

**SECURITY STRATEGIES AND MARKET-POLICING IN THE BAMENDA GRASSLANDS:
1864-1908 OF LONG DISTANCE TRADE**

BY

NIXON KAHJUM TAKOR, (Ph.D)

Department of History, Higher Teacher Training College, The University of Bamenda

takornixon@yahoo.com

+237 95588356

ABSTRACT

In the Bamenda Grasslands during the Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods, trade, especially long distance exchange, stood as a central activity that wired communities in the region. The anticipated gains and the general lure of the activity attracted several persons from different ethnic groups. The presence of many actors and the mobility it engendered, made conditions expedient for some security strategies and market-policing measures to be taken. This paper adopts a historical approach to track the mode and nature of mutations in security and market-policing measures that were employed to give the long distance trade an enabling operational environment. It argues that, the stakes surrounding long distance trade rendered the activity not only lucrative but risky. In such endangering circumstances, the traders as well as the traditional and colonial authorities had different security mechanisms in managing adversities and regulating the sector.

Key Words: Security, strategies, Market-Policing, Bamenda Grasslands, Long Distance Trade, Pre-colonial, Colonial

Introduction

Long distance trade was a common commercial culture carried on by people in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon.¹ The trade that took place over route networks like bush paths and traditional bridges was most often characterized by long hours of trekking and human portage. The traders usually organized themselves in caravans constituted by agile men who ferried goods from one region to the other. In some areas like Nso', pack animals notably donkeys, horses and oxen were used as transport aids. In the Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods, traders in the region traded as far as the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria as well as the coastal towns of French Cameroon. Long years of such trading activities, coupled with ethnic cordiality became an important impetus that caused some trade communities to widen their

trading frontiers towards the Bamenda Grasslands. This was the case of the Hausa, Igbo and later the Bamileke who in the course of time, took up permanent settlements in some localities in the region like Bamenda, Ndop Plain and Wimbun Plateau. The strategic importance of the area as a commercial crossing point, the general mobility of traders and the transactional affairs involved in the trade made it a bait for security concerns and measures. The paper from this perspective invests attention on the security problems that traders encountered in their trading adventure; explores the strategies that were put in place to mitigate the security constraints, examines the market policing measures that were employed to protect traders and to enforce law and order.

Situating Long Distance Trade in the Bamenda Grasslands

Long distance trade in the Bamenda Grasslands built up from local and most especially regional trade. The basis of the trade has been discussed by Takor.² In the main, the reasons for the trade could be tracked from the determinist, formalist and substantivist standpoints.³ Generally, as far as the region was concerned, trade mostly went along lines of specialization. The gains from local and regional trade were most often re-invested in long distance trade. It is difficult to state with accuracy when a trader was said to be in long distance trade. The distance factor was primordial in determining long distance trade. The commodities that went with long distance trade were varied. They included goods that were mentally construed as ostentatious and those that were by dint of the forces of demand and supply considered utilitarian. The ostentatious trade items that served as exports in this perspective included; kola nuts, slaves, ivory, iron implements, and tobacco. For utilitarian goods, palm products, smoked fish, cow pea and cereals like groundnuts and maize were traded. Irish potatoes also featured prominently (especially during the colonial period) as part of the essential trade products. These trade items went in exchange for imports like salt, clothes, gun and gun powder, beads, cowries, ornaments and gadgets. The importance that trade in such commodities commanded attracts some mention of the context in which it operated. In this paper, attention is given to the concepts of security and markets.⁴

Context of Security and Notion of Market in the Bamenda Grasslands

The concept of security is amorphous. Most often it has been defined by scholars of international relations to mean the affront to the monopoly of violence.⁵ At times, the concept is given the name of "human security." In this case, it expresses the need of individuals for safety in situations of environmental constraints, movements, economic exploitation, protection from arbitrary violence and extortion by thieves, or harassment by unfriendly individual(s). While this concept may be useful in indicating the variety of human needs that should be protected, it does not offer an appealing alternative to traditional

conceptions of security. Rather, it is simply to guard against conceptual elasticity that can reduce the effect of the term as an analytical tool in this paper. In traditional African states, civil protection was vested in the hands of the supreme state authorities locally called *Fons*. They guaranteed the movement of people and goods. In Bum, for instance, the traditional ruler was responsible for the safety and protection of his people. He had a frontier guard of twenty-one men called *isagwe* who were drawn from all the quarters in the chiefdom and chosen for their valour and common sense. Their main mission was to protect the borders⁶ and give some fluidity to commercial fluxes or markets.

Different authors have tried to define the term ‘market’ to suit their conceptual designs. Hill defines it as an ‘authorized concourse’ of buyers and sellers.⁷ Meillassoux adds that it is a delimited area where goods pass from trader to trader thereby preserving the exchange value of the goods or from trader to consumer in whose hands it acquires final use value.⁸ A market in this context will be taken as any place and time where trade transactions were made. It will also be considered as the outlet of a commodity, be it in a public concourse or inter-personal basis. The size of the market will depend on the volume of trade that took place in place and time. In the Bamenda Grasslands we shall give some attention without limiting the scope of markets to commercial centers that owed their importance to the fact that they connected important trade routes that rattled across the region. Markets in the Bamenda Grasslands respected the periodic rhythm espoused by Hill, Hodder, Smith and Warnier,⁹ where days were designated to transactions in function of a program that was intimately linked to the traditional calendar. The essence of course was to give each village in the market periodic ring, the opportunity to inject its locally produced goods into the distributive network.¹⁰ Presented in this way, periodic markets were usually target locations where long distance traders sojourned to break their bulk, garner fresh trade commodities, organize and strategize for further trade trips. The statistics of visiting traders in the periodic Kimbo market in Nso in 1939 on table 1 is a pointer to the attractive force that geographical concourses had on traders, far away from the geographic market ring.

