not only suffer the fate but served as vectors as they moved from one locality to another (Awemo, 2009).

During the British colonial period, it was reported that the spread of small pox had come through the courtesy of traders trading towards Nigeria. Evidence to support this view an Assessment Report on the Nso District in 1933 holds that Nso' traders were responsible for the spread of small pox. The Fon of Nso' supported this view as he said itinerant traders were chiefly responsible for the periodical outbreaks since they carry the infections from the Ibi or Kentu area. The spread of this disease was further made evident in 1917 when, a severe small pox epidemic ravaged the area. It was believed that the disease had been brought by a trader returning from Ibi. As a preventive measure the trader was immediately confined in the local medical health unit in Kumbo for treatment (Hawkes worth, 1923: 42-43).

2.9. Development of Thrift and Loan Associations

Thrift institutions were strong social settings for the investment of wealth. The institutions were locally known in most parts of the Bamenda Grasslands as njangi houses. These were mutual aid associations that made appeal to the sensible and cautious management of money and/or goods ploughed from trade. Njangis were informal joint stocks organised periodically by members to aid partners in their social commitments. These njangis were most often organised by age mates, close friends and members of the same trade or profession who shared a bond trustworthiness. (Fanso, 1989: 65). A compound head could invest such wealth in a number of ways. Besides ploughing back trade surpluses into further trading or household utilities, surplus wealth could be realized in brass rods and invested in subscription societies. These societies were informal associations of age mates and close friends, the members of which invested fixed amounts of brass rods and each took the collection in strict rotation. In this way, wealth could be concentrated and realized for a specific need or venture, the nature of which had to be approved by other members of the society.

Members could also support each other by delaying their turn to collect and thus passing the collection to a needier partner or by giving it to another member to trade with on their behalf. Societies were also ranked according to the size of payment made by senior notables in chiefdoms. Nobles belonging to high rank subscription societies could control substantial amount of wealth stored in this way. They could either invest this wealth in lower ranking societies or give it to ambitious junior members to trade with on their behalf. The richer members were therefore, usually those who belonged to a member of different subscription societies, using their shares to pay bride wealth or to fund a son's trading expedition. Alternatively, it could be used to make arrangements with a network of professional traders to use their wealth to their joint advantage. However, besides these strategies, they could also divert wealth into the wider lineage, clan and chiefdom institutions where titles and privileges were to be gained (Rowlands, 1979:9-10).

3. Conclusion

It has been argued that in most parts of the pre-colonial and colonial periods communities in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon were engaged in trade across appreciable distances. Though visibly an economic activity with mathematical considerations for profit maximization, long distance trade produced fundamental incidental social ramifications which remained indelible in the Bamenda Grasslands. The trade, among other outcomes contributed to the development of multilingual communities. Generally as traders moved across different communities they contracted social ties, which in some cases, materialized into nuptial alliances. Such nuptial ties went on at royal and household levels. Long distance trade also served as a source of social integration among people and communities of different political and economic spheres as well as contributed to the gentle proselytisation of Christianity and Islam in the region. The outlandish nature of most of the trade goods remodeled decorative art and redefined the praxis of social status. It also brought about a system of gift exchange which went on at different levels and the capital demands for and gains of trade contributed in fair measure to boosting the thrift and loan societies.

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