The assertion of rights to agro-pastoral land in North Cameroon: a cascade to violence?
Noorduyn, R.E.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
General description

Although the three case studies are to be dealt with separately in different chapters, where a more extended description of both ecological, social, economic and political issues is given for the actors under study, a broader insight into the setting of the three cases is necessary to make it possible to compare local level insecurities with meso and macro level ones. Therefore, in this chapter, I first describe some characteristics of Cameroon as a country.

In the second part of this chapter I elaborate on the Far North Province, where the three case studies are located. I deal consecutively with the natural resources, some human capital indicators, the economic situation, the cultural and socio-political situation and the administrative set-up. Special emphasis is given to the legal trends, especially regarding natural resources and conflict resolution.

4.1 The Country

Situated in the armpit of Africa (Figure 4.1), Cameroon's roughly triangular shape, with a surface of 475,442 km\(^2\), stretches over a distance of more than 1,500 km from the humid tropics in the south to the Sahelian Lake Chad in the north\(^1\). In between, a myriad of different ethnic groups inhabit a diversity of climate zones\(^2\) and landscapes. Rich tropical rainforests extend to the south and east. Together with the oil fields, this is an interesting source to tap for the southern bound State elite\(^3\). In particular, the wealth of timber causes a predatory pre-occupation

---

1. From 2\(^\circ\) to 13\(^\circ\) latitude.
2. All four agro-climatic zones of Western Sub-Saharan Africa, described by Jahnke (1982: 17), can be found in Cameroon, although the real arid zone, with less than 500 mm of rain/yr forms only a small part of the Far North.
3. For a recent report of the effects on the environment and the social conflicts engendered by the exploitation of the forest, see Nguiffo (1998, forthcoming). Furthermore, see e.g. Robin de Bois (1998), Cleuren (2001), World Bank Group (2003a).
with the south to the detriment of the north of the country. This is also due to the export-oriented plantations in the humid south where the very large number of growing days exceeds 270. In the north-west and centre, extended grass-fields have gained in economic importance since they have been opened up for cattle grazing because of the eradication of vector borne diseases, especially Trypanosomiasis (Boutrais 1999).

The total population is around 16 million people, who speak over 200 different languages. In none of the administrative units does one ethnic group have a majority status (Mback 2000:108). Although the country is officially bilingual, French is the lingua franca almost everywhere. Only the two western provinces are officially ‘English-speaking’. Nevertheless, in the Far North it is easier to communicate with ‘Fulfulde’, the language of the Fulbe, nomadic cattle keepers and the dominant group in the past.

Started as a Federal Republic in 1961, a year after the independence from the French administration, the English and French Cameroon States have been united since 1972. Since 1984, it has been referred to as a Constitutional Republic headed by an elected president.

4.1.1 Political History

After the arrival of the Portuguese in 1472 and the subsequent development of the cross-Atlantic slave trade by first the Dutch and then the English and the French, the Germans became interested in ‘the land of the shrimp’ in 1884. They invaded the hinterlands and conquered the different small kingdoms and ‘non-headed’ communities. In the south, after the cessation of military rule, “[a]t the local level power was exercised by German civilian administrators, by military authorities and, to a varying degree, by local chiefs” (Mbuaghaw et al 1987: 64). However, when the Germans arrived in the north at the beginning of the new century, after the defeat of the Fulbe, they chose to impose indirect rule because of the presence of the hierarchical system of Islamic kingdoms. The colonisers divided the territory into administrative units, each under the chieftaincy of an Islamic leader (Sultan or Lamido). With this the independence of certain non-Muslim groups, so hard-won from the aggressive Fulbe, was bluntly suppressed (Iyébi-Mandjek and Seignobos 2000a: 57).

When the French and British took over after World War I on the basis of the declaration of the League of Nations, the French used metropolitan legislation where possible. In addition, they superimposed ‘neo-traditional’ chiefs and rules based on what they considered to be

---

4 In the run-up to the presidential election in 2004 several highly educated Northerners have accused the State President of neglecting the North and of under-representation of northerners in almost all (higher positions of) government, political and State bodies (see Eya 2003).
5 See, for example, the explanation of Van Driel (2001:8) or Jahnke (1982: 17) of the climatic zones of Western Sub-Saharan Africa.
6 This eradication came about through more and more widely accessible pesticides to combat flies (e.g. Tse-Tse) and ticks, and through bush clearances.
7 French is learned at school or on the streets of urban centres. School-attendance is low especially in the north, meaning that lots of (rural) people do not speak French.
8 Fulfulde words used in this book: Lamido (pl Lamibe) = traditional Fulbe chief, now mostly district chief. levam = village chief, djuroro = neighbourhood chief, karal = transplant-sorghum field, muskuari = transplant-sorghum.
9 Camerôes is the Portuguese word for ‘shrimp’, a creature found in abundance in the coastal waters here.
10 The League of Nations, formed after World War I, allocated the eastern part of the German Cameroon as a mandate territory to France and the western part to Britain.
native laws and customs\textsuperscript{11}. Many new chiefs did not have a legitimate position because they lacked blood bonds with the former royal lines or because they were installed in communities where no chieftainship had ever existed (Mback 2000; Geschiere 1982). In the north the French followed the German example of incorporating the Muslim hierarchy and installing Fulbe chiefs to rule over formerly non-Muslim communities. With the official status in the French system accorded to them, several chiefs mis-used their power in the north as well, while the non-Muslim population remained powerless. Because it was difficult to dominate the scattered mountain people, efforts to force the inhabitants to descend to lower areas were undertaken already early in the French colonial period (Boutrais 1973; Van Andel 1998: 8).

As in other parts of the World, political parties emerged and started to demand independence directly after WW II. In the French part, in spite of a gradual increase of democratic liberties\textsuperscript{12}, a revolt in 1955 was put down with much bloodshed (Crawfurd 2003). Although it was followed in 1956 by general French legislation to increase self-government of overseas territory (Mbuagbwa et al 1987: 103), violence by the rebellious party continued until 1958, when the future President Ahmadou Ahidjo formed his ‘Party l’Union Camerounaise’ and became the prime minister of the Assemblée Legislative (CAML A)\textsuperscript{13}.

In January 1960, the northern Ahidjo was inaugurated as first president of the independent Republic of Cameroon. A year later he succeeded in bringing the southern part of British Cameroon within one system\textsuperscript{14}. In general, the power of ‘big men’ developed quickly in the Federation\textsuperscript{15}. Although some suggestions from the Anglophone west were honoured, in general it was French Cameroon and its president Ahidjo who managed to “establish a preponderance of federal over state institutions” (Mbuagbaw et al 1987: 125), with emphasis on the inherited, centrally directed, French administrative and juridical system. In 1966, he introduced the one-party system. Manipulating personal power positions of ‘co-leaders’ within the party and within government, as well as the outcome of a referendum on the abolition of the Federation\textsuperscript{16}, he arrived at his final goal of a united Cameroon in 1972\textsuperscript{17}. In 1982 he resigned from power in favour of the then prime minister Paul Biya.

Very soon Ahidjo seemed to regret his decreased power and, with the help of his northern, Muslim supporters, even tried to make Biya step down again. The southerner Biya started to exercise his power by dismissing several government ministers, and even accused Ahidjo of planning a coup d’etat in the middle of 1983\textsuperscript{18}. In the presidential election of 1984, the sitting

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, Geschiere (1993).
\textsuperscript{12} In 1952, for instance, general male suffrage was introduced. See also note 13.
\textsuperscript{13} CAMLA is the third of three assemblies set up by the French from 1946 onwards in a continuing process of democratisation. This last one is the result of universal suffrage in 1958. Its aim was to achieve independence.
\textsuperscript{14} In a UN aided referendum the British Cameroons had the choice between joining Nigeria or Cameroon. The Southern part chose for Cameroon.
\textsuperscript{15} See Bayart (1993) about “the politics of the belly”.
\textsuperscript{16} He claimed that 99.9\% of the votes said ‘yes’ to a six-line question statement, with a turnout at the election of more than 98\% in a country where the majority of the population is illiterate and lives far away from even small administrative centres. Especially in the Muslim North one can doubt whether women attended or gave an independent reaction.
\textsuperscript{17} See, e.g., Chem-Langhé (1995).
\textsuperscript{18} Ahidjo indeed had called all northern politicians, both incumbent and otherwise, to his residence in an attempt to make a political statement. His supporters, however, argued that he should take precedence over the President. Finally this pressure made it necessary for him to retreat into exile where he tried to win the support of the French government. Cameroon sentenced him to death, but Biya later granted him amnesty.
president again managed to be re-elected with more than 99% (sic) of the votes. However, the struggle for power was not yet over. When Biya tried to fire northern soldiers from the Presidential Guard, some of them rebelled and attempted to seize the presidential headquarters in Yaoundé. Thanks to loyalist troops, and to an Ahidjo-based anti-coup organisation of the military ranks that set the two main ethnic groups within the rebellious ranks (Fulbe and Tupuri") in opposition to each other, the coup was thwarted (Le Vine 1986). But casualties were high and distrust spread. Up to today this is setting northerners and southerners more against each other than was already the case. As expected, Biya again took the opportunity to reshuffle his government to the detriment of what he thought were Ahidjo adherents and to replenish the ranks of the Guard with his own tribesmen (Beti). However, it did not help to re-establish trust between the two regions of the country.

It has to be stressed, though, that Biya had no intention of increasing regional, tribal or religious differences. He hammered home his message of “one Cameroon” and stressed that the rebels were “not from any particular province or religion” (Mbuagbaw et al 1987: 141). From the start, the Biya administration searched for alliances with the old traditional elite to safeguard stability, as did his predecessor and the German and French colonial powers in the north before that. However, the events made him look for new partners within the ranks of new educated elites. As a result, in the course of his presidency the government tried to diminish the power of traditional (Fulbe) leaders from the north (Schilder 1994: 223-8). However, Biya still tried to balance the influence of the different regions and to maintain national cohesion. He tried to achieve both goals at the same time “by appointment in the administration of members of Kirdi-groups" [from the north], and giving high positions in the North to civil servants from the South.”(Van Est 1999: 8). Another method to make it possible to represent all ethnic groups was a high number of government places22 and a high turn over of ministers (Bratton and Van der Walle 1998: 75).

Soon after Biya changed the name of the party to “Rassemblement Démocratique des Peuples Camerounais (RDPC) to show his distancing from the ‘ancient régime’. Pro-democracy movements and protests started. Because political upheaval was developing all over Africa during those years (end of the 1980s-beginning of the 1990s), one is tempted to blame the economic crisis and the international situation on the end of the Cold War. However, comparative analysis of Bratton and Van der Walle (1998: 131 - 146) shows that, although the economic crisis that struck Africa from the mid 1980’s onwards certainly did play a role in the development of political protests, it “cannot explain the extent, timing and outcome” of these protests (id: 132). Moreover, Cameroon managed to maintain a positive economic growth during this period (3.2%). In addition, “international [...] factors played supportive but essentially secondary roles.” (id: 139). It was the growing frustration about regular participation possibilities (namely, 14 elections in 30 years) without any real choice, the subsequent denial of former political rights,
together with political diffusion from other countries that led to protests. Like other Africans, Cameroonian voters exercised the “familiar urge to participate [...] this time through non-electoral outlets such as strikes, riots, and demonstrations” (id: 143). Seeing the government turning from left to right and back again in response to donor demands, and not finding solutions to existing problems, made protesters challenge the legitimacy of the State leaders.

In the years to come, Biya followed a path of repressing and giving in alternately and changed tack from shooting on protesters and imprisoning opposition leaders to drafting a multi-party system and then committing electoral fraud. He “encouraged party fragmentation by extending enticing provisions for state financing of registered political parties” and “[offering] individual leaders of the opposition [...] various material inducements to cross over to the government side” (Bratton and Van der Walle 1998: 168). When the north established a Muslim-party, the UNDP. Biya responded out of fear for his former adversary by helping to establish a ‘non-Muslim’ party (the MDR) that could divert votes away (Schilder 1994: 224). Indeed, in the 1997 elections, the totally split opposition had to recognise Biya again as the president, although large sections of the population expressed doubts as to the fairness of the process.

This doubt is fuelled by the fact that, in 1998 and 1999, Transparency International designated Cameroon as the most corrupt country in the world. One reason for this was the bad example the two successive presidents and their staff had given the civil servants. The second reason put forward, that of the terrible economic position at the beginning of the 1990s when civil servants had to resolve to bribe to earn a living, is somewhat farfetched. This may have been true for other African countries, were sometimes more than 90% of salaries were not paid, but, thanks to French support, currency inflation rates stayed low and the government managed to maintain a relatively low budget deficit (Bratton and Van der Walle 1998: 132). In Cameroon the government was ‘only’ not able to fulfil its responsibilities every now and again.

By giving way to more decentralisation and with the appointment of former ‘ordinary’ people to high-ranking State posts, together with the continued stressing of the fact that all citizens were equal and should be handled equally, Biya managed to win the support of people who, up to then, had had no opportunities. His rigid stance in the Nigerian border affair (especially concerning the Bakassi peninsula and the Bouram island in Lake Chad), although aggravating the country’s defence budget, did much to ameliorate national feelings amongst the Cameroonians. This, together with the policy change in late 1996 - when the government upgraded the banking and fiscal system, adopted new land tenure and forestry laws to ameliorate production, and thus corrected its years of economic mismanagement - restored ‘father’ Biya firmly within the neo-patrimonial system at the beginning of the new millennium.

23 That is, the example of protest in other (West African) countries might have been followed in Cameroon.
25 Crawford (2003): for example the southern Social Democratic Front leader John Fru Ndi was arrested.
26 Electoral manipulation and fraud was found by a US observation team.
27 Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès.
28 Mouvement Démocratique pour la Défense de la République.
29 For Cameroon it was 5.3%, as opposed to more than 40% in other African countries.
30 Biya was often referred to in this manner during discussions and interviews with inhabitants of the Far North Province from 1999 – 2004. According to Schatzberg (1986: 18) the metaphor of the president as a father derives “from an idealized vision of patterns of authority within the family”. Based in the African lineage system “... these metaphors are culturally relevant [...] the legitimate governance in Cameroon [...] is based on the tacit normative idea that government stands in the same relationship to its citizens that a father does to his
However, the first parliamentary and municipal elections of this new era were again subject to accusations of having been manipulated by the president’s party. "Fifteen opposition parties filed complaints [...] and the country’s Supreme Court annulled the results in nine districts" (Infoplease 2003). A second round only resulted in a further increase in RDPC seats: from an initial 133 to a final 149 out of 180¹. In the lead-up to the next presidential election (end of 2004) many people are worrying about the disintegrative forces within the country, such as the growing identity consciousness related to ethnicity and region, the neo-patrimonialism and clientelism, the distortion of the participation of civil society and the endemic corruption¹².