Table I: Visiting Traders in the Kimbo Market 1939

Area	N° of Traders
Ndop plain chiefdoms	200
Nsungli	100
Bamum	60
Hausa	50
Ibo ¹¹	35

Bum	10
Wum	10

Source: National Archives Buea, File no. Ab 13/ 3436 vol. I. Re-assessment Report on Banso District, p.37.

From table 1, it can clearly be seen that, there were just as many (about 465) persons as could be imagined, that left from different localities¹² to get to the periodic markets in the region for one reason or the other. The coming together of these traders momentarily increased demand for security and market regulations. To better appreciate the security stakes that went with long distance trade, there is need to explore the state of insecurity and market constraints in the Bamenda Grasslands.

Nature and Dimension of Insecurity and Market Constraints

The discussion on insecurity here will reflect the context of the definition of ‘human security’. As earlier mentioned, it will have to do with the impediments of safety in geo-environmental circumstances and/or in confrontational situations. Basically, the dimension of insecurity and market constraints will be placed in the perspective of the Bamenda Grasslands during the Pre-colonial period with overflows in the colonial period. In the absence of motorable roads, the only option left to long distance traders was the use of bush paths. The bush tracks meandered through hills and valleys, some of which were intersected by fast flowing streams and/ or run offs. This nature of the terrain made movements difficult especially during the rainy season when the streams out-flowed their banks. It was difficult to go across big rivers like Katsina Ala, Kimbi and Donga. Walking on trunks put across some of the streams was risky. This was dangerous as it often resulted in loss of balance with the consequence of falling and losing trade consignments.¹³ Bush paths were also safe havens for dangerous reptiles like vipers, chameleons and other wild animals like chimpanzees and leopards. Managing such a problem during the day was relatively easy because the traders could take advantage of visibility to tackle any attack from such wild animals. It equally helped them not to step on reptiles or other hibernating animals. Perhaps where the greatest obstacle rested was during night hours, where traders had to pitch somewhere along the trade routes to recuperate energy for subsequent overland trekking laps. During such nights which most often were chilly, the traders camped with fire to keep them warm and at the same time to deter reptiles and other wild animals from approaching them. Coupled with this, they usually formed a ring and kept their trade consignments inside it and at times, they fastened their loads around their waist before going to sleep to guard against thieves, especially from people in communities along the trade itinerary who could

set in stealthily.¹⁴ This suggests that, in the list of hindrances to long distance trade was the risk of falling prey to robbers with the corollary being inter-chiefdom conflicts.

The Bane of Robbery and Inter-chiefdom Violence

It is despicable to glorify the past nature and mode of moral life in pre-colonial Africa as exemplary. This is because there were glint instances where the expectant societal norms were deviated and perverse attitudes exhibited. In this light, robbery remained a nuisance that made most traders insecure during trade missions. Many accounts of traders involved in long distance trade point to unforgettable events of robbery. Traders were usually tracked and trapped along bush paths by robbers, who most often exploited their long hours of exhaustive travels and the weight of load. In some cases the robbers were armed, thus rendering the traders completely helpless. It is difficult to establish with accuracy the number of traders that were robbed during trade trips. But it is evident that many traders were prey to incidents of robbery. The intensity of such a de-motivating act sometimes contributed to inter-fondom skirmishes. Warnier asserts that one of the reasons that led to the Nkwen-Mankon war in the second half of the 19th century, was the repeated robbery of Nkwen traders by Mankon assailants on their way back from Bali.¹⁵

Closely associated with the problem of intermittent robbery was the worry of being trapped by slave hunters. Traders walking along bush paths ran the risk of being caught to be sold as slaves. Most of the slaves from the Bamenda plateau were captured as isolated persons rather than in a large raids on whole chiefdoms.¹⁶ Insecurity was equally expressed in situations where some chiefdoms had strained relations. It was quite risky for traders to move to and across villages with whom they had strained relations. The case of Nso' as illustrated by Wirkom supports this view when she contends that, hostile chiefdoms attacked traders and had their goods seized. Examples of these hostile encounters were the Bamum and Wimbun. Hostilities with these groups stemmed from the Nso'-Bamum war of 1886 and the hegemonic competition to subjugate and incorporate the Wimbun, respectively.¹⁷

While the political arm of the traditional state was wrestling to establish its prominence, the immediate victims of the tension generated were the traders who had to shuffle through those hostile spheres. The solution to such moments of insecurity was not far-fetched. Traders through their personal social connections with brokers and landlords of hostile chiefdoms most often received protection from their trading connections. Nkwi expounds on this when he says;

Traders who were specialized in trading across chiefdoms had to maintain formal friendships with people, usually traders who would give them shelter and security, feed them, store their wares, give them

credits, perhaps sell their goods and store their accounts. Such friends had to be entirely trustworthy and [the mark of this trustworthiness was expressed] by an oath. The procedure for this was varied but most often, they shared a beverage-usually raffia wine, palm wine or corn beer-pure or mixed with their own blood or blood of a fowl.¹⁸

Besides, some who had knitted other social ties like contracting amorous links with maids of the hostile chiefdoms were most often guaranteed some protection. Besides, the traders were armed with catapults, slings, long wooden shafts with sharp edges and spears¹⁹ that they used to ward attacks. In some cases, the interception and harassment of traders went beyond their agencies to manage. There was therefore a need to solicit the intervention of the executive powers of the traditional governing structure to give state protection to the traders. Attacks from unfriendly chiefdoms were checked by military wings. In Nso' it was done by two military wings; *Ba* and *Gham*. These organs were re-organised and drilled to protect the southern and northern parts of the territory and also to accompany traders along alarmingly insecure trade routes. Above all, the traditional governing unit had mechanisms for trade protection.