4.1.2 Economic situation
Under the German colonial regime, Cameroonian s experienced a period of relative economic prosperity. However, after World War One, both the French and the British mandate territory quickly declined. The only real income came from the plantations set up and later again owned by the Germans¹¹. After World War II, however, the United Nations Charter “proclaimed that trusteeship was intended to promote the economic [and other] advancement of the local inhabitants” (Mbuagbaw et al 1987: 109) and “the period 1945 to 1960 was characterised by rapid economic and social development [...] in both French and British Cameroon” (id: 104).

After independence, the Ahidjo regime opted for ‘planned liberalism’. This means making efficient use of available resources by setting reasonable targets in successive five-year plans. In contrast to other West African countries private investment from internal and external enterprises was encouraged. The government focused most of its attention on the development of agriculture, but it also invested in industry to counter urban unemployment. In order to improve the future capabilities of the population, the Ahidjo administration paid due attention to education and health services. Infrastructure enhancement also became a government target.

Indeed, Cameroon in the years of the Ahidjo regime was “...one of Africa’s economic success stories.” (World Bank Group 2003a), “... that has in the past two decades followed an admirable and well-documented path of economic growth and development” (Ndongko 1986: 83). The discovery of oil in the late 1970s and the fact that petrol became an important source of income added enormously to the real economic growth rate of 8% per year from 1976 to 1981¹³.

The fall in world market prices for oil in 1984 had a significant impact on the country’s income position¹⁴. This was aggravated by the simultaneous drop in price of the other export products. Cleuren (2001: 132) points out the devastating effects for the country’s inhabitants: “Since the 1980s, living conditions have deteriorated dramatically for the majority of the population as a consequence of the severe economic crisis in relation to declining export revenues from oil, coffee, and cocoa.” Of course this added to the unpopularity of the Biya administration.

¹¹ Electionworld (2002): of the specific northern parties only one obtained one seat in parliament
¹² See, e.g., Konings and Nyamnjo (2003), or Fonchingon (2004).
¹³ During the early 1930s the colonial powers wanted to sell the plantations to private entrepreneurs, but the only people interested were the former German planters. At the start of WW II the plantations were again expropriated.
¹⁴ Even Cameroon’s debt position from 1977 to 1981 was the most promising on the African continent. being only 8% of the government budget
With a view to improving the country’s financial position, international donors demanded structural adjustments (SAPs) to the economic and financial organisation of the country. Since 1989 “markets for agricultural products have been liberalised and a privatisation program for the public sector is slowly advancing. Ministries have been restructured and the number of public servants drastically reduced.” (Cleuren 2001: 132). However, up to 1994, the World Bank Group (2003b) speaks of a fiscal crisis and economic mismanagement as well as reluctance within the government to “carry out necessary structural reforms.” In combination with the political upheavals, the economic crisis led to a halt in the growth of the GDP between 1989 and 1993 and the GDP per capita fell steeply in 1994. In spite of the January 1994 devaluation of the Franc by 50%, which should have “restored the competitiveness of Cameroonian products” (Cleuren 2001: 133), the country’s economic performance did not benefit until 1996 onwards.

The international help to overcome the financial crisis led to an increase in the international debt from $ 2.5 billion in 1981 to $ 9.8 billion in 1998. “In the fiscal year 1998-99, one third of the public budget was spent on debt repayment, while the total external debt represented 89 percent of the GDP” (Cleuren 2001: 133). Because this is “far above even the levels considered by the IMF/World Bank as sustainable” (Afrodad 2003), in October 2000 Cameroon was incorporated into the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative. In January 2001, to reward Cameroon’s steady performance, the Paris Club agreed to reduce Cameroon’s debt by $ 900 million, thereby reaching a total debt relief of $ 1.2 billion (nominal $ 2 billion). In the meantime adjustments continued. The restructuring of the banking system and privatisation of rail and air traffic were well under way by the year 2000. Despite the low oil prices the State finances improved. On a personal level, people’s purchasing power continued to recover and the informal sector expanded. The Chad – Cameroon oil pipeline project, funded by the World Bank and the European Investment Bank in 2000, is meant to improve the country’s finances even further, although there is considerable protest against the risks for the environment and the local people. In July 2003, the first oil flowed from the south of Chad to the coastal terminal at Kribi, Cameroon.

Countrywide, Cameroon can be regarded as almost self-sufficient with respect to food production, but on a regional scale there are substantial differences. Every now and again food aid has to be given in vulnerable areas.

Politically and economically speaking, Cameroon is one of the most stable countries in West and Central Africa, but observers still warn about setbacks. Democracy is not fully developed: On the one hand, Biya has retained his position thanks to electoral fraud while, on the other hand, there are fears of the effects of a sudden death of the (old) president. Membership of political parties is not totally free, especially not for the elite and those with public management positions (e.g. chiefs). There is considerable pressure on people to

---

5. The sharp reduction in real income due to the devaluation of the Fcfa had negative impacts on the manufacturing and service sectors. Together with several delays of payments of civil servants’ salaries, this made people seek additional sources of income.

6. In 1996, growth rates returned to 5% per year, due to a considerable extent, to services (OECD/AFDB 2002).


8. Several newspapers and internet pages discussed the Debt Service Relief initiative. The most important is the World Bank itself (2000), the Afrodad website (2003) and the OECD information on Cameroon (2002).

become members of the ruling party (RDPC) and this goes even as far as exclusion from certain jobs when such membership is not proven. Despite Biya’s lip service to equal rights and opportunities for all Cameroonian citizens, his governance has led to a kind of regionalism. The French-speaking Christian south is more or less satisfied with ‘their’ Biya. The Anglophone west, though, feels betrayed and wants to go back to the Federal State or even to secession\(^4\). The north, however divided it may be, has a strong opinion about the origin of the next president. They believe he should again be a northerner, “otherwise our needs will never be addressed.”\(^5\)

Corruption is widespread both at government and administrative level as well as within the legislature and the judiciary\(^6\). Political turmoil can start any day. And the instability in neighbouring countries does not help. In addition, the economic recovery is a fragile one. Once again, oil revenues play an important role, but these are far from certain. Moreover, other income depends on exogenous influences such as a favourable rainfall pattern\(^7\). Unfortunately, import increases led, in 2002, to an external deficit. In addition, despite the debt relief, Cameroon still has to pay more in debt service than it receives in loans. In the meantime, urban unemployment is high and “half of Cameroon’s population lives below the poverty line” (Courier 2002). In the Human Development Index of the UNDP of 2003 Cameroon ranks 142. Up to now, civil society has not played any role in controlling central institutions; the empowerment of the people remains feeble. “Sustainable development largely depends on the level of genuine involvement of civil society and on the country’s political ability to curb corruption and promote good governance” (Courier 2002). In short, the overall political and economic situation is not totally secure.

4.1.3 Legal situation regarding land tenure and conflict resolution

In order to facilitate an analysis of land tenure situations at the local level, as well as conflict resolution in the event of discord, I will describe the national organisation of the two. The three case study chapters describe daily practices in more detail.

To start with, I would like to make a general remark concerning the land tenure arrangements: in spite of State law, there is no single land tenure regime in Cameroon. “It is a variety of pre-colonial (= traditional), colonial and national land codes” (Mope Simo 2002: 40). In addition, the customary or ‘traditional’ system is not as static and archaic as the term suggests\(^8\). It only means that “there are forms of land management based on customary principles” (Lavigne Delville 2000: 99)\(^9\). Different rules can be applied to each piece of land, at the same time or consecutively. Even the customary regime is not restricted everywhere to one system if different ethnic groups use the same area. In addition, sometimes the traditional customary rules are not clear because of the meddling of the colonial powers and because the

---

\(^{41}\) See Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003)

\(^{42}\) Remarks to be heard in the streets and cafés everywhere in the North, from urban to rural places, during visits from 2000 - 2004.

\(^{43}\) In 1998 and 1999 Transparency International ranked Cameroon number one on its list of corrupt countries.

\(^{44}\) Apart from regular droughts in the North, in 2003, for example, the Southwest was hit by too much rain and flooding, because of which the harvests failed. Food aid had to be provided.

\(^{45}\) See also Djuidje (1999).

\(^{46}\) Some researchers prefer to speak of “socially-determined land-use rules” instead of ‘customary’ ones (Lavigne Delville 2000), Mathieu (1995) to denote the flexibility and change thereof.
lengthy experience with State interference has made such traditional local practices “incorporate external concepts” (Lavigne Delville 2000: 102), albeit in accordance with customary practice (and thus, again, differently per group). This whole mixture makes different actors opportunistically claim the most appropriate ‘traditional’ or formal regimes. In other words, “land rights are being defined and legitimated at different levels in society, and transfer of land rights [...] is regulated in ways that may ignore or challenge official land tenure regulations.” (Van der Haar 2000: 272).

**Development of land rights**

In agricultural and settled communities, the pre-colonial system was mostly patrilinear, with patrilocal residence and patrilinear inheritance of natural resources. For women this meant that they could gain usufruct rights over land via their husbands47, but they did not have management, exclusion or alienation rights (Ostrom and Schlager 199648). The vertical dimension of land tenure differed per ethnic community49. This dimension means that “a hierarchy of groups is the focus of land rights, with each ascending group larger and embracing several groups of the next lower order, pyramiding toward a king or paramount chief of the tribe” (Bruce 1988: 26)50. Bruce (id: 27) adds that “mostly a group’s land right does not originate at the very top of the political hierarchy, but at some [lower] level”. In non-Islamic communities, the central chiefs were custodians of all natural resources and, as such, could reserve land for special goals (like hunting, prohibiting any encroachment), but their power to allocate land to inhabitants or immigrants was mostly limited to giving advice to neighbourhood heads who, in turn, only represented lineage and compound heads. In addition to those hierarchical societies, other ethnic groups only recognised power at household head level, with wise-men’s councils for issues regarding the whole community (e.g. Geschiere 1982; Iyébi-Mandjek and Seignobos 2000a: 57).

As is the case in many other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa (see Perrot 2000; Breusers 1998), in Cameroon the personal dimension of land tenure was clear. The customary law of cultivators

---

47 Of course in matrilinear societies it is different (see, e.g. Hilhorst (2000: 187), about Tanzania). In addition, Goheen (1989a: 372) for instance mentions the original possibility for married women in the Northwest province of Cameroon to acquire “rights of usufruct in lands belonging to their mother’s lineage, or [...] in lands of their father’s lineage”. A decrease in the availability of land, she says (id: 375), causes these rights to disappear.

48 “Management right = right to regulate internal use patterns and transform the resource by making improvements. Exclusion right = right to determine who will have an access right, and how that right may be transferred. Alienation right = right to sell or lease either or both of the above ‘collective-choice’ rights” (Ostrom and Schlager 1996 131-132). Next to that, Ostrom and Schlager recognise ‘operational level’ rights, such as access and withdrawal rights.

49 Bruce (1988) defines four dimensions of land tenure: vertical, horizontal, historical and personal. Vertical refers to a hierarchy of ‘secondary and primary right holders’ (resp. primary and secondary actors). Horizontal refers to differences in type of land use and the rights related (whether or not in different times of the year, and with regard to resources that are situated on the land or otherwise related to the land, and rules for personal use or common use) Here again primary and secondary rights can be seen. Historical refers to changes of tenure systems over time, due to changes in land use practices, in population densities, in political systems, in climate and to conquests etc. Personal refers to “farmers views” (id: 29) and situations (endowments and entitlements: see Leach et al (1999: 232)) that influence the actual implementation of rules. The differences in opinion about rules make it a “give-and-take” (id: 29) game, as Berry (1988, 1993) also observed.

50 For example, women as a group get their land rights from the group ‘married men’ who, as such, get their rights from the fact that they are descendants of a certain fore-father (This touches upon the notion of Berry (1988) that tenure rights depend on social identity.)
declared rights to land to the first settler. In lots of cases, elder sons of extended lineages migrated away (sometimes staying quite close in order to show that group membership is still important) to avoid havoc in a group that is too large, but more specifically to enlarge the lineage's domain in competition with other lineages. The extendedness of land surface combined with that of members of the group defined the status of the group (Gonnin 200;Loubamono-Bessaque 2000). Another reason to migrate was to enlarge the surface area in view of the survival of all current and future group members. "taking into account the equilibrium between the environment and the exploitation methods of the natural resources" (Koumba-Manfoumbi 2000: 63).

In the new area, the first settler and clearer of the bush became chief. Whether new arrivals were required to obtain the authorisation from the chief to clear and cultivate land depended on the customs of the group. Afterwards, the male settlers almost always became owners of their land, with all the rights that Ostrom and Schlager have formulated (see note 48). As regards their offspring these lands developed into lineage lands. Because chiefs aimed at acquiring large numbers of 'followers', partly to show off their importance to ethnically related lineages and partly to be safe from enemies (building a large army against them or geographically incorporating them), newcomers were often warmly welcomed (Gonnin 2000: 47). Individual family (household) heads delineated their fields using natural borders or erecting stone-lines or other signs. Most societies did not hold the land in common property, apart from some stretches to be used as grazing land or sacral land. In most situations of land abundance, later immigrants had to be given parts of the already cleared land (in use), although according to custom these lands were inalienable because the property of offspring of former clearers.

Referring to Bruce's categorisation (see note 49), the vertical domain rights developed only gradually, so building up the historical domain. In the more ancient systems, individual household heads perhaps started as secondary right holders, when chiefs had to give them permission to settle, but afterwards they soon became primary right holders. Only when the community developed and/or became part of a wider system did higher levels of authority obtain 'earlier' rights (referring to primordial rights, such as those of first settler). Exo-intransmissability grew in the customary systems in connection with the growing pressure on land (Van den Berg 1997: 178). Especially in the north, with its dry period, personal rights over land were only exercised during the agricultural season. In general, customary land tenure systems in Africa are fluid (Berry 1993), because they are subject to perpetual negotiations and changes.

Also, when land was abundant, inheritance was not a big issue. Although all villagers knew which land was the property of which lineage, everybody was able to use whatever s/he needed. This applied especially to male members of that lineage. Inheritance meant that each male member had the right of use of the land of his forefathers with decisions related to ownership being taken by the lineage elders. In general, every member of a village community had the right of access to and use of enough land to accommodate his or her subsistence. However, growing pressure meant that inheritance and allocation became important and sometimes even a cause of conflict within and between families. At such times, local chiefs and land masters

51 In a way this is still the case in official administration the number of people and the expanse of the land are between "the principal determinants in the classification of chiefs under Decree No. 77245 ...." (Fisy 1992: 145). Also, the more of both, the higher the prestige of the chief.
52 See also Mope Simo (2002); Bruce (1988)
54 That is: only the local chief is permitted to sell land, as a check against alienation of land to outsiders.
had to use their position as an arbiter in conflict resolution.

With the increase of colonial influence, land tenure rules changed in almost all four of Bruce’s dimensions. Starting from a mismatch of ideas according to land ownership, from the 1880s onwards European civilians were able to buy land at very low prices from local chiefs, communities and individuals. For chiefs the sale of bush-land far from the village was a lucrative business that did not interfere much with the village system. On the other hand, the former users still regarded their sold lands as free to be used (to collect firewood, to graze cattle or even to till) according to traditional customs. In addition to these ambiguous purchases, military expeditions also resulted in the conquest of land.

Although the customary practices did not make it possible to alienate land and the Germans officially signed a treaty not to interfere with customary laws, in 1896 they formulated a policy that declared all ‘unoccupied’ territory to be vacant. ‘Occupied’ meant cultivated and this did not therefore include grazing lands, hunting lands, or fallow lands whose fertility was being re-established during years of non-use. In addition to that, and to encourage plantation agriculture, they stipulated that land had to be registered. If not, it became land controlled by the State, or “crown land”. The State then set aside small reserves on behalf of individual farmers for subsistence agriculture and living. With regard to other natural resources, the first Imperial Forest Ordinance of 1900 prohibited the illegal felling of timber without replanting, or the use of forest products without individual exploitation rights (Egbe 2002). When all natural resources had thus been placed under the control of the colonial administration, the regular supply of resources to the metropolis was secured to the detriment of the local people.

When the Germans arrived in the north in the second half of their colonial presence in Cameroon, they had to deal with the same customary rules within the local non-Islamic communities as could be found in the south, albeit with small diversions. However, because they kept the Fulbe lords in place as their allies or even extended their realms to the detriment of the ‘kindi’ population, as will be further explained in section 2, the emphasis in the land tenure domain as well was placed on the hierarchical system of the Fulbe who had a firm grip on the legal system by way of their network of primary, secondary and tertiary chiefs. Land was allocated by, or in the name of, the primary chief who, in non-contested situations, delegated it to lower-level chiefs or even to customary (according to autochthonous, that is pre-Fulbe, populations) chiefs and their own original system. Indeed, as far as the cattle-keeping Fulbe were concerned, the authority of the lamibe was uncontested. In return for a reasonable tax payment, they were able to access grazing lands and acquire protection against enemies from their mas-

---

54 The fact that these traditional chiefs were able to sell land contrasts with the perception of later Western colonial authorities and scientists that in traditional, communal tenure systems alienation was not possible. Yet, the sale of land meant something different than the Western buyers thought.
55 Although in the South chiefs did sell land to the Germans, within the framework of their vision and that of their subjects this did not alienate the land from them with regard to user rights.
56 In 1896, they had not yet invaded North Cameroon. This invasion took place in 1901.
57 The German land register was called ‘Grunbuch’. This Grunbuch and the rules that called for registration can be seen as the forerunners of all later registration-based land laws in Cameroon.
58 Of course, there was widespread resistance to the entire policy, but the very small area appointed to farmers (only 6 ha was deemed enough per household head) particularly turned the population against the Germans.
59 Because of this neglect of the rights and the position of non-Muslim people, the Germans encountered continuing resistance up till WW I.
On top of it all, the Germans imposed their laws regarding the use of natural resources and their central authority in the person of one governor with all-embracing power.

When the French and British took over, the registration of ownership (title) became the legal norm in both parts of Cameroon. The French expanded the German legal system to include the category of public domain. Land with regard to which individuals or communities could not prove were being used was considered to be 'empty', 'unoccupied' and 'ownerless'. Cultivation and temporary occupation were not seen as 'occupying'. For that, the land had to be developed, that is used for commercial agriculture, industry, housing, or be (re)planted with trees. This contradicted the customary system in which trees belong to other property regimes than the land on which they stand. Although confirmation of customary rights was officially possible for groups and individuals, “until the 1950s, land was registered only by European colonists and urban dwellers” (Van den Berg 1997: 189). As a consequence, most land became State land and from then on was administered by the colonial authorities as part of the national domain. Forests, as a potential economic asset, were given a special status consistent with the land law of ‘non-developed land is State-land’. Indeed, the 1926 Décret classified all forests as ‘forêts domaniales’ and put them under the control of the French Commissioner, who had the power to decide on exclusion, allocation and involved rules. Traditional users acquired user rights only to satisfy their direct (short-term) personal needs. Exploitation permits were issued to commercial harvesters, although several hardwood species could only be felled with special authorisation.

During the period of French rule, the State monopoly on forest increased, limiting the possibilities of local users more and more. Land legislation acquired its most restrictive form in the 1932 and 1938 Decrees that “prepared the ground for subsequent land colonisation by the colonial administration” (Fisiy 1992: 35). However, after World War II, the French gradually started to meet people’s demands. In reaction to successive protest actions of local chiefs and their villagers against the land-rights deprivation, the French revised the law in 1949. But it was only just before independence in 1959 that a new land law reinforced the property rights of local communities on ‘vacant lands’ by re-establishing customary land tenure via the authority of large customary chiefs61. However, immigrants’ rights to clear land were not restored.

In the British Cameroon, on the other hand, native rights were recognised from the beginning in accordance with the League of Nations Mandate Agreement62. The British recognised so called “native lands”: “the whole of the lands in (West) Cameroon, whether occupied or unoccupied” (Fisiy 1992: 31), with the exception of the former German plantations, now called ‘free estates’ or ‘Crown Lands’. However, “the Land and Native Rights Ordinance [of 1927] only acknowledged the right of occupancy, management and use of land” (Van den Berg 1997: 190). The ownership right of alienation, for example, was given to the Governor63. The

61 Whether or not those were indeed ‘customary’ remains an issue for debate. When Fulbe rules were re-installed, autochthonous populations still felt overrun. In lots of cases, equalising chiefship with territory is a disputable colonial invention (Mback 2000)

62 Mandate text: “In framing laws relating to the holding and transfer of land and natural resources, the administering authority shall take into consideration native laws and customs. and shall respect the rights and safeguard the interests, both present and future, of the native population. No native land or natural resource may be transferred, except between natives, save with previous consent of the competent authority” (in Fisiy 1992: 30)

63 With the installation of these rules, the British did not divert far from the German system that also gave all-embracing power to their governor.
same principle was already formulated within the Forestry Ordinance of 1916 that gave him the power to constitute forest reserves, with special, more restricting rules\textsuperscript{64}. In addition, native rights in customary fallow land were forfeited after ten years of "non-use". However, before that time had expired. "[t]he governor could deprive indigenous people of their rights to resource tenure only in accordance with customary law." (Egbe 2002: 63). In the case of free estates, both the State and, later, private owners had the right to purchase and sell on the basis of a Certificate of Occupancy.

After independence, the new Federal government wanted to build a ‘modern State’ with a mono-legal system of modern law and thus get rid of “old-fashioned” land tenure systems as had just been restored in French Cameroon in the 1959 laws. In addition, “land [has] a central place in the State’s effort to “capture” and control local populations” and “for the rational allocation and reallocation of natural resources” (Fisiyi 1992: 1). So, to gain a firm grip on the population and on economic development, in 1963 the latest land laws were more or less reversed into those of 1932. The term “terres vacantes et sans maitre” was substituted by the more positively sounding “le patrimoine collectif national”. However, this did not alleviate the problem of the new law disregarding the customary social and cultural values of land, and its function of social binding within and over the generations. All the rights regained by communities with regard to ownership, allocation and control over their own bush, pastures and fallow land, were again lost\textsuperscript{65}. These communities could only exercise those rights over occupied and cultivated land (Fisiyi 1992: 34). Once again, all non-registered land was to be administered by the State. Individuals had to prove that they ‘developed’ their already acquired land, to obtain property rights over it, via registration. In 1966, individual tenure became the ‘winner’ over corporate customary ownership. By comparison, in the Anglophone part and in spite of several amendments to Land and Forest Ordinances, there was not a great shift between the before and after independence situations with regard to natural resource tenure. This was mainly due to the rejection of all ‘modernisation’ plans.

Because the unification of 1972 asked for a streamlining of the differences in legal systems of the two Cameroons, a new land law was drawn up in 1974. This new system was firmly based on French colonial rule, as the powerful president of the Union came from the French part and overruled demands for recognition of their legal system from the Anglophone part. Ahidjo sought to enlarge State involvement on the one hand and privatisation on the other. The new laws meant citizens and communities could once more become private owners of their land\textsuperscript{66}. However, the road to registration turned out to be a long, arduous and very expensive one, and one that was impassable for individual small-scale and mostly illiterate farmers. “Those who register are mainly bureaucrats, highly ranked civil servants, and traders, but no male, let alone female, farmers” (Van den Berg 1997: 192, note 22). Fisiyi (1992) found that, after seven years, the Land Consultative Boards had only managed to finish half of all applications (in West Cameroon the total number of applications was only 900; in the north this number was even lower) and, what is more, had only granted a title to 6 % thereof. The prob-

\textsuperscript{64} It has to be said that such an intervention could be exercised to prevent the destruction of forests “diminishing the water supply or threatening the continuous supply of forest produce to village communities” (Egbe 2002: 63). In other words, not only for commercial purposes.

\textsuperscript{65} This reversion to the colonial laws of the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century caused Lavigne Delville (2000: 102) use the denomination “archaic” for the so-called ‘modern’ laws.

\textsuperscript{66} With, among other things, inheritance rights for their off-spring, and registered wife
lem is that not registering means your land becomes national land and thus subject to expropria-
tion. On the other hand, “nobody, not even the holder of a land certificate, can claim to be 
free from State encroachment” (Fisiiy 1992: 52) when, for example, the State deems it in the 
interest of the general public to do so. Registration, however, can also mean that the user 
can be expropriated, as the owner can now use his title for that purpose, whereas in the past cus-
tomary habits and societal rules and solidarity had prohibited such actionsöt. Not only did individual farmers lose their ownership right once again but also the traditional communities: “The corporate nature of customary land rights cannot be legally enforced under the 1974 land law 
reforms” (Fisiiy 1992: 52). For example, “any sale or alienation of unregistered land by the 
customary community is illegal” (Fisiiy 1992: 52).

In the 1974 Land Law (Ordinance) and subsequent 1976 and other decrees and amendmentsöö, 
three types of land are stipulated, namely two types of registered land, being private or public and, third, non-registered ‘common-pool’ land, being ‘national land’. Table 4.3.1 shows the 
different legal types of land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3.1</th>
<th>Legal types of land (based on Ordinance ‘74-1, -2, -3 (1974) and Fisiiy (1992: 38 - 53))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. National land</strong> = land that is not registered (Art. 15 of Ordinance 74-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land free of any effective occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land with houses, farming fields, plantations and grazing lands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Registered land</strong> (may belong to private persons, private bodies or the State)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private estates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Registered before 1974 (10 years to transform documents into ‘modern’ ones)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- New registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- after purchase (has to be via a notary)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- prove customary occupation of before 1974 (10 years time to register)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- via concessions (with intention of development project and assessment after 5 years towards permanent grant (= private property) or long-term (99 years) lease (for foreigners); to be paid for - declassification of private State lands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- State private propertyöö</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- acquired from National Lands (no compensation paid)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- from private ownership by expropriation (compensation has to be paid)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- from gifts (ordinary or testamentary)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- recovering of public and parastatal land after institution has been wound up. To be used directly by the State(institutions) or to be redistributed to individuals in case of need (&quot;in the general interest of the public&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public estates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- all lands which by their nature or by their intended use are reserved for the direct use of the public or public services, such as waterways and public pathsöö</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

öö Private State land can be appropriated via three methods: 1) Sale or lease as with National Land, 2) Exchange between State and citizen, 3) Retrocede to a council, public body or parastatal.
öö Cannot be privately appropriated.
Apart from the Land Laws as such, land and natural resource use and ownership are regulated in several other laws. The most important thereof is that which deals with forests, as it regulates the rights of access, use, management, exclusion and alienation of the land on which forest grows and of the natural resources wood (timber), fauna (wildlife) and minor products that together make up the forest. Indeed, the first forestry law of the United Republic of Cameroon, in 1973, dealt with timber (Egbe 2001: 8; Egbe 2002: 65) because of its economic importance. This ordinance gave customary rights of use, but only for the minor ('secondary') products. Naturally grown trees, even on private land, belonged to the State. So, only the State had all the rights of ownership as defined by Ostrom and Schlager (1996). of which management, exclusion and alienation are the most important here. Later amendments did not change this rights regime. In 1994, all forest resources and genetic resources that were deemed to be part of the national heritage were nationalised in accordance with the new Forestry Law71, and thus not accessible to individual or community use. This included “orchards, agricultural plantations, fallow land, wooded land adjoining an agricultural farm, and pastoral and agro-forestry facilities” (Egbe 2002: 66).

On the other hand, in response to donor-stated conditions on Structural Adjustment Loans, the Cameroon government began to recognise the needs and rights of local communities72. The 1994 Forestry Act granted “local communities the possibility of greater control over forests and wildlife” (Egbe 2001: 1)73. Local council and privately planted forests were excluded from the nationalisation wave. Local populations were now allowed to cut trees in unprotected areas to meet their domestic demands for fuel wood and building materials, as long as they could justify these needs to officials from the Forestry Service74. Moreover, they were given the right to harvest wildlife and fisheries products for their personal use (not commercial), as long as the species and area involved are not protected and as long as ‘traditional methods’ are used, such as hunting tools made of plant material. In addition, community management is allowed on former fallow land and agricultural or pastoral land to which no title deeds exist75. Covenants between the State and community members can be drawn up to create ‘Community Forests’, which then have to be managed according to a mutually designed plan. The same applies to ‘Community Hunting Zones’, as formulated in the 1995 Wildlife Decree (see Egbe 2001, Bauer 2003: 22-23). Even the suspension of community rights in the public interest can officially only be implemented after consultation with the local communities and with appropriate compensation payments (Egbe 2002: 66).