Royal Protection of Trading Activities

The right to guarantee security of the political as well as the economically-perceived traditional state boundary was vested in the hands of the *Fon*. In this portfolio, the traditional ruler had to know about those who were coming into or traversing his sphere of influence to trade. As an acknowledged right, traders who left one *Fondom* for another, like from Piapakum to Nso', Bum and beyond to Kentu and Takum, presented themselves to the *Fon* (or their representatives) of their commercial destination or transit zones. These traders paid transit tolls to the rulers which varied in nature depending on the relation between their ethnic origin and the type of commodity in which they were trading. In return, the *Fon* guaranteed them protection and gave them royal "passports" to move across their *Fondoms* into neighbouring or distant polities.²⁰ Confirming this view with an illustration, Chilver states that, the *Fon* of Bum's 'passport or transit visa' was respected over a wide area.²¹ This was because the *Fondom* through its public diplomats; HRH. Tam-a-Yeundong (c.1865-1908) and Kwanga I (1908-1954), had established friendly ties with neighbouring and distant polities like Nso', Nsungli, Kom, Fungom, Babungo, Bali and Mankon. This diplomacy of inter-village political ties extended up to Kentu and Takum (kola commercial centres) in Nigeria.²² Nkwi supports this view by presenting the general picture of traditional diplomacy in the Western Grassfields when he says: "Chiefs of the [Bamenda] Grassfields made deliberate efforts to promote friendly contacts. [This was done through] inter-chiefdom marriages, exchange of gifts, the celebration of mortuary rites of fellow chiefs and trade. Such contacts could and did give maximum advantage to them".²³

The establishment of friendly ties between *fondoms* was very vital in the movement of people and goods across ethnic²⁴ boundaries. This was because of the security and protection that individual traders and trade caravans needed, as a prerequisite to go beyond ‘foreign’ political spheres of influence.²⁵ Supporting this idea, Boutellier holds that ‘the existence of trade meant the caravan routes had to be kept safe’ for traders’.²⁶ In return for the protection given, the *Fons* received rare gifts and transit tolls from traders which varied from standards of exchange like cowries, iron brass, hoes, salt, kola nuts to cash-pfennig and shilling in the German and British colonial periods respectively. Generally, the influx of traders from different ethnic origins and different commercial specializations, gave the chiefdoms the opportunity to consume a wide variety of goods such as clothes, guns and household utensils.²⁷ To fully savour the fallouts of trade and ensure security in the activity, the traditional authority took full control of the centres of exchange.²⁸

Market Locations and Policing

Although there was no fixed principle to determine where exchange of trade items in long distance trade took place, most of the volume of trade converged in the traditional village markets. The importance that the traditional state attached to the commercial concourse, could be informed by the role the traditional authorities played in situating markets. The choice of where to locate a market, occupied an important place in the geo-politics of the economy of the Bamenda Grasslands. This ran in tandem with the classic principle that “in areas characterized by centralized chiefdoms, large or small, some degree of royal regulation of trade existed.”²⁹ The location of markets in this light was to a large extent the handiwork of the traditional sovereigns, notably the *Fon* and his entourage, the regulatory wings, especially the *Kwifoyn* (as in Kom) and the *Nwerong* (as in Nso)’. For cogent strategic reasons, the market site was chosen by the royal authority and was usually located not far from the palace of the traditional sovereign.³⁰ The location and opening of new markets was traditionally sanctioned by rituals and the planting of a sacred tree, usually a fig tree. This was done to leave an epitome of royal designation and command. The privilege that the traditional authorities had in choosing and establishing markets gave them the same office to levy taxes and exact tolls.³¹ Examples of the political influence on market location was indicative in most parts of the region. In Nso’, the main market was placed at Kimbo (Kumbo) around the vicinity of the paramount *Fon’s* palace.³² In Mankon, the market was located at the palace neighborhood of Ntarenkon.³³ In Bafut, the market (*muta*) was located about half a mile from the *Fon’s* palace at Bujong.³⁴ Chilver noticed by 1966 that the main market in Bafut was still opened with a recital of the names of the fon’s ancestors by the leading men of Kwifon accompanied by the masker *mugbu* carrying a jingle-spear and emitting the bird-like chirrup associated with kwifon’s punitive night walks. In Bali the

market was controlled by royal councilors called *kom mfon* assisted by picked warriors, *bagwe*, who acted as spies in war and peace.³⁵