Indemnities are also prescribed in the reverse situation where the State wants to create a

---

71 The law stated that 30 % of all Cameroon territory should be dedicated to permanent forest and this should represent the ecological diversity of the country (law 94/01 of 1994, Art. 22).
72 In the course of the organisation of, and during, the UN conference on Sustainable Development in 1992, the level of recognition of indigenous peoples' rights steadily increased. Later, this developed within the framework of the negotiations and agreements on Biodiversity. At the start of the 1990s it meant that donor institutions began to ask their borrowers to fulfil related demands. As a result, global agencies began to claim rights to intervene in tenure rules.
73 See also Didier (1998) and Mvondo (1998).
74 "This provision is a source of confrontation between local inhabitants and forestry officials, as the mechanisms for proving 'justification' are unclear." (Egbe 2002: 66). It also opens up possibilities for more powerful forest-guards to accuse local inhabitants of misuse and to have them pay off the threatened fine.
75 It has to be stressed that this rule includes the risk of depriving farmers of the use of the customary method to improve the soil quality through long-term fallow practices.
national forest on a territory that is already in use by local people (see Nguiffo 1994). Art. 26 of the 1994 Law on "Forests, Wildlife and Fisheries" obliges people to "respect the social environment of autochthonous populations" in such a case and, when it is necessary to limit or deny such "normal use", "compensation, according to modalities formulated in a decree" should be paid. Indirectly, this means that it is not per se necessary to limit or deny access to and use of national forests by local inhabitants (Bauer 2003).

One of the problems with the new legislation is that, especially in the north with its long dry season, customary rules governing natural resources change over time. This can go as far as different communities having authority over a certain territory in different parts of the year. As far as cultivators are concerned, rights of use and access to land are only claimed during the production season. In general, "land rights are always more complex then public versus private." (Zoomers 2000: 1:14).

In short, although operationalisation is fraught with lots of difficulties, - where concepts are not properly defined (for example, the term 'community' itself), where the position of traditional chiefs is totally subordinated to other administrative levels (Mbaka 2000), where factual situations cannot meet formulated conditions (for example the unrealistic conditions for hunting rights) or demands regarding places of community forest (Egbe 2002: 67), where routes to be followed to register community's rights are too difficult, time consuming and expensive (id) - the 1994 Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Act is a first step towards involving local communities and creating space for customary legislation in addition to the more formal rules. Nevertheless, the State remains the de jure owner of the resources and the Act goes only so far as to give communities some management rights.

In theory, the land registration laws give women more land-tenure security than customary rules. Traditionally, almost all customary rules excluded women from land-ownership. They obtained access and use rights via male farmers, mostly husbands (these were therefore secondary rights). The death of such a husband made the woman vulnerable for expropriation by, for example, brothers or sons (of co-wives) of the deceased. Because the registration rules required actual improvement of, and work on, the land, women stood a fair chance of obtaining ownership. However, for them, access to the difficult registration procedures was more difficult (and too expensive). Another option for women was the new law on matrimonial registration. A marriage certificate can also be used to secure the inheritance of the husband's property. However, most women were unaware of this possibility and, when they did find out about it, they discovered that it was still the husband's decision as to whether to register his marriage. This was, once again, a difficult route which cost money and generated no benefits for the husband. In addition, trying to get official title had a detrimental effect on the woman's social position in the village, where the customary land ownership rules still considered a woman's}

---

77 See Egbe 2001: 3-4.
79 "Since 1974 Cameroon has adopted a land tenure regime that guarantees access to land ownership for everybody, included women and the very poor." (Anonymous. 2000: 30).
81 Insecurity may also arise when the relationship with the husband deteriorates, when a second (or other) wife enters the household, etc.
82 See also Van den Berg (1997).
land title as a threat to family property and identity.'

In practice, the increase of cash crop production and of husbandry for cash income made men seek more security to land at the detriment of access and usage possibilities for women. Even the arrival of foreign cattle keepers, agreed upon by local chiefs because it meant tax revenues, restricted women’s farming options.

**Conflicts**

As depicted above, before the colonial period the different ethnic groups had their own rules to manage land and other resources. The same applies to conflicts about resources and other issues. For land-centred communities, the head of the land-owning lineage (that is the lineage that descends from the first settler on that piece of land) had to decide about land allocation issues and had to settle related disputes. Contesting members of the lineage who were unable to agree with the decision, “would generally break off from the main compound and migrate to foreign lands to create a new home, this new home constituted the nucleus of a new lineage...” (Fisiy 1992: 57). This could easily be done where population densities were low. In other locations, where there was a greater demand for land, war was often waged to decide which individuals (or group) could settle and take command. This seldom led to a continuing conflict, while the conquering lineage would restrict itself most of the time to the acquisition of just the political and economic control of the land, thereby leaving the “initial settlers to maintain the spiritual control” (Fisiy 1992: 59). However, when the warriors chose to “establish new links with the gods of the land”, this resulted in “deep-seated distrust and hard feelings” (Fisiy 1992: 60), that were not easy to resolve.

Yet, within a community, conflicts could usually be settled not through mediation by the chief but by asking the gods of the land themselves to pass judgement. This involved libation of the disputed territory by the lineage heads. Because the gods of the land were involved, the community did not have to support a kind of police force to impose implementation.

Incoming nomads usually obeyed the rules of the inhabitants of the territory on which they grazed their animals. In cases of discord with the population that had settled in the region they accepted the judgements of the local authorities, whom they considered to be ‘masters of the land’, or they simply went away.

Other types of conflicts, such as those concerning family matters (bride wealth (re-)payments, divorces, property inheritance - for example when the eldest sons did not divide the inheritance equally between their brothers – adultery), contract breaches between herders and cattle owners, or criminal offences (theft, murder, witchcraft), were judged by the village elders and the chiefs, depending on the cultural habits of the different groups. In extreme cases, land could be used in punitive acts. Confiscation (sometimes to transfer the land to the victim or his family), or even banishment from the entire territory of the group could be the outcome of the judgement. Otherwise, and especially in cattle-raising groups, the conveyance of animals might settle the discord.

---

81 As Toulmin and Quan (2000a: 27) already remarked: “it may be problematic trying to improve the security of women’s rights of access to land without opening up a much broader discussion regarding the rights of women within society in general.”

82 See, e.g., Fisiy (1992 chapter 8).

83 See Goheen (1989) and Fisiy (1992)

84 See for example, Van der Ploeg (2001). See also the increase of this phenomenon in Benin (Van Driel 2001).
Most nomadic cattle keepers have strong lineages, with strong lineage heads. If the bush was large, it was free to be used as pasture. Conflicts would more likely to develop over the use of water sources (between and within groups) or, indeed, over family matters. In such instances, lineage heads passed judgement, assisted where necessary by other elderly and wise group members (men). In cases in which some of the cattle keepers were settled and a ‘royal’ (or an administrative) hierarchy had developed, a local (lavan) or regional (lamido or sultan) leader was seen as the master of the land and he was required to resolve disputes over both land use and access to water between different groups or families of cattle nomads. These chiefs also had judging power (although this was often delegated to special judges at their courts) because of their role as religious leader within the Islamic system.

The power of the invading Fulbe and their hierarchical governing system went so far as to assign their leaders the arbiter role in discords between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ people. In conflicting situations with cultivators, these same lords tended to approve the cattle keepers’ actions. Thus, when the different customary systems clashed, the Fulbe system appeared to be dominant. In the areas where up until the German invasion the Fulbe had not been victorious, their system can only be called ‘neo-traditional’.

When the colonial administration took over, “family matters were adjudicated according to customary law in Tribunaux Coutumiers, except for those educated people who explicitly renounced their customary status and wished to be treated as French assimilés” (Van den Berg 1997: 161). Conflicts over land between local users were still handled by the traditional authorities, despite the fact that overall re-establishment of customary land tenure via the authority of large customary chiefs was only carried out at the end of the colonial period (as we have seen above). In the British parts of Cameroon the customary courts already played a more important role in conflict settlement and land tenure arrangements in general.

From the colonial time onwards, State-claims to land or to the right to attribute land engendered conflicts between that State (or its representatives) and local communities and individuals. Just as in cases of conflict between inhabitants or communities, again the State tried to involve and take into account customary practices and rules to avoid excessive resistance. However, because all the power was generally vested in the State, and because the State had to take above-local level interests into account, most of the time the basis of State’s decisions could not be challenged. “What could be challenged was the quantum of compensation paid by the public body...”

---

87 Montz (2003: 343-347) describes conflicts within Fulbe families over cattle. The fact that cattle were a common resource for Fulbe pastoralist families under the management of the ‘family head’, more or less regardless of ownership of the cattle, clashes with the Islamic inheritance (and private property) notions. For example, according to Islamic law, women have private ownership over inherited cattle, but in reality they cannot enforce such rights under the original Fulbe rules. Depending on the importance of the herd size for survival of the family versus the importance of adherence to religious rules and, thus, the piety of the group and the judges, a woman can try to get decision rights to her cattle.


90 Even where the Fulbe had been victorious, and had installed their law system, it was only superimposed on the local tradition of autochthonous people one century earlier. For some of those groups in the areas conquered by the Fulbe, the system found and nourished by the Germans (although called ‘traditional’ by them) was not really traditional, but fairly new being therefore ‘neo-traditional’. In addition to that, it was also changed by the colonial powers adapting it to their own legal perceptions and views. See Olivier de Sardan in Lavigne Delville (2000) 99-100: “customary law was derived from the way the administration interpreted rights over land and people as described to them retrospectively by the chiefs at the beginning of the colonial occupation”
expropriating land” (Fisiy 1992: 145), not the expropriation as such. This is necessarily an administrative challenge instead of a juridical one, going from Prefect to Minister (see below).

In short, during colonisation, three different legal systems co-existed. Apart from the statutory law on land tenure and conflict resolution, popular customary law regulated daily land interactions. In between, the “State’s customary law” could be involved. However, according to Fisiy (1992: 133), the latter was “out of tune with local practices” because it ignored the fact that customary law changes with the alteration of society”. “Some court pronouncements have not kept pace with socio-economic changes”, such as the increase of market forces and the “emancipation of the individual from strict ties of kinship” (id: 131).

After independence, the focus quickly shifted to privatisation and the registration of land, and with that, State involvement increased again, also as regards conflict mediation. However, it became apparent that “ignoring [...] local structures simply creates conflicts” (Fisiy 1992: 126). So, while land law was being created after unification, and even before this new law was officially enacted, the State had already installed a special institute to incorporate traditional leaders. This Land Consultative Board had to deal with the registration of land as such (see former section), but also with conflicts and ensuing disputes. Although the traditional chiefs constituted only a minority within the Board, they did have a large influence, because of their high legitimacy at the local level.

Since the unification, the State juridical system in the Republic of Cameroon has been organised according to the French system. The British Common Law system of the Anglophone part has more or less disappeared”. Conflicts are dealt with as in the French Code Civil, with more serious cases being subject to the French Code Penal. Based on the recognition that all different regions and ethnic groups have different land tenure and conflict resolution systems, the State has created space for customary courts at the unofficial, local level and installed Tribunaux de Premier Instance (Magistrate’s courts) as the first level in the official judiciary system. These are located in the departmental capitals and mostly use regional customary law. In civil cases they are only competent when both parties in the conflict agree to submit disputes to such courts. A practical problem is the frequent linguistic difference between the parties and the Magistrate, together with the lack of well-trained (juridical) translators”. The parties that do not consent with the Magistrate’s decision can go to a Court of Appeal in the provincial capital. Finally, the Supreme Court (Tribunal de Grande Instance) can check the decisions of lower-level courts. It has several chambers for both “legal and administrative matters as well as the appraisal of accounts” (Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. 1996: art 38).

In cases that deal with penal justice such as theft, murder” or (e.g.) disturbance of enjoyment of land”, the police have to bring charges at the Magistrate’s Court, for example based

---

1 See also Mathieu (1995) and Lavigne Delville (2000).
2 See Fonkah (1997).
3 In the summer of 2000, I witnessed a case of an accusation of witchcraft between two inhabitants of Sirlawé, at the Magistrate’s Court in Yagoua in the extreme north of Cameroon, being postponed for days and in the end even for months, because no ‘neutral’ translator from French to Tupuri and vice versa was available.
4 In Cameroon, witchcraft has been officially declared non-existent, so accusations of witchcraft are difficult to handle. Nevertheless, most customary courts (dependent on the chief’s attitude) and even some Magistrate’s Courts deal with conflicts related to this matter. Geschier (1997) even speaks of State interventions against the rising witchcraft activities designed to defend or to gain wealth and power: a judicial offensive to convict alleged witches.
5 In such cases, a registered title of land is unnecessary. Proven cultivation and use of the land is sufficient.
on accusations against civilians filed by (higher) members of the administration, based on accusations of civilians against each other or based on their own findings.

An example of how the Magistrate's court can include customary rules and practices in modern law is described by Van den Berg (1997: 241-242). In a case between a brother and sister over the ownership of a piece of land - both claiming the inheritance of it" - the Magistrate took into consideration the accounts of the family members as well as the village notables. These testimonies were quite contradictory, but the court chose to follow the explanation of the village elders that the land was given to the woman by her mother and that she planted trees on it. The development of the land by the woman (tree planting), in combination with the fact that the family involved was Islamic and thus that the woman had the right to inherit lands from her mother, made the Court decide in her favour*. Had the woman been a Christian or a follower of a traditional religion, the Court could not have given her ownership to the land.

As can be seen, the settling of land disputes is a difficult affair. It is even more difficult because the hierarchy of courts as depicted above does not exist in relation to land matters. Instead, the land law of 1974 "has come up with a hybrid group comprising bureaucrats and local authorities" (Fisiy 1992: 141). It has given" pre-eminence to the Land Consultative Board. Although this Board also has a role in land registration it is, as before the 1974 law, "empowered to settle disputes relating to the membership and boundaries of a community" (Egbe 2001: 4), as well as disputes relating to the registration and property of unregistered land (Law No. 19. 26 November 1983). As a result, it is an arbiter in its own decisions. During the registration procedure, appeals against decisions by the Board are "possible at the Tribunal de l'Instance or the préfet (under droit immobilier)" (Van den Berg 1997: 317). However, such appeals are seldom implemented because recommendations concerning titling are not made public before they reach the Minister of Domains and only therefore once the decision has already been taken. Fisiy (1992: 141) also points out the fact that the Board cannot give "a well-motivated legal opinion on rights infringed in any of the land cases" (id: 141) because of its administrative instead of judicial background. In addition, because the position of the Board is purely advisory "the Minister alone has the final word" (id: 142). One can only appeal against a decision by the Minister "to the Administrative Chamber of the Supreme Court, which involves a highly complicated procedure for introducing litigation." (id). This is, understandably, an impossible course of action for local peasants.