In Bum, there was an exception but with compensating effects where the Fonfuka market which later served as the main kola entrepot in the Bamenda Grasslands linking the entire region with the Northern Nigerian markets of Kentu and Takum was some distance away from the Fon's palace at Lakabum. This location did not curtail the fon's overriding influence. Considering the strategic importance that the market occupied in the region as part of the great trans-grasslands trade route, linking Takum in Nigeria, it was closely monitored on the spot by a ring of palace confidants. To the North were Njitoh of Mulung, one of the principal kingmakers and Domi-a-Negin of Kikanko, a royal emissary; to the West were Missom of Kwoti, head of the inner council of the *Kwifon* and privy to the *fon* and Kimbi Yuandong, a prince and one of the eight representatives of an inner traditional council of lords called *Tuut*. To the South was Nji Beya of Mbuk, a palace lord who represented the actions of the *Fon* in that direction.³⁶ The placing of markets at the vicinities of traditional authorities or under the control of their confidants was a common practice in most West African traditional states as opined by Falola in the following words:

...political authorities in all West African states took interest in the orderliness of the market, partly because the dues and tolls paid by the traders went a long way in financing their bureaucracies. Officials with wide powers were usually placed [around] the markets to monitor the activities of both traders and consumers...³⁷

Besides locating markets, the traditional political authority decided when such markets had to take place. This programming was intimately linked to the traditional calendar and was in agreement with neighbouring villages. The role of the traditional authorities to locate and police markets was very central in the general state of security. It went to match actions put by traders in their mobile groups.

Caravan and Security Strategies

Insecurity along trade routes was primarily taken care of by the convoy or caravan system which Hopkins describes as "slow moving markets, selling some of their goods on the route and paying for foodstuffs

and services as they went". Setting up a convoy did not need any formal arrangement since most transactions were done on periodic market days. Traders were very informed about the different periods that people moved and the hours at which they arrived in certain resting locations. It was common place for traders to keep this mental arithmetic and join the trade convoy as early as possible especially before traversing spots that were noted for armed brigands. This strategy worked pretty well to guarantee security for the traders as collective mobilization could be taken to keep the routes safe.³⁸ Although caravans ensured security for traders, the equation between caravan size and danger in the Bamenda Grasslands trade need some appreciations. A large caravan definitely offered more protection to poorly armed merchants when traveling through insecure areas. However, a large but poorly armed caravan could be an excellent prize for bandits. A small but well armed group could serve as a guarantee against attempted pillage.³⁹ Implicit in this judgment is the fact that an adequately armed caravan could guarantee better security than a large un-armed caravan. Besides safeguarding trade consignments from bandits, traders on individual or group bases and the traditional state system had some strategies to protect commercial arrangements out of the geographic market setting.

Policing Trade out of the Geographic-Market Setting

So far the paper has shown how traders were protected in the fixed periodic market settings. Market operations as earlier stated, did not only take place in such situations. There were transactions that went on door to door services and in gentleman-agreement standards that were regulated on basis other than rigid market control. In this case, it was founded more on trust because of the human frailty of dishonesty. Dishonesty although not very common, could not be ruled out from the realm of difficulties that traders in long distance trade faced. More often, it emanated from the credit system trade where traders handed over trade consignments to trade friends to pay at a later date. Warnier suggests that, such a problem arose from the barter exigency of 'coincidence of wants' where traders who could not find trade partners ready to collect what they had to offer and give in exchange what they needed, decided to hand over their goods against a promise for what they needed. Later on, the debtor could endlessly delay payment under all sorts of pretexts.⁴⁰ Different strategies were used to turn around such a problem. In Mankon like in other chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grasslands and distant trading nodes like Kentu and Takum, traders minimized the non-payment of debts by contracting formal friendship. This went through an oath taking bond with a trading partner at the terminal market. Oaths had deeply embedded implications as Warnier describes:

There is no need of any witness. In fact, the sanction of the oath is not directly social, but works indirectly through supernatural punishment: the betrayed party would talk, the talk would reach God's ears, and God would send a misfortune on the culprit, in this oath, he would die of swollen belly. The oath with the blood of a fowl was by far the most frequent, but it could also be done with raffia-wine alone or, in serious cases with the blood of a dog. The belief in super natural sanction through God was shared all over the Bamenda plateau and possibly all over the [Grasslands]. It provided an ideological framework operating as an international code greatly helping commercial transactions.⁴¹

The fact that such contracts were made did not mean there were no instances of problems arising from trade disappointments. There were just as many instances where trading partners' defaulted payment. In Bum, traders defaulting on advances were tried by *kwifon* and fettered in wooden ankle-blocks. In extreme cases and as a last resort, persistent debtors were taken and enslaved by the creditor chieftains.⁴² In some cases when a trader could not recover his merchandise from a foreign debtor, he could take the option of using brute force on the fellow debtor. He did this by arranging with a gang to seize the merchandise of the foreign trader and then specifying to the victim that it was compensation for a particular debt. Such blatant acts of appropriating justice often ended up raising tension between the chiefdoms of the traders.⁴³

The presentation of the pre-colonial period should not be interpreted as a dichotomised break with the tradition of continuity. This is because, the traditional or pre-colonial principles did not disappear with the advent of the colonial period, rather they remained in force, although with some institutional modifications and got the complementarities of the colonial security strategy.

Commercial Security

It will be too quick to conclude that, inter-state commercial relations in the Bamenda Grasslands did not make the establishment of law enforcement institutions an exigency. There were a couple of instances where commercial caravans were intercepted and traders harassed that made the stepping up of security measures an absolute necessity. The complaints repeatedly channeled by Kom, Aghem and Bum against Mmen people who were in the habit of attacking and disrupting small trade caravans and imprisoning traders,⁴⁴ made the establishment of public security measures expedient.