Therefore, and because the Board officially has only authority to handle issues of land property (of registered land)*, titling and registration, land disputes find their way to the civil courts via the formulation of land use rights, the infringement thereof and, specifically, the trespassing on somebody's land, although more often than not the latter is in fact also a dispute over ownership**.

* In fact, the case was subject to the penal code because the woman had accused her brother of infringing the peaceful enjoyment of the fruits of her land. A land ownership claim would have been dealt with by the administrative Land Consultative Board (see there).

** This case also shows that, within Islamic families, inheritance rights are not secure, and often clash with more customary rules (see also Moritz 2003).

†† Re-enforced officially in an amendment of 1983 to the 1974 laws.

†*Van den Berg (1997: 317) mentions the fact that the Mindif Land Consultative Board nevertheless handles conflicts over unregistered land.

‡‡ Indeed, conflict parties' opportunistic use of different formulations and denominations of the same conflict, so as to make it fall under the jurisdiction of either the Board or the Court, has engendered disputes between the two institutions itself.
Infringements of land use rights and trespassing can also be dealt with in Criminal Courts, depending on the access route of the complaining party. One of the issues that may be brought before one of the two courts is the use of fire. Fire sometimes leads to the destruction of standing crops and sometimes to the premature burning of grazing land. In addition to Civil and Criminal Courts (Magistrate Courts), Customary Courts are also competent to handle land conflicts. Thus, based on normative and cognitive awareness, financial capacities, manoeuvring skills and social relations, litigants can and do choose which forum will most serve their interests.

Even at a local level, different fora can be chosen due the overlapping administrative and political entities. Normally, local-level problems are first discussed by the persons involved and, if this does not solve the issue, with sub-local or local authorities. Their role in conflict mediation is firmly embedded in customary law and habits and may therefore differ from locality to locality. On the other hand, their position in land and resource management and related conflict mediation is officially recognised in the new constitution of 1996 (art 55 - 57), with the appointment of Regional Councils, in which traditional chiefs and communities have to be represented, together with a description of its rights and duties.

Local authorities are not only village and neighbourhood chiefs which although unofficial are recognised by the State. Lots of ethnic groups have different ‘masters’ who have local authority over the use of natural resources, such as those related to land (who decide over the appropriation of land for new comers, for example, and therefore over conflicts over land and land boundaries between indigenous people and foreigners) and over social matters, that is conflicts about resource or non-resource issues. It depends on local coherence and social bonding as to whether these traditional institutions still have (enough) legitimacy to perform their conflict mediating tasks.

The fact that traditional and formal conflict mediating systems do not always coincide, and even contradict each other from time to time, is magnified by the competition of the different authority systems at local level. Nowadays, to solve their conflicts, litigants not only choose between traditional or statutory courts but, locally, between the involvement of the police, the traditional chief, the elected mayor or the heads of the regional administration or line agencies. A ‘wrong’ choice, can lead to a negative outcome which favours the adversary or to lost court fees and bribe money without any solution having been reached. Arbiters can use the ambiguity of the system to perpetuate the conflict in their own favour. ‘Solutions’ can then give rise to more frustration and new problems in the future. This is aggravated by the high level of corruption that influences the behaviour of chiefs, civil servants (like sub-prefects, line agents and police) and judges alike.

Nevertheless, “local customary laws [...] provide the social legitimacy [for] interactions at

---

102 Court cases are expensive actions. So, “... just the threat of initiating a court action at the State level could serve as a strategic move during the dispute management process at the local level” (Fisiy 1992: 133).

103 See also Von Benda Beckman and Von Benda Beckman (1994).

104 So-called administrative authorities of ‘second’ or ‘third’ degree, who are customary chiefs.


106 See also Lavign Delville (2000: 103): “The real problems arise [...] from the multiplicity of arbitration authorities.”

107 Indeed, according to Mathieu (1995: 56): “the confusion and the non-application of land rules are not simply accidents or unfortunate imperfections” of conflicting law systems, but they are the conscious outcome of managed coexistence of different rules, by “those who have privileged access to political power and strategic information” (id)
the local level” (Fisiy 1992: 148). Only “when local norms are contested by the parties” (Fisiy 1992: 148), or when local norms collide, such as in cases where different cultural systems have to be applied to the same piece of land, does State law have to be resorted to as a last option.

Whereas, in the past, that same piece of land and related conflict was managed perfectly by the system of one of the now conflicting cultural systems, it may take time before the different parties agree that State law can now offer a way out106. Changing societal patterns and the loss of legitimacy of the formerly overruling system are hard to accept for those who lose their primacy. The loss of status of several lamido courts in the north of Cameroon may serve as an example107. Of course, when the conflict extends beyond the local arena (for example in border conflicts between different districts or when authorities themselves are involved) higher-level authorities and statutory law have to be involved. For most of the local inhabitants, however, the involvement of State law and State Courts entails problems because they “do not have the financial or cognitive resources to seek redress under the 1974 land reforms” (id: 149). In addition, according to Fonkah (1997: 2) “Cameroonian do not have any confidence in the courts, because most of the decisions that come out of them depend on the whims and caprices of the judges.”108

The fact that “getting your rights” also depends on social position locally, but especially in the higher-level political forums, is demonstrated by the struggle for the pasture territory in the mountains of North-West Province between a rich rancher and M’bororo cattle herders who have been indigenous since the 17th century. To reach his goal, the rich business man, who is a prominent member of the ruling party, ordered the local administration to back him and used the gendarmes to arrest, detain and even torture M’bororo who resisted his attempts to deprive them from their lands. Without any government objections being forthcoming, he tried to frighten away his adversaries by stealing their animals and harassing their wives and daughters. Other tactics even include imprisonment without charge a M’bororo man who was filming a disputed piece of grazing land and trying him before a military tribunal109. Marginal ethnic groups and individuals are hardly able to defend their interests in such situations.

In the case of crop damage by livestock, the gap between local farmers and official courts is filled by the institutional installation by the State of the so-called Land Consultative Commissions. The frequent crop damage by roaming livestock (which in the past was handled by the parties involved with some assistance from neighbours or local chiefs) appeared to be developing into a growing source of severe conflicts. Now, for each case of discord over such damage, the Land Consultative Commission is called together by its president, the local subprefect. The rest of the members are the regional heads of the veterinary service, the agricultural service and the forestry service, the local police superintendent and the ‘traditional’ land-chief110. The first two line agents in particular are easily accessible to peasants. The Commission has to descend to grassroots level and judge the amount of damage and the level

106 Although State law does not offer a consistent, congruent system.
108 For a comparable legal culture, see, e.g. about Honduras, Roquas (2000:178): “Latin American legal culture combines a great respect for formalities and rituals with a complete denial of the content of law.” “Landholders [...] have no confidence [...] in the ability of courts to solve their problems [...] it only leaves them with an empty wallet”. The avoidance of the judicial system results in “long, violent disputes that transcend generations ” (id. 177)
110 The lamido in the North of Cameroon, the Fon in North-West Province etc
of culpability of the livestock owner. After that, it takes decisions on compensation payments. Officially, the parties can still go to court but, in reality, this hardly ever occurs. The Land Consultative Commission can also be called upon in cases of field or pasture damage by fire. cases in which cattle tracks are blocked by new fields or in cases of discords over access of livestock to public water wells. It is even consulted sometimes in cases of boundary disputes between neighbouring farmers.

Thus, conflict resolution normally starts at an interpersonal level. When this does not work, parties can (and do) choose from a myriad of possibilities of which the official route via the courts is but one. Due to “too few magistrates and judges” (Fonkah 1997: 3) and an excessively arbitrary way of decision-making, most inhabitants do not have much trust in this route. Combined with a shortage of (juridical) knowledge and the fact that court cases are expensive, the most accessible route is usually via traditional authorities or the administrative Board (or just some of its members).

4.2 Far North province

The (again) triangular shape of the Far North Province stretches over 350 km from the southern border with Chad to Lake Chad at the far northern edge of the country. From east to west it is situated between the Logone River that forms the Chad border and the escarpments of the Mandara Mountains along the Nigerian border. With a total surface of approximately 48,125 km² it constitutes 10 % of the total land surface of Cameroon (see Figure 4.1). Far North province is home to a wealth of ethnic groups111 originating from three basic language groups112. It has the highest population density of the whole country (an average of 77 persons per km² and a total of 17 % of the national population). Some parts are even home to more than 250 inhabitants /km² (e.g. the northern Mandara Mountains), but other areas are without habitation (for example Waza National park)

At the same time, Far North Province is the most poverty-stricken area, with a poverty index well above that of the other provinces113. Infant mortality, for example, is as high as 200 per 1000, in contrast to 79.3 per 1000 for the country as a whole114. The general poverty incidence in the Far North is 56.3, as opposed to a countrywide poverty incidence of 38.7. This is partly due to the fact that the vast majority of the population are rural farmers, the poorest group in the whole country115. However, the farmers in the Far North are relatively poorer because of the low agricultural yields and the recurrent harvest failures there116.

111 Boulet (1984: 115) mentions 42 different ethnic groups in the North of Cameroon (from the southern border of Waza National park to the Benoué river). See also Meur and Felix (2001).
112 At least seven language families are represented (between others: Semitic (Arab) and Chadic (e.g. Bana, Mafa, Giziga) from the Afro-Asiatic phylum, West-Atlantic (Fulfulde) and Adamawa-Oubangu, (e.g. Tupuri, Mundang) from the Niger-Congo Phylum, and Saharian from the Nilo-Saharan Phylum (see Barreteau and Dieu (2000: 64)).
116 According to Njomah (2004: 34) agricultural yields “have remained almost stagnant over some 30 years” and “the population growth rate in the region has remained higher than the staple food growth rate.”
Figure 4.2 Far North Province

[Map showing regions and boundaries]
4.2.1 Environmental domain

Climate

For the inhabitants, both humans and animals, the most important climatic characteristics of the Sudano-Sahelian and Sudano Savannah environments\(^{117}\) of the Far North are the two distinct seasons - the wet and the dry (of which the latter is divided into a ‘cold’ and a hot one, according to the inhabitants) - the amount and pattern of rainfall in the rainy season, the amount of solar radiation and the winds. These four together influence factors such as water availability, possibilities for plant growth, and soil erosion, not to mention general feelings of well-being and possible levels of activity.

The alternation of the two seasons is caused by the change of anticyclonic winds. In the dry season (December and January) the Intertropical Front moves southwards from the Sahara desert and brings the dry and often sand-bearing Harmattan winds. During June and July the anticyclonic wind blows from the Atlantic Ocean and brings moisture-bearing clouds and rain. The amount and distribution of rainfall over the days, months and years varies enormously, but the monsoon normally starts in the beginning of April and continues until the end of September or the beginning of October. The highest rainfall is recorded in August\(^{118}\).

The Far North can be divided into three sub-climatic regions (see Figure 4.2) with diminishing mean yearly and monthly rainfall:

1. the Mandara Mountains (weather station in Mokolo at 795 m altitude),
2. the Diamaré (weather station in Maroua at 430 m), and
3. the extreme north (weather station in N’Djamena, Chad, at 295 m).

Due to the high altitude of the Mandara Mountains on the west border of the Far North Province, the sub-humid zone that stretches between the same latitudes from west to east all along the Sub-Saharan continent north of the equator\(^{119}\) includes a lump northwards into the Far North Province. Although the rainfall may be relatively high, the Mandara Mountains suffer from the same unpredictability in rainfall patterns, over the years and within years, as the rest of the semi-arid north.

Towards the north and east, precipitation diminishes from 1100 mm per year in the south west Mandara Mountains, bordering the Benoué basin, to 400 mm per year above Lake Chad. Only in those most northern regions does the climate resemble that of Jahnke’s “arid zone” (Jahnke 1982: 17). In general, in the whole Far North, the agro-climatic conditions are such that they can support both agriculture and husbandry, e.g. of grazing animals. In all three climatic areas, precipitation in the 1970-1990 period was lower than before, increased again in the first half of the 1990’s\(^{120}\) and then decreased again, albeit less dramatically than in the 1970’s and 1980’s (see Table 4.2.1). The latter can also be concluded on the basis of the

\(^{117}\) Semi-arid and sub-humid in the terminology of Jahnke (1982).

\(^{118}\) It is claimed that the unpredictability of the amount and distribution of rainfall is increasing, while the total amount is diminishing, due to global climate change (see Obale-Ebanga 2001: 25). Indeed, the last hundred years have seen one extreme long, more or less continuing, period of drought during the last quarter of the century (from 1970 to 1989), compared to only two short ones from 1910 - 1914 and from 1940 - 1944.


\(^{120}\) Information based on Beauvillain (1995), and L’Hôte (2000).
necessity of food aid to counter drought effects in 3 out of 5 years since 1995\textsuperscript{121}.

**Table 4.2.1**  
Mean year precipitation per period (Beauvillain 1995, l’Hôte 2000; ‘ = Qwikcast.com weather forecast). NB. ‘n.av.’ means ‘not available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Period</th>
<th>Mokolo</th>
<th>Maroua</th>
<th>Ndjamena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944 - 1969</td>
<td>1035</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 - 1990</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1991 - 1995       | 1119   | 980    | 4 out of 5 years >
|                   | n.av.  |        | 'normally humid' |
| 1995 - 2000\textsuperscript{a} |        | 850    | 584      |

Long-term pluviometric data recorded in Mokolo (10° 44’ N; 13° 49’ E; 795 m altitude) and Maroua (10° 35’ N; 14° 18’ E; 402 m altitude) show in the advanced mean over 3 years a dry period from 1937 to 1947 and from 1980 to 1989. The period at the end of the 1950s also had a lower than long term mean precipitation, although it was less dramatic than the other two periods (see Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3**  
Advanced mean over 3 years in Mokolo and Maroua (Beauvillain 1995: 72 and 74)

\textsuperscript{121} See [www.wfp.org/country_brief/projects/608400e.pdf](http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/projects/608400e.pdf), which deals with food aid in 1998 due to the shortage
The length of the rainy season is more or less the same in Maroua and Mokolo (5 months), but further north, where measurements were taken in N’Djamena, it lasts only 3 to 4 months. According to Njomaha (2004: 34), the duration of the rainy season has diminished since the 1970s and this has threatened the maturing of the crops and has also made people abandon their long cycle crops. For a good cultivation season, at least four subsequent months of more than 100 mm of rain are said to be necessary.

Solar radiation depends on the seasonal variation and latitude. Of course, during the rainy season, clouds cover the sky for much of the day, thereby decreasing the amount of sunlight. In addition, the Harmattan winds bring a dry fog that absorbs radiation, sometimes from November until the end of March, but which is most prevalent in February. In total, both radiation and temperatures increase in line with the gradient towards the north. For example, in 1996 in N’Djamena there were 3150 hours of sunlight while, at the same time, there were only 2900 hours in Maroua. Year means of temperature decrease from N’Djamena via Maroua to Mokolo, mainly due to a rise in altitude there (see Table 4.2.2). Evapo-transpiration also increases alongside solar radiation and temperature increases. The maximum mean monthly temperature is lowest in August and highest at the end of the dry season (April). The difference between the means of the hottest and coldest month in the whole province can be as much as 6.5 to 7° C. The lowest temperature is recorded during the nights in December-January, when there is little cloud. At that time, the difference between day and night temperature is also very high, especially further north (see Table 4.2.2). This makes living conditions difficult. For example, susceptibility to respiratory viruses increases.

### Table 4.2.2: Divers climatic parameters in the three climatic zones (based on L’Hôte (2000), and Olivry (1986. 1996) in L’Hôte (2000)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mokolo</th>
<th>Maroua</th>
<th>N’Djamena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solar radiation (in hours)</td>
<td>n av</td>
<td>2900</td>
<td>3150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean year temperature (in ° C)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max. mean monthly temp. (April; in ° C)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min. mean monthly temp. (January; in ° C)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean daily temp. minus mean nightly temp. in January (in ° C)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wind force can differ dramatically, especially during the rainy season. Construction damage and soil erosion by heavy winds occur especially just before and during downpours and thunderstorms.

### Geology and Soils

Geologically speaking, the Far North Province can be divided into two parts which are north of rain, locusts and grain-eating birds in 1997 and with food aid provided in 1999, due to an excessively late start to the rainy season, the effects of grain-eating birds and stray elephants in the Mindif area and caterpillars in the Mandara Mountains, [www.gea.org/paris/paris_lhote.html](http://www.gea.org/paris/paris_lhote.html) which deals with food aid provided in 2001 because of an excessively low precipitation in recent years, and [www.fao.org/docrep/10004](http://www.fao.org/docrep/10004) etc.

121 This depends on the area: for example, the data of Beauvillain (1995) does not reveal this for Mokolo. In Maroua a diminishing trend can be observed, but this started as long ago as in the 1960s.

121 L’Hôte (2000: 17) "...le paramètre déterminant de la valeur de temperature moyenne annuelle, la latitude n’étant qu’un facteur secondaire..."
and south of the great sand dune which stretches from Yagoua in the south-east to Limani which is more in the north-west, and which is probably "a beach related dune" (Obale-Ebang 2001: 27) of eolian origin from the time that lake Chad was much more extended. North of this line the geomorphology is part of the Chad basin. Here the vast floodplain of the Logone stretches out, without any distinctive interruptions. "The Chad basin is [...] composed of sediments from several sources, including lacustrine deposits exposed through the regression of the lake: alluvium, comprising fine and coarse feldspatic sands from the Logone and Chari rivers and sandy clayey alluvium from the Mandara highlands." (Obale-Ebang 2001: 27). Along the Logone, the soils are mostly hydromorphic vertisols consisting of mainly argillic particles. On the inner (= north) side of the Yagoua-Liman sand-dune, soils are mostly of the planosol type (Brabant & Gavaud 1985).

South of the dune ridge, the landscape consist of subdivisions and compartments, erupting in small massifs with high rising inselbergs (especially on the Mandara Mountains plateau) and, in the pediplain along the southern border, bristly rock stumps. It is possible to distinguish four relief zones (see Figure 4.4, in colour quire):
1) the Mandara Mountains in the west.
2) the foothills to the east.
3) the Diamaré plain, again eastward, extending into the Chadian plains, and
4) the pediplains of Kaelé in the south, more or less parallel to the southern border of the province with Chad.

The Mandara Mountains are the continuation of the western volcanic range that starts in the south with Mt. Cameroon, the highest point in West Africa, and still an active volcano124. In the north the rocky solitary peaks and steep slopes up to 1300 m are a popular tourist destination125. More to the south the slopes are less steep. There the landscape consists of high plateaux at an altitude of around 1000 m. with occasional granite inselbergs rising yet another 200 to 300 m (Morin 2000). The mountains consist of gneiss and granite covered with soils composed of lithosols of volcanic origin. In the southern plateau region they have a thin profile and a low clay content that makes them less fertile and not suitable for highly productive agriculture (Boutrais 1984: 76). These soils are supplemented with regosols, sometimes from alluvial and colluvial deposition and with local hydromorph characteristics. The soils in the steep, northern mountains vary in a normal fashion from thin rock layers to pockets of deep and fertile soils, improved over centuries of human activities such as terracing (Zuidervijk 1998, Van Andel 1998, Ndoum 2001).

The foothills have a similar basis and are covered with tropical ferruginous sandy soils of luvisol type, supplemented with leached planosols. "These soils [...] are highly susceptible to degradation of the chemical and physical properties when converted from natural savannah vegetation to cropland, largely because of the loss of organic matter..." (Obale-Ebang 2001: 28).

The same two soil types can be found in the Diamaré on acid rocks, together with cambisols. However, the most important types here are the vertisols with a sandy or clayey composition on basic rocks. These vertisols "are naturally fertile with high moisture retention capacity and with high potentials for crop production" (Obale-Ebang 2001: 29). The heavy

---

124 Mt Cameroon is 4,095 m high and erupted last in 1999.
125 In 2000, almost 5000 tourists visited the valleys and cliffs of the Mandara Mountains.
clay vertisols in the lower lacustrine and fluvial parts are specifically suitable for dry season sorghum production. Although all vertisols are easily affected by physical degradation, the deep and fine textured soils on the lacustrine plains do exhibit a certain robustness. Vertisols with a dry pédoclimat or local patches of planosols also cover the granite and gneiss basement of the Kaelé region.

Surface water and groundwater
Within the Far North Province the only permanent river is the Logone River, although in wetter years some of its tributaries in the Far North, like the Logomaty, also keep flowing. The Logone originates far south in the Adamaua highlands, flows east, passes through Chad, where it is joined by lots of tributaries of varying sizes, and, turning north and slightly to the west again, forms the Cameroon Chad border before ending up in Lake Chad. Its permanency makes it an important fishing river. The duration of flow in the seasonal rivers depends on the rainfall of the previous rainy season, the width of the streambed, obstacles in the streambed and the catchment area. In general, the Far North surface water as well as groundwater flows from the mountains to the Logone, in a north-eastward direction (Olivry and Naah 2000; Detay 2000). In conclusion, the Diamaré and extreme north of the province depend on rainfall patterns and the filling of groundwater reservoirs in the Mandara Mountains, as well as on the precipitation along the lengthy course of the Logone. The south-western part of the Mandara Mountains and a strip of land along the southern border of the province, however, are not connected to the Chad basin. For example, the river Louti, which starts west of Mokolo, finally discharges into the Benoué River. So here the rivers flow south (see Fig. 4.2). The same applies to the filling and flowing of the aquifers in this Atlantic basin, although Detay (2000) also stresses the fact that lots of aquifers in the Mandara Mountains are discontinuous, that is they do not connect to the southern ones.

Two artificial lakes (near Mokolo and near Maga) serve the drinking water supply of Mokolo town and function as irrigation pool for rice production respectively. The second one was constructed in the late 1970s by way of a dam in and along the Logone river. The rice was meant to feed the urban populations, but it turned out to be too expensive in comparison with Asian import rice. Locally it resulted in an ecological as well as social disaster. Therefore, in the early 1990s, a project was started to redress the implementation of the irrigation scheme and diminish the negative effects.

Furthermore, lakes and rivers can be a rich source of fish, both to enhance the biodiversity of a region and as a natural resource for human inhabitants. Examples of fish-rich natural lakes in the Far North are Lake Chad in the uppermost north part of Cameroon and Lake Fianga on the southern border of the ‘beec-du-canard’ with Chad. Because of their position, both lakes

---

126 There are some smaller ones as well, but some of these are so small that in dry years they do not survive to the next rainy season. The barrage of Rhumsiki (in the Mandara Mountains, between Mogodé and Bourah), for instance, serves a small, but year-round artificial lake, used mostly for drinking water for animals in that region.

127 The fish stocks in the Logone and therefore in Lake Chad became disturbed, the make-up of the grazing lands of the floodplain changed to include more annual instead of perennial grasses (Scholte et al 2000) and the availability of water in the Waza Nature Park diminished (see also Vanpraet (1976), Coe and Foley (2001), Drijver and Marchand (1985) and SOGREAH (1980)).

128 The function of the floodplain and the river as a resort for diverse ethnic groups in the further dry Sahel surroundings diminished dramatically. Fishermen and cattle keepers had to look for other sources and even farmers saw their yields decline (see Drijver and Van Wetten (1992) or Van Est (1999)).

Lake Chad is particularly suffering from a continuous depletion over the years, in addition to a seasonal halving during the dry season due to evaporation. The Logone River is the most important source of fish in the region. Several ethnic groups, like the Kotoko, have based their livelihoods almost solely on fish. Like many other renewable activities related to natural resources, almost all fishing is a seasonal occupation, especially in the Far North where the seasonal flooding of the Logone sets the time for spawning and growth.

*Natural vegetation*

The diverse types of soils together with the climatic circumstances contribute to several different vegetation covers, from tree and shrub savannahs to extended grass-fields in the Logone floodplain. There, due to month-long inundations, trees cannot easily survive. Because of the age-long habitation and the high population density, almost all natural vegetation is of a secondary nature. Fotius (2000) speaks of “dégradées ou anthropiséés”. This description refers to the classic ecological categories of the exploitation and conservation phases, in which the latter, on the basis of slow accumulation and the storage of energy and material, was called the climax stadium, or primary forest. However, this notion passes over new ecology ideas of a permanent cycle of discontinuous patterns of change in four subsequent ecosystem ‘functions’ (or stages), in which not only accumulation of capital, but also “the degree of connectedness among the variables” (Holling and Sanderson 1996: 62) plays a role. In this concept man is a normal part of the ecosystem.

Nevertheless, nowadays some areas of the Far North are totally bereft of human habitation and sometimes even totally or seasonally unused by humans. Where population densities are low and climate and soil condition are favourable, almost fully grown savannah woods can be found. Examples are certain areas on the Mandara Mountains Plateau or that part of the Diamaré that stretches between Mindif and Moulvoudaye. The most notorious examples are located north of the sand-dune, namely the two nature parks of Far North Province being the small Kalamaloué, in the floodplain far north, and the bigger Waza National Park, one-third of which is covered by *Acacia Seyal* forest. The second park in particular, with its high biodiversity, is an attractive tourist destination.

South of the sand dune the vegetation mirrors the soil types of the four relief zones. According to Brabant and Gavaud (1985), the natural vegetation in the mountains consists of woody savannah of the Medio-Sudan altitude type with *Isoberlinia doka* being the most important tree. Further to the north *Anogeissus leiocarpus* and *Acacia* (or *Faidherbia*) *albida* dominate the tree species. The foothills are home to the same woody savannah with a *Anogeissus/Faidherbia* composition, supplemented in some areas by *Boswellia dalzielii* and *Combretum* spp.. In the Diamaré plain, where there is still some rocky subsoil, *Anogeissus leiocarpus* is again dominant, together with *Sclerocarya birea*. In addition, sandy-clayish areas are dominated by *Acacia Seyal* and *Balanites aegyptica*. Moving further to the south-east, there are vegetation covers of *Amblygonocarpus andongensis* and *Detarium microcarpum*, together with *Guiera*
*senegalensis*. Approaching the Chadien plain, in the 'bec-du-canard' corner, these species dominate in interchanging areas\(^{134}\). In the open savanna where there are a lot of anthropogenic influences they are supplemented with *Acacia* species and *Piliostigma reticulata*.

All these different natural bush areas can serve as grazing lands for livestock because of the growth of fine (and coarse) annual and perennial grasses, such as *Hyppherhenia bagirmica*, several herbs and edible bushes, whose leaves provide food for small ruminants\(^{135}\). According to Gaston (1996) the general year round carrying capacity of the Sahelo-Sudan is \(3 - 9\) ha/TLU\(^{136}\). A Tropical Livestock Unit (TLU) is equivalent to \(1.42\) head of cattle, or ten (hair) sheep or goats (Dietz et al 2001: 198). Breman (1975) has calculated a more positive outcome in the 1000 mm rain belt of up to \(1.2\) TLU/ha\(^{137}\).

In addition to that the bush is useful for the extraction of fuel wood and timber, both for direct use and to sell to urban centres\(^{138}\). The bush is also indispensable for all sorts of minor 'forest' products that are used directly in households or as raw materials for small-scale manufacturing\(^{139}\). Examples are grass for roofs, mats and storerooms for own use or sale, wild berries used to prepare cookies for sale and several sorts of green leaves used as ingredients to

\(^{134}\) See, e.g., Donfack et al (1997), Fotius (2000), and Seignobos (2000a)

\(^{135}\) Some of these bushes and trees, such as *Balantium* and *Acacia* species, have high protein contents

\(^{136}\) Gaston (1996) divides the Sudano-Sahel pastures of the Lac Chad basin into five different types. The most important in Cameroon are 1) the waterlogged soils (flooded during and after the rainy season: the Yaere) that can produce \(2000\) kg DM/ha, especially when managed by burning; 2) the sandy soils which produce, on average, \(1000\) kg DM/ha and have a year round carrying capacity of \(4.5\) ha per TLU. This type is useable all year round, although the browse layer is somewhat over-grazed and the amount of coarse grasses that are inedible in the dry season increases; 3) antropic formations with a cultivation-fallow complex. During the rainy season the livestock here have to survive on the fine grass layers of the follow fields (e.g. *Eragrostis tremula*) that can produce up to \(1000\) kg DM/ha, and during the rest of the year on crop residues and the browse layer. In mountain areas a production of \(2000\) DM/ha can be achieved (rainy season carrying capacity of \(3\) ha/TLU) with *Aristida kerstingii* and *Loudetia togoensis*, but both are inedible in the dry season, thus resulting in an outmigration to the Yaere. Under very unfavourable conditions up to \(9\) ha/TLU is needed

\(^{137}\) According to Breman (1975) palatable primary production (DM of herbaceous cover) of grazing lands in the 1000 mm per year precipitation belt is roughly \(2.8\) ton/ha/year (NB on favourable soils etc), according to Boudet (1975) a TLU needs \(6.25\) kg of dry matter per day as feed. These two assumptions together correspond (roughly) to a capacity per ha of \(1.2\) TLU (over the year), when the rainfall reaches the average of \(1000\) mm per year. NB. Total biomass production is not only dependant on the precipitation but also on evaporation and the water-holding capacity of the soils (see De Leeuw and Tothill 1990), vegetation species, etc. Thus it also varies greatly according to area (see De Leeuw and Tothill 1990: 7). The number of possible TLU/ha also depends on forage quality and on the spreading of the available forage over time. De Leeuw and Tothill (1990: 2) mention a decline such that “at the end of June only \(10\%\) of the original biomass was left.” When grazers are present, however, part of this assignment of “a 50\% decline in standing biomass from October to March” with a subsequent acceleration of ‘climatic’ decline does not take place, because the animals have already eaten part of that biomass. The quality of forage depends on soil fertility, growth phase of the grass (older grass contains less protein) and precipitation level (higher mean annual precipitation gives lower protein contents). De Leeuw and Tothill (1990) mention that a certain soil type in a 400 mm rain belt gives an end-of-season N-content of grass of \(1\%\), while this same soil type only produces grass with \(0.5\%\) nitrogen in the 1000 mm belt. Even when there is enough bulk grass, cattle will lose weight at the end of the dry season in this precipitation zone.

In addition, Breman (1975: 6) estimates that there is a more real capacity for cattle in the 1000 mm belt of \(0.7\) TLU/ha, because “productivity under an average rainfall one or two times less than the standard deviation’ is more interesting to “avoid the risk of destroying the grassland beyond repair during relatively dry years”.

\(^{138}\) See, for example, Geist and Lambin (2001); Ali and Peters (2001)

make sauce. Another example is wild vegetables or small game that can serve as emergency food in times of hardship (e.g. wild yams, mice) or as a steady stock to add to the normal diet. The last important supplies from the bush are the traditional medicines, from plant origin and from (small) animals.

**Subsistence production**

Although big differences in intrinsic fertility and vulnerability for erosion exist, most of the soils are useful for agricultural purposes. In general, rural farmers produce for their own subsistence and that of their family members. However, all surpluses of this domestic production can be (and are) sold on local markets, both directly and sometimes via small-scale middlemen.

The most important crop that the inhabitants of the Far North produce for subsistence purposes are different sorts of sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor bicolor*). Pearl or finger millet (*Pennisetum glaucum* and *Eleusine coracana*) is only rarely cultivated. Without sorghum or millet, people feel undernourished. A preference for what the inhabitants call white, yellow or red sorghum depends on the area and ethnicity of the farming group. The so-called *sorghum réplicé* (called ‘muskuaari’ in Fulfulde) has been cultivated for approximately fifty years, especially in the Diamaré plains from Mokolo to the south boundary of the province and up to the ‘bec-du-canard’ in the east, on clayish vertisols (called ‘karal’ in Fulfulde). This sorghum type does not need rain while maturing since it grows on the water-table in the soil. At the end of the rainy season it is sown in beds. Later the seedlings are transplanted to fields that have to contain enough water in the subsoil to support growth until the end of January or beginning of February, when the grains are ripe. If the field as such cannot hold enough water, conservation measures, such as small dikes (tied ridges), can improve the water-content by giving the fallen rain more time to penetrate the soil. Obviously, this crop can help to prevent shortages in the next cropping season, especially after a bad harvest due to pests (e.g. locust) in the rain-fed crops. Nevertheless, after a year of bad precipitation, most of the time the transplant-sorghum yield also fails.

Maize (*Zea mays*) and rice (*Oryza sativa*) are gaining in popularity as part of the staple diet. The Fulbe, for example, prefer maize to sorghum. Especially the short cycle maize varieties that are already mature in August can help to get through the hunger period. Although total production is lower than in the case of experimental production. One of the problems with maize production is the risk of low yields due to high water demand and a susceptibility to weeds. In addition, maize requires good soil fertility. Farmers mostly cultivate this crop adjacent to the compound so they can administer household refuse. Subsistence rice production takes place mostly in areas that are swampy (during the rainy season); irrigation rice is mostly a cash crop (see section 2.3.1).

In addition to these cereals almost all farmers produce other crops, such as cowpeas (*Vigna unguiculata*), common beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) or Bambara groundnuts (*Vigna subterranea*), all of which forms an easy protein source and, being leguminous, enhances the fer-
tility of the soil. Diverse root and tuber crops and vegetables also supplement the household food supply. Although groundnuts and soya beans (rare, but on the increase) are mostly produced for cash, they do supplement the food supply of the producing households. In the Mandara Mountains, before the cash crop varieties were introduced by the French, a local groundnut variety was already produced. Several farmers also grow tobacco in a corner near the compound for their own use and, if the harvest is sufficient, to boost the household income. Lemongrass (Cymbopogum spp) is only cultivated occasionally, mostly within the compound, to be used as essential oil in herbal teas and by healers against various diseases. Several types of fruit trees are planted adjacent to the compounds or on the river banks.

4.2.2 Human domain

**Health**

In the Far North, all indicators with regard to the health situation are worse than the country average, except for the rate of visits to informal health centres (see Table 4.2.3) and some infectious diseases that are related to a more humid climate. Nevertheless, "surveys show that Far North province is still a region with widespread endemic epidemics" and that "the most frequent diseases are almost all related to problematic hygiene" (De Backer et al 2000: 138, translation RN). This is mostly due to poor health information and education services. In the whole country, as well as in the Far North, some indicators score lower for poor people (and therefore farmers) than for non-poor people. Examples are the rate of visits to formal health centres, the average annual spending on health and the percentage of vaccinated children. With regard to the latter indicator, the Far North reveals a smaller difference between poor and richer households than other Cameroonian provinces. This may be due to an overall less adequate vaccine supply to the Far North than to the rest of the country.

| Table 4.2.3 Some health indicators for the Far North province compared with rural and total Cameroon (when no other information is given, the data concerns the year 2001. Source: Ministry of Economy and Finance 2002) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Doctors per capita$^d$           | 1: 46 972       | n av            | 1: 14 730       |
| Nurses per capita$^d$            | 1: 8500         | n av            | 1: 2725$^b$     |
| Formal health centres per capita$^a$ | 1: 34142 (where of 34 hospitals$^e$) | n av            | 1: 10 000       |
| Formal health centre visits      | 67.5            | 72.2            | 75.5            |
| Informal health centre visits    | 32.5            | 27.8            | 24.5            |
| Distance to nearest health centre (in km) | 4.05         | 5.26            | 3.86            |
| Distance to nearest health centre (in min.$^f$) | 35.0            | 39.7            | 30.6            |
| Percentage of vaccinated children aged 12 - 23 months$^c$ | 34              | 50.3            | 55.3            |
| Percent of > 23 months never vaccinated | 32.8            | 22.8            | 19.2            |
| Annual spending on health per capita (Fcf$^a$) | 6.220           | 12.922          | 22.036          |
| Share of health spending on overall expenditure (%$^c$) | 3.2             | 7.6             | 6.5             |
| HIV/AIDS prevalence (%)          | 13.1            | n av            | 11              |
| Prevalence of other infectious diseases (in %$^c$) | Malaria $^c$ 8.6 | n av            | Malaria 11      |
|                                     | Diarrhoea 2.1   |                  | Diarrhoea: 2.8  |
|                                     | Respiratory: 2  |                  | Respiratory: 9  |
| Life expectancy                   | 42              | n av            | 48$^c$          |
In addition to the disequilibrium between the provincial population and the number of medical personnel compared to other provinces (in 1995 the Far North was home to 17% of the country's population and only 7% of its nurses and doctors\textsuperscript{153}) the health centres and health personnel are not evenly divided either over the regions or according to population densities. Maroua, as the provincial capital has a disproportional amount of doctors (15 of the total of 48 in the whole province\textsuperscript{154}) and more than its proportional share of hospitals. In some areas there are several hospitals less than 1 km from each other, while other areas suffer from a total lack of health centres. Most nurses work in health centres, instead of leading rural health posts as recommended by the WHO. Another problem is the distribution of medicines. This is difficult, now the State institution assigned this task (Onapharm) has been closed down because of budget shortages. Especially in the Far North, with its poor infrastructure and distance to the metropolis, many health centres are not able to distribute enough or the right medicines.

\textbf{Education}

The Far North literacy figures are very low compared to those of the rest of the country. Although numbers have been on the increase since 1995 (after a steep decline due to the economic crisis of the 1980s), differences between the north and the south remain almost the same. In 1999, the whole country had a school enrolment percentage of 69.22, while the Far North only achieved a meagre 25% (Yaya 1999). Differences between school attendance by boys and girls are high in the Far North province, especially in the rural areas where almost no girls attend school.

\textsuperscript{153} Leguminous plants bind nitrogen out of the air due to their symbiosis with nitrogen-binding Rhizobium bacteria in their root system.
\textsuperscript{154} For example: (sweet) potatoes, yam, African eggplant, hot pepper, pumpkin, and several leaf vegetables.
\textsuperscript{155} Especially guava, mango, papaya and citrus, but occasionally also a small type of banana.
\textsuperscript{156} In the beginning of the 1990s severe epidemic outbreaks of yellow fever, cholera and meningitis were recorded. Almost every year during the dry season, a number of areas of the North are hit by meningitis outbreaks. A measles outbreak, with mortalities amongst young children and old aged, was recorded during the dry season of 2001, especially in the south-east of the province.
\textsuperscript{157} Especially the low vaccination rate for poliomyelitis in the Far North is a subject for concern because of the influx of wild polio-virus from north Nigeria, where traditional leaders have forbidden vaccinations against this disease.
\textsuperscript{158} Van Beek (1989: 622).
\textsuperscript{159} See, for example, De Backer et al (2000: 135).
Unfortunately, the economic crisis has resulted in the current low number of teachers. This is because insufficient young inhabitants have been educated to fulfil the role. This is especially a problem in the Far North, where less than one teacher with an official degree is employed per primary school. The rest of the teachers are so-called parent teachers. These are voluntary teachers, paid by the pupils’ parents and mostly with only some years of secondary education themselves. In 1999, the number of pupils per teacher nationwide had increased to 84 from 66 in 1995. In later years, the number of pupils per teacher increased further. In the Far North this amount frequently reached 150 (Yaya 1999). For some literacy figures of the Far North compared to those of the whole country: see Table 4.2.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2.4 Education-related indicators for the Far North and country in 2001 (source: Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2002, Iyébi-Mandjek 2000, and Yaya 1999)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Far North Province</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy for men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average spending (per capita) on education: in Fcfa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to nearest primary school (in km)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils per teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of 6-14 years old registered in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils in secondary education*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = figures over 1990 from Iyébi-Mandjek 2000 and Unesco Annual Statistics 1999

The situation with regard to secondary education is also disheartening. As can be seen in Table 4.2.4 less than four percent of all pupils in secondary schools are from the Far North. Since 1990, the total numbers have increased but provincial differences have remained the same. With a population equal to 17% of the country’s total population this is a grave under-representation. As regards the first secondary education cycle of four years, there were 32 colleges for general and 7 for more technical education in 1997. Thirteen post-primary education units for arts and household-related issues are situated in rural areas. The second cycle of three years, leading to a baccalaureate, was only covered by 15 ‘lycées’, of which only two offered technical subjects. There are no higher education institutes in the Far North Province. The nearest university is in Ngaoundéré, some 500 km south of Maroua.

4.2.3 Economic domain

**Cash crops**

Of the cash crops produced in the Far North, groundnuts and cotton155 are the most important. Both were introduced by the French colonial administration, before and after World War II respectively. Since the 1990s, beans have gained in importance now that there is demand on the internal and Nigerian market and because the Far North has a favourable climate. Predominantly, these are all small-scale cultivations, apart from the more extended irrigated rice schemes of

---

155 Where no other reference is given, the information about groundnuts is based on Iyébi-Mandjek and Seignobos (2000b) and that about cotton on Roupsard (2000).
In some areas onions, which were introduced by the Islamic population and sometimes garlic are produced with the help of small-scale irrigation. Substantial areas along rivers are used for onion production in particular. This can, in turn, cause a rapid rise in the commercial value of the land. Nowadays, North Cameroon is known as the major onion-producing region in the country (Njomah 2004: 193). It can generate high incomes for the farmers involved. The supply of taro, potatoes and sweet potatoes to the towns originates in the Mandara Mountains and foothills. In addition, the French introduced fruit as a cash crop in the 1950s. Since new varieties were developed in the 1980s (Njomah 2004: 164), commercial fruit plantations now exist around Maroua. In the towns and along the major roads small quantities of tomatoes and carrots are sold. In addition to that, tomatoes are produced for ‘export’ to the south of the country. In general, commercial vegetable cropping is only carried out near towns (such as Maroua, Mokolo, Yagoua) because they perish quickly if transported over any longer distances.

After a start of the cultivation in around 1930, groundnuts remained the only export crop from North Cameroon until well into the 1950s. The French encouraged cultivation by means of favourable prices, they introduced new, high-yielding varieties and provided all the farmers south of the sand-dune, from the mountains and mountain plateaux to the eastern borders with Chad, with information on good farming practices in relation to groundnuts. However, when cotton cultivation started in the Far North, the two crops became competitors and groundnut production survived only in the foothills and mountain plateaux where there were favourable physical circumstances. In the Diamaré plains, the better cotton soils, the high prevalence of groundnut diseases and the easier combination of cotton with (the increasingly prevalent) transplant-sorghum, caused an almost absolute disappearance of groundnut production. Only on the Yoldé and Yolkonde soils further east did some groundnut-production persist.

Nevertheless, production more than doubled between 1958 and 1983 (15,000 ton of grain) despite the drought years. Both the surface and the yield/ha increased. The latter changed from 500 kg/ha in the late 1960s to 1,000 kg/ha in the Diamaré in 1985. At that moment, the State did not believe any profit was to be gained from groundnuts and ceased all its involvement. However, commercial groundnut production, albeit as a lower proportion of the total production, continued. The groundnuts were sold partly on the foreign market, especially Nigeria, but mostly on the internal market. A high quality groundnut is transported from the northern Mandara Mountains to the south of the country for oil and sweets, while the mountains plateaux and the Kaélé plain export a low quality groundnut to the west for paste. Small entrepreneurs buy at village level from the end of October to mid February and sell to bigger merchandisers. Finally, the large-scale trade is in the hands of only a small number of merchants. Prices differ according to month or even week of the month - when festivities are imminent - according to yield and supply and according to the market location (e.g. on the Nigerian border prices can be twice as high as in inland areas).

The new cash crop of beans also competed with groundnuts as regards land and agricultural labour. Nowadays, lots of farmers throughout the north cultivate this crop. The average yield

154 SEMRY = Société d’expansion et de Modernisation de la Riziculture de Yagoua
157 See for example Timmermans and De Groot (2001).
158 Fulfulde for Cambisols
is 900 kg/ha. In general, commercial hauliers take 30 bags of beans to the south and west for every 100 bags of groundnuts. This crop is increasingly traded in the wider region, for example, in Nigeria and Gabon (Njomaha 2004: 194).

Commercial cotton cultivation started in the Far North in the beginning of the 1950s. The French (State and private interest) set up a system of seed, chemical fertiliser and information distribution throughout the whole north up to the sand dune that traverses the Far North161. They offered a fixed price independent of distance between production place and export harbour, with such disturbing a possible Thünian process (see chapter 2). The foothills of the mountains appeared to offer the best physical circumstances, resulting in the highest yield (700 – 1000 kg/ha) and the highest total production to date. Moreover, the soils in the plains were good and, as already mentioned, the easy combination with *muskuaari* transplant-sorghum meant that cotton started to dominate the groundnut fields in the Diamaré. According to Njomaha (2004: 164) the amount of land devoted to cotton is still on the increase. This is probably due to the access cotton production generates to farm inputs such as fertilisers, which can subsequently be used by the farmer on his other crops. Yet, cotton could never replace groundnuts in the high mountains and plateaux of the Mandara. After a temporary decline in production during the late 1980s162, cotton production in the whole north of Cameroon was estimated at 115,000 tons (Raemakers 2001) in 1992-1993, while this increased again to 223,100 ton from 190,920 ha in 1997.

From the beginning, the French and Cameroonian cotton promoting institutions (nowadays SODECOTON163) organised the production in a kind of production chain from seed supply, via fertiliser and equipment supply to guaranteed sale by the farmer to the SODECOTON, binding the producers with easy credit in the early days of the growing season. This institute constructed proper physical infrastructures for more remote areas. In order to reduce the labour competition with the food crops, it encouraged the use of ploughs in cotton production. On the one hand this meant a disposal of the soil to easy dehydration164; on the other hand it meant an increase in animal husbandry by farmers who presently did not have their own cattle, donkeys or horses.

*Farm animals*

The Far North Province, with its extended, almost parasite free bush lands, was an ideal region in which to keep livestock. For that reason, various nomadic groups migrated there over time. Invasions, raids and unfavourable climatic circumstances, as well as imprudent policies may from time to time have hindered the increase in the number of cattle in certain areas or the whole province but, in the long run, the total number of livestock has steadily increased. In certain areas numbers increased quickly, for example, in the Kar-Hay sub-department (see Fig 4.2: Mayo Danay department with its capital Doukoula) an increase of up to 100 % was observed between 1950 and 1980, due to the increased wealth of the people through cotton production and the capitalisation of migrant remittances.

During the droughts of the 1970s, the total number of livestock in the whole Sudano-Sahel zone decreased. But in the Far North of Cameroon, cattle numbers did not decline because lots of cattle nomads sought refuge in the water rich areas of some of its regions (e.g. the plateaux of

---


162 Although the production in the Far North in 1989 was still as high as 66,000 ton on 53,500 ha.

163 Société du Développement du Coton (Cotton Development Corporation).

164 Especially in the Mandara Mountain plateaux this turned out to be disastrous see Van Beek (1989: 636).
the Mandara Mountains). However, the total of small ruminant numbers did decline during the 1972-1974 droughts because this type of animal is more easily commercialised or used as food. The subsequent 1980 droughts also depleted the wells in the former refuge areas. This time, the total livestock numbers decreased to less than 30%. The transhumance areas were especially badly hit, such as Logone-Chari department (halving of the numbers from 228,000 in 1980 to 122,000 in 1990) and the Mindif region, where a 30% decrease occurred. This is notwithstanding the fact that, in 1985, herds that had sought refuge in Chad in the 1960s and 1970s returned because of the civil war there (Seignobos 2000e: 115-119; Boutrais 1984: 433; Beauvillain 1989: 428). This time the numbers of cattle declined dramatically in Kar-Hay as well.

Table 4.2.5  Livestock numbers in the Far North over the years (long term).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>484 000</td>
<td>908 000</td>
<td>605 333</td>
<td>689 040</td>
<td>1 147 038^*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>960 000</td>
<td>433 000</td>
<td>720 000^b</td>
<td>750 000</td>
<td>688 471^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat (together)</td>
<td>623 000</td>
<td>920 000^b</td>
<td>937 500</td>
<td>988 763^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>12 180</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>6 090</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>6 561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkeys</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>20 000</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>23 216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>24 000</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>62 253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>1 025 000</td>
<td>n.av.</td>
<td>1 146 630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^* = this augmentation is mainly due to a rise in numbers in the Logone floodplain since the restoration of the flooding by the Waza-Logone project^6^.

^b = between 1985 and 1990, sheep and goat numbers remained more or less the same.

After the start of a livestock number restoration from the late 1980s onwards, a drought period that influenced numbers occurred again in the early 1990s. Since 1995, numbers have again been on the increase (see Table 4.2.6), although certain areas are still subject to ongoing decline. For example, according to Djouvé (2001), cattle numbers in Mayo Tsanaga department decreased from 92,428 cattle in 1991 to 73,250 in 2000.

Pig numbers increased from the early 1990s onwards, because of the rising demand from the south. There, pig production stagnated due to severe epidemics. Only the non-Muslim population is engaged in pig farming and it is done especially in beer brewing and rice-producing areas where left-overs are abundantly available as pig feed^6^.

It has to be realised that all numbers (especially of ruminants) are estimates. It is very difficult to count the numbers of cattle and small ruminants. Animals are constantly on the move with their herders, not only during the seasons and years, but also during a single season. Cattle herders always seek the best places to graze their herds, whether this is across the border of a department or the country. Asking owners about cattle numbers does not work. It is a cultural habit not to tell anyone about it, because showing off about your wealth can cause general misfortune or make others jealous and thus bring you bad luck (e.g. by performing witchcraft or by accusing you of witchcraft). Even counting during vaccinating procedures does not provide any real numbers because not all cattle are brought. Due to the fact that a head tax has to be paid on cattle, owners only get that number of cattle vaccinated that they deem necessary to obtain


^6^ Njomaha (2004: 166)
travel licenses and to obtain high enough protection levels against the diseases.

Table 4.2.6 Livestock numbers over the years (shorter term) in Far North Province  
Source: Djomvé (2001) and Délégué Vétérinaire Provincial (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>years</th>
<th>93-94</th>
<th>94-95</th>
<th>95-96</th>
<th>96-97</th>
<th>97-98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>689 040</td>
<td>585 400</td>
<td>987 000</td>
<td>1 004 000</td>
<td>1 147 038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>751 048</td>
<td>593 000</td>
<td>622 650</td>
<td>653 782</td>
<td>688 471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats</td>
<td>938 393</td>
<td>784 998</td>
<td>824 276</td>
<td>865 489</td>
<td>988 763</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-agricultural economic activities

Off-farm

The off-farm activities performed by town people are of particular importance. Apart from a large number of civil servants, who come mostly from the rest of the country, and employees of international NGOs and churches, some of whom come from abroad, most people who earn their income from non-agricultural sources, are (bigger and smaller) traders. The merchandise may be import or export products of (small-scale) industrial or agricultural origin. Import and export can take place over international boundaries with Nigeria or Chad, or over provincial boundaries with regions as far south as those bordering the Atlantic Ocean. The transport within the province of fuel wood from rural areas and regional markets to towns can also form an important element of trade for individual middlemen or bigger urban-based companies. In the towns and larger villages, several types of service-related employment can be found, for example in restaurants and shops, in motorbike ‘public’ transport, in education or in health centres. The rise in the number of mobile telephone networks has led to an increase in individually-operated, roadside telephone posts.

Trade is also one of the most important off-farm activities in rural areas. Some regions attract tourists leading to employment opportunities in hotels, as guides, etc. However, this option is only limited to very few localities. For example tourist trips from Maroua to Waza National Park or to the Mandara Mountain ridge along the border with Nigeria serve as a source of income.

In a number of areas, whole ethnic groups base their life on fishing. The Kotoko in the Logone floodplain are a good example. There, most of the time women catch fish for household consumption and most men catch fish to sell at the market. According to Prins and Mahamat (2003), a total of 12,000 tons of fresh fish per year is caught in the floodplain and Lake Maga, most of which is sold to the towns of the Far North and exported to Nigeria and Chad. Further to the south, some fishermen and fish traders use the catch from Lake Fianga in Chad to sell at local markets.

Several young men regard banditry as a way of living. They form groups of highwaymen and rob rich merchants on their way home after a day of healthy trading at a regional market. The State’s response to this phenomenon was the installation of a semi-military ‘anti-gang’, with a

167 See e.g. Ali and Peters (2001). According to Njomaha (2004: 166-67) fuel wood extraction and sale take place in accordance with Thünian processes (see chapter 2).
168 Worth 2.3 million Euro (Prins and Mahamat 2003)
169 Because of a lack of fuel wood with which to smoke the fish properly, an enormous amount of pesticides is used to conserve it. This poses a major threat to the environment and to the health of the fishermen and consumers (Prins, pers. comm.).
broad mandate. Some say they even had the license to kill directly, but this has given rise to deep
corns in the international community fearing a downward spiral of diminishing human rights\(^{17}\).

**On-farm**

Both men and women gather and cut fuel wood for sale from nearby bush areas and their own
fallow land. This has increased since the 1970s – 1980s droughts as an alternative income
source when crops failed.

The petty trade of various types of handicrafts and prepared foodstuff or drinks based on agric-
ultural crops or bush products serve as a permanent cash provider, especially for women. For
men, labour migration is an important income-generating activity in the Far North. Men tend to
follow the harvest season of the various crops from densely populated areas such as the north
Mandara Mountains or towns. Between the sowing and harvesting of the fields a migration wave
moves towards the North Province (Béoué area) to help in the earlier harvest there. After the
harvesting of personal crops in December-January, the transplant sorghum (*muskuaari*) harvest
in the Diamaré plains attracts lots of labour migrants from all over the province.

4.2.4 Social domain

Political-economic factors are not only important for the way natural resources are exploited, 
they also co-determine whether or not these resources diminish. In addition, they set the stage
for (connected) conflicts and the resolutions thereof.

The actual situation is based on former constructions (either being in accordance with such
constructions, or rejecting them) and on “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988) that “not only
results from a researcher’s specific location in the material and cultural realities of the world,
but also in the chronological particularities of a certain moment in time” (Frances Gouda 2002,
personal comment\(^{17}\)). For that reason, I will describe the political-administrative circumstances from the pre-colonial time onwards. Because the situation in the Far North Province is
deeply influenced by the powers and influences of successive local and invading ethnic
groups, this description will take the form of a short, general historical overview. It has to be
added, though, that the information on which this description is based is derived mainly or
even only from sources of dominating groups, such as Islamic invaders or European colonis-
ers, and as such is unavoidably biased.

Apart from the information on the cultural domain given in this historic overview, the actual
cultural diversity and the related issues relevant for the research are dealt with in a separate
section below.

**Political and administrative organisation and history**

The north of Cameroon is often called the “crossroads of Africa”. This means that many dif-
ferent ethnic groups have moved in and intermingled between the escarpments of the Mandara
Mountains in the west and the floodplain of the Logone River in the east. From early times
onwards, incoming peoples have swept across the country and have (mostly) incorporated the
people already there into their cultural and political systems\(^{17}\).

\(^{17}\) See, for example, Amnesty International reports (1998 or 2000) or IRIN (2002)

\(^{17}\) See also Francis Gouda (2001)

\(^{17}\) See e.g., Martin (1981)
One of the oldest known civilisations was that of the Sao people in the eastern parts of the Far North. This civilisation expanded in the early centuries after Christ and then met its demise in around 1000 AD when the area was invaded by Kanem warriors. The Kanem Empire started to invade the region and put southward pressure on it from the 7th century onwards, especially when they converted to Islam in the 11th century. Islam gave them access to horses, chain armoury, weapons and, last but not least, the incentive or legitimacy to conquer their surroundings on religious grounds. From the 6th century onwards, various tribes developed and became established in the Mandara Mountains. First in the north (e.g. the Mafa) and later in the plains more to the south. According to current theories they all originate from the same ancestors in Gudur, which for most groups is still the religious centre.

When the Kanem were defeated by the Bulala from the north-east (who also pushed other people towards the south-west) in the 15th century, they changed their headquarters to the south-west of Lake Chad and formed the Bornu Empire. These Bornu, and people from the eastward neighbouring kingdom of Wandala (or Mandara) that established itself in the 15th century in the eastern foothills of the northern Mandara Mountains coming from the Baguirmi region in Chad, then started to conquer the Sao, Gamergu and paléo-Marghi (the predecessors of, among others, the Kapsiki). In 1576, for example, the troops of sultan Idriss Aloma forced people to hide in the inaccessible mountains and swamps, or flee as far south as the Benoué basin.

In the heyday of its power the Bornu realm stretched into the Adamawa grasslands in the south and into the Haussa lands of Nigeria. The great king and statesman, Alma, strengthened the links with the Muslim world of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire and installed a Sharia-type of law around 1600. Even at that moment, autochthonous groups were effectively able to use their own legal system of customary law most of the time.

Although in the latter days, Bornu became a centre of learning and scholarship, due to the scarcity of natural resources in the Sahara