Besides, insecurity discouraged the expansion of public market traditions in some areas. A good example was at Befang between Bafut and the Aghem country, where there were occasional reports of armed

assaults on traders. This had made the local inhabitants and neighboring communities to produce mostly for subsistence or to privately barter their surpluses in confined places like palace precincts, houses and farm buildings. In this way, public markets were unknown to some communities like Weh until 1913, when the Germans forced the opening of one. Muhle reveals that, with the stationing of thirty troops in the post near Befang, it became necessary to convince surrounding groups to sell their surpluses in the Befang market.⁴⁵ The prevalence of this state of security made traders from the neighbouring Aghem and Weh communities to take advantage of the Befang commercial center. Moreover, it gave itinerant traders from Kom, Bafut and most especially the Hausa country in Northern Nigeria the opportunity to extend in appreciable manner their trading mission to the area.

It has earlier been mentioned that for trade to move on smoothly, there were usually strategic measures of offering protection to itinerant traders going through different localities. The role played by the traditional chieftains has been shown in this direction. It is important to note that, among the different obligations that traditional ruling authorities had to play in coordinating commercial fluxes was to put in place a system of public security. It will be erroneous to think that, the idea of creating police and paramilitary units for public security was a colonial creation. Rather, it was part of the indigenous system that was adopted and reformed by the colonial administration. During the colonial period, especially during the German presence, the demand for a law enforcement unit did not become serious until 1889 and 1890, when the first efforts were being made to force a way into the interior.

It was fully realized that, indigenes would fight for the defense of their trade monopolies and that the white traders would be safe in the interior only when roads were constructed and garrisons of soldiers were there to offer protection. This need was particularly articulated by the German Jantzen and Thormahlen firm which wanted to get the markets of the interior. The firm made a request that two or three hundred Hausa troops be acquired and trained to give traders protection.⁴⁶ It was partly on the basis of this need that there was the formation by the colonial administration of a police force, *polizeitruppe* in the colony on November 16, 1891. This force was an organization of *Kru* (black) boys, Hausa, and Dahomeans. One of the architects behind the project was Captain Gravenreuth.⁴⁷ Considering the hueculian task that stood ahead of the police force to maintain order, Public security measures were stepped up on June 9, 1895 when a paramilitary force, the *Schutztruppe* was created in Cameroon.⁴⁸

Closely linked to the establishment of a police and paramilitary units to ensure law and order in the region as well as elsewhere in the colony, was the creation of stations with garrisons of troops at critical points as protection against the almost inevitable attacks on the trade of the white man.⁴⁹ It was against this setting

Rudin observed that, with the passage of time when peace became a certainty in an area, military control gave way to civil rule and police succeeded the soldiers. It can therefore be understood how and why some heads of stations were called upon to exercise both administrative and law enforcement functions. The forces recruited were not only foreigners, that is, mercenaries from Togo and Dahomey but locals. A good case of local recruits were the Bali. The station at Bali by 1891 had 50 recruits. They received military training in exercises, gun shooting; fieldwork and mounting guard according to regulations adapted to local conditions. Describing the reliability of the Bali as a formidable police force, Hutter cited by Nkwi holds that

They were usually soldiers with body and soul [who] demonstrated zeal and ability and were far better in physical agility than the young German peasants. Although learning how to shoot required a lot of patience, the Bali made tremendous progress. Despite the fact that the village was near the station, these young Bali were very obedient [and were] described as hard-working not lazy.⁵⁰

As a mode of ensuring security to traders and the general public, there were devised routines that the forces of law and order had to respect. For instance, in the Baliburg station, the mounting of guard was practiced in such a way that one guard (one black sub-officer, four men) patrolled from 6 p.m in the evening to 7 a.m. in the morning and the patrol made up of two men was carried out on relieve basis.⁵¹

Although not having the zest of the Germans in securing and monopolizing the interior trade, the British colonial administration equally saw the need to put in place a system of law and order that will permit traders like other subjects in the territory to go about undisturbed with their normal activities. To meet this goal, they empowered the chiefs following their Indirect Rule political philosophy to guarantee the maintenance of law and order. Coupled with the assistance that the Native Authorities had to play, the British also put in place a police force for the administration of the territory. A Preventive Force was put in place to control trade and the flow of goods considered dangerous to the indigenes.⁵²

The reasons for the establishment of forces of law and order in the pre-colonial and colonial periods in the Bamenda Grasslands were all important and similar. While the traditional governing system had as central objective to guarantee their commercial monopoly, the colonial administrations for their part were determined to end the commercial hegemony of their perceived hinterland rivals. It was obvious that, such similar intentions were going to bring about a clash of interest as the social relationship between the Europeans and Bamenda *Grasslanders* conspicuously bred fear, suspicion and contempt that finally led to wars of resistance. This result re-interrogates the notion of reconnaissance missions of pacification which

was interpreted verdantly as peace for the Germans but economic infringements, humiliation and domination to the indigenes. In whatever angle of interpretation, a cursory reading of the situation suggest that, the need to protect trade in the Bamenda Grasslands like elsewhere in the territory during the period under study opportunistically advanced the tradition of public security as a governing structure.

Conclusion

The paper set out to examine some of the security problems that traders faced during trade trips. In doing this an analytical praxis was established where security was toned down to examining a cross-section of the unsafe trappings that traders went through in the course of their trading missions. The security constraints as highlighted spanned from geo-environmental difficulties inherent in the Bamenda Grasslands during the Pre-colonial and most parts of the colonial periods to sporadic acts of robbery and inter-chiefdom violence. Long distance trade in the Bamenda Grasslands exhibited instances of security concerns and market policing strategies. The paper has explored the different ways by which the trading atmosphere was made relatively favourable for traders. Generally, it has been expressed that the personal and group agencies of traders mitigated some of the security and market protection exigencies. On the other hand, the traditional governing authorities made security a priority consideration to control markets and trading operations. The Colonial administration did not respond differently, as it equally set out strategic measures to protect trade and give security to traders. The paper generally maintains that the causal relation between security and commercial fluidity was an essential concern in the Pre-colonial and Colonial periods. This rested on the inextricable importance of the activity to the traders as a livelihood opportunity and to the strategic significance that trade commanded to the functioning of the traditional as well as the colonial states.

¹ There is hardly any family in the Bamenda Grasslands that did not have one or more members participating in long distance trade. Although seen in the present context as an enduring activity with risk and insecurity of varying levels, people in the Pre-colonial and colonial periods found pleasure trading across long distances.

² N.K.Takor, "The Bamenda Grasslands in Long Distance Trade c.1850-1961: Evolutionary Dynamics, Socio-economic and Political Transmutations", Ph.D Thesis in History, The University of Yaoundé I, 2011, pp.75-84.

³ The determinists hinge on the ecological basis that made trans-community exchange indispensable. They hold that production ran in consonance to geographic or ecological determinants. This suggests that, ecological constraints brought about specialized production and made inter-geographical exchange possible. This view is closely associated to the formalist basis of trade which holds that, long distance trade was necessitated by the

complementary needs between regions which was not only pinned down by ecological differences. The substantivist for their part suggest that, long distance trade stemmed from the conscious or unconscious perception of competition for social edifying variants like rank, status, control of titles and pleasure. In describing long distance trade as ostentatious or sumptuary, the authors who made such appreciations were trapped by the social motive of the trade.

⁴ Interview with Jato Tosih, aged 83, former long distance trader, Moumou Quarters Ndop, April 24, 2009.

⁵ Stephen E. Sachs, *The Changing Definition of Security*, Oxford, Merton College, 2003.

⁶ P.N.Nkwi and J.-P Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*, Yaounde, Publication of the Department of Sociology, 1982. p.185.

⁷ P.Hill, "Notes on Traditional Market Authority and Periodicity in West Africa", *Journal of African History*, vol.vii, no.2, 1966, p.296.

⁸ C.Meillassoux, (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp.80-81.

⁹ P.Hill, "Notes on Traditional Market Authority and Market periodicity in West Africa", pp.295-311; B.W.Hodder, "Periodic and daily markets in West Africa", in C. Meillassoux, ed. *The Development of Indigenous Trade in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp.347-358; R.H.T.Smith, "West African Market Places Temporal Periodicity and Locational Spacing", in C. Meillassoux, ed. *The Development of Indigenous Trade in West Africa*, pp.319-346; J.-P. Warnier, *Echange, developpement et hierarchies dans le Bamenda pre-colonial(Cameroun)*, Stuggart, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbadn, GMBH, 1985, p.74.

¹⁰ See B.W.Hodder, "Periodic and Daily Markets in West Africa."p.351.

¹¹ The presence of the Igbo in some appreciable numbers is thought provoking. This is because they were hardly part of the long distance itinerant trade. It is most likely they started moving into the region to trade as retailers from July 1939 when the Mamfe-Bamenda road was opened to traffic. The coming to existence of such an artery of communication significantly expanded the trading frontiers of the Igbo to the Bamenda Grasslands. See M.B. Gwanfogbe "An Economic History of the British Cameroons: A study of the economic evolution of British Cameroons", Post Graduate Diploma Dissertation in History, The University of Yaoundé, 1975," p. 125.

¹² The number depended to a large extent on proximity factor and on commercial anticipations. Traders from the Ndop plain were in geographical terms, comparatively closer to Nso' than traders from Wum. The Hausa and Igbo were attracted more by commercial anticipations.

¹³ B.Wamei Nongei, *Oku in Long Distance Trade ca.1830-1961*, Post Graduate Diploma in History, Higher Teacher Training College Bamenda, Bambili, 2011, p.71.

¹⁴ Interview with Mallam Gembu. Also see, C.N.Young, "Kom and Long Distance Trade from the Earliest Settlement to 1961", Masters Dissertation in History, University of Yaoundé I, 2007, p.60; Wirkom, "Nso' in local Trade"p.94.

¹⁵J.-P. Warnier, *Pre-colonial Mankon: The Development of a Cameroon Chiefdom in its Regional Setting*", Ph.D Thesis in Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, 1975, p.306.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.304-305.

¹⁷ C.L. Wirkom, “Nso’ in Local Exchange and Long Distance Trade ca.1820-1961: Evolution and Impact”, Master of Arts Dissertation in History, The University of Yaounde I, 2006, p.94.

¹⁸ Nkwi and Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*, p.53.

¹⁹ V.G.Fanso and B.Chem Langhëë, “Nso Military Organisation and Warfare in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries”, in I.Fowler and D.Zeityn, eds., *African Crossroads: Intersection between History and Anthropology*, London, Bergan Books, 1996, pp.103-107.

²⁰ Interview with Adamu Njibua Tum, aged 73, Trader and son of Tum Njibua, the Lakabum royal retainer, Misaje, 17 December 2006.

²¹ Chilver, “Nineteenth Century Trade in the Bamenda Grassfields, Southern Cameroons”, *Afrika und Uebersëë* Band, vol. xlv. No.4 , 1960, p.254.

²² N.K.Takor, “Changing Tides in inter-Village Diplomacy: The Case of Bum and her Neighbours ca.1870-1954”, DIPES 1 Term Paper in History, ENS-Annex Bambili, 1999, pp.17-19.

²³ P.N. Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy: A study of Inter-chiefdom relations in the western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon*, Yaoundé, Publication of the Department of Sociology, 1986.p.41.

²⁴ ‘Ethnic’ as used here means a group of people who share a distinct language, common cultural patterns, and a sense of identity.

²⁵ Interview with Michael MUYAH Fuh, aged 69, notable of Mambu village-Bafut, Bafut, 15 November, 2006.

²⁶ J.-L. Boutellier, “La cité marchande de Bournia dans l’ensemble économique Ouest-africain”, in C. Meillassoux, (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1971, p.251.

²⁷ Interview with Anna Shika Kwanga, aged 73, princess of Bum, Fonfuka, 18 May, 2006.

²⁸ Markets were strategic assets of the traditional states and their location close to the traditional palaces informed the degree to which the state desired to keep them secured.

²⁹ E.M.Chilver, “Nineteen Century Trade in the Bamenda Grassfields”, p.241.

³⁰ Interview with Lambert Gadinga, aged 71, former Bali-Nyonga long-distance trader. Ntanko’o-Bali, 10 March,2007. Also see the case of the Banen of the former French Cameroon. *Vide* D. Abwa, “La politique et le commerce dans le pays Banen de 1883 à 1914”, DES in History, The University of Yaounde, 1977, p.107.

³¹ Interview with John Kibuh Yangsi, aged 77, Quarter head of Fonfuka, at Tamfor-Fonfuka, 19 May, 2006. The informant in question is the son and heir to one of the most influential tax collectors of Fon Kwanga and later Yai of Bum known as Beben Yangsi who died in 1994.

³² C. I. Wircom, “Nso’ in Local Exchange and Long-distance Trade”, p.36.

³³ Interview with T.F. Ndeh, aged 67, notable of the Mankon Palace, Mankon, 16 November, 2006.

³⁴ R. and P. Ritzenthaler, *Cameroons Village: An Ethnography of Bafut*, Milwaukee, Milwaukee Public Museum, 1962, p.106.

³⁵ Chilver, "Nineteenth Century Trade", p.242.

³⁶ Interview with Adamu Njibua Tum.

³⁷ T.Falola, "Trade and Market in Pre-colonial Economy", in G.O. Ogunremi and E.K.Faluyi, *An Economic of West Africa Since 1750*, Ibadan, Rex Charles Publication, 1996, p.65.

³⁸ Interview with Jato Tosih.

³⁹ R. Roberts, "Long Distance Trade and Production: Sinsani in the Nineteenth Century", in *Journal of African History*, 21, 1980, p.176.

⁴⁰ Warnier, "Pre-colonial Mankon", p.307.

⁴¹ Ibid,"p.308.

⁴² Chilver, "Nineteenth Century Trade", p.242.

⁴³ Warnier, "Pre-colonial Mankon", pp.309-310.

⁴⁴ N.P. Nkwi, *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields, 1891-1913: A German Colonial Account*, Leiden, ASC Research Report no.37, 1989, p.65.

⁴⁵ C.G.Muhle, "The Historical Development of the Chiefdom of We (Southern Fungom), in "The Contribution of Ethnological Research to the History of Cameroon Cultures, vol2, Paris, CNRS, 1973, p.388.

⁴⁶Ibid, p.184.

⁴⁷ Gravenreuth was an officer of the German regiment, who had some experience in East Africa and was at the point of leading an expedition into Southern Cameroons to put down rebellions and to establish German control, with the aid of several hundreds (370) Dahomeans whom he had purchased from a king in Dahomey for 320marks per male slave and 270marks per female slave. See H.R.Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons 1884-1914: A case study of modern Imperialism*, New York, Green Wood press publishers, 1968, p.193; H.G.Mbeng Dang, "La double problematique de la resistance et de la collaboration a la colonization a L'Est-Cameroun: 1899-1960", *Memoire de DEA en Histoire, universite de Yaoundé I*, 2007, p.73.

⁴⁸ It was following a mutiny in 1893 of Dahomean soldiers against the German Administration for training salaried troops when they themselves were not paid. This was following a contract deal negotiated by Gravenreuth where they were not to be paid for a period of five years. See Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons*, p.193.

⁴⁹ The attack of Zintgraff's commercial reconnaissance mission in some localities in the Bamenda Grasslands like Bafut is a strong indication to the fact that, trade was an indispensable artery to the life and functioning of most of the Bamenda Grasslands societies.

⁵⁰ P.N.Nkwi, *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields*, p.36.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The dangerous goods must be understood from the colonial design that all trade items across the French borders were going to affect the market for British products in her colony. More so, there were other products like liquor that when consumed in excess could make the colonial subject indolent or a nuisance to public peace.

References

- Abwa, D., (1977) “La politique et le commerce dans le pays Banen de 1883 à 1914”, DES in History, The Université of Yaounde,.
- Boutellier, J.-L., (1971) “La cité marchande de Bourna dans l’ensemble économique Ouest-africain”, in Meillassoux, C., (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press.
- Chilver, E.M., (1960) “Nineteenth Century Trade in the Bamenda Grassfields, Southern Cameroons”, in *Afrika Und Uebersë Band*, vol.xlv no.4, pp.233-258.
- Falola, T., (1996) “Trade and Market in Pre-colonial Economy”, in G.O. Ogunremi and E.K.Faluyi, *An Economic of West Africa Since 1750*, Ibadan, Rex Charles Publication.
- Gwanfogne, B.M., (1975) “An Economic History of the British Cameroons: A study of the economic evolution of British Cameroons”, Post Graduate Diploma Dissertation in History, The University of Yaoundé.
- Fanso V.G.,and B.Chem Langhëë,, (1996) “Nso Military Organisation and Warfare in the Nineteenth and Twentieth century’s”, in Fowler, I. and .Zeityn, D., eds., *African Crossroads: Intersection between History and Anthropology*, London, Bergan Books, pp.103-107.
- Hill, P., (1966) “Notes on Traditional Market Authority and Periodicity in West Africa”, *Journal of African History*, vol.vii, no.2, pp.295-311.
- Hodder, B.W., (1971) “Periodic and daily markets in West Africa”, in C. Meillassoux, ed. *The Development of Indigenous Trade in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, pp.347-358
- Mbeng, Dang, G., (2007) “La double problematique de la resistance et de la collaboration a la colonisation a L’Est-Cameroun: 1899-1960”, Memoire de DEA en Histoire, Université de Yaoundé I.
- Meillassoux, C. (ed.), (1971) *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press.
- Muhle, C. G., (1973) “The Historical Development of the Chiefdom of We (Southern Fungom), in “The Contribution of Ethnological Research to the History of Cameroon Cultures, vol2, Paris, CNRS.
- Nkwi, P.N. and J.-P Warnier., (1982) *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*, Yaounde, Publication of the Department of Sociology.

Nkwi, P.N., (1986) *Traditional Diplomacy: A study of Inter-chiefdom relations in the western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon*, Yaoundé, Publication of the Department of Sociology.

_____ (1989) *The German Presence in the Western Grass fields, 1891-1913: A German Colonial Account*, Leiden, ASC Research Report no.37.

Roberts, R., "Long Distance Trade and Production: (1980) Sinsani in the Nineteenth Century", in *Journal of African History*, 21, pp.178-183.

Rudin, H.R., (1968) *Germans in the Cameroons 1884-1914: A case study of modern Imperialism*, New York, Green Wood press publishers.

Sachs, Stephen E., (2003) *The Changing Definition of Security*, Oxford, Merton College.

Smith, R.H.T., "West African Market Places Temporal Periodicity and Locational Spacing", in C. Meillassoux, ed. *The Development of Indigenous Trade in West Africa*, pp.319-346.

Takor, K. N., (2011) "The Bamenda Grasslands in Long Distance Trade c.1850-1961: Evolutionary Dynamics, Socio-economic and Political Transmutations", Ph.D Thesis in History, The University of Yaoundé I.

_____ (1999) "Changing Tides in inter-Village Diplomacy: The Case of Bum and her Neighbours ca.1870-1954", DIPES I Term Paper in History, ENS-Annex Bambili.

Wamei Nongei, B., (2011) *Oku in Long Distance Trade ca.1830-1961*, Post Graduate Diploma in History, Higher Teacher Training College Bamenda, Bambili, p.71.

Warnier, J. P. (1975) *Pre-colonial Mankon: The Development of a Cameroon Chiefdom in its Regional Setting*", Ph.D Thesis in Sociology, University of Pennsylvania

_____ (1985) *Echange, développement et hiérarchies dans le Bamenda précolonial (Cameroun)*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbadn, GMBH.

Wirkom, L.C., (2006) "Nso' in Local Exchange and Long Distance Trade ca.1820-1961: Evolution and Impact", Master of Arts Dissertation in History, The University of Yaounde I.

Young, N.C., (2007) "Kom and Long Distance Trade from the Earliest Settlement to 1961", Masters Dissertation in History, University of Yaoundé I.

Oral Sources

Fuh, Michael Muya, (15 November, 2006) aged 69, notable of Mambu village-Bafut, Bafut.

Gadinga, Lambert, (10 March, 2007) aged 71, former Bali-Nyonga long-distance trader. Ntanko'o-Bali.

Gembu, Mallam, (23 December, 2009) aged 85, retired Long Distance Trader, Bamenda.

Kwanga, Shika Anna , (18 May, 2006) aged 73, princess of Bum, Fonfuka.

Ndeh, T.F., (16 November, 2006)aged 67, notable of the Mankon Palace, Mankon.

Tosih, Jato , (April 24, 2009) aged 83, former long distance trader, Moumou Quarters Ndop.

Tum, Njibua Adamu , (17 December 2006) aged 73, Trader and son of Tum Njibua, the Lakabum royal retainer, Misaje.

Yangsi, Kibuh John, (19 May, 2006) aged 77, Quarter head of Fonfuka, at Tamfor-Fonfuka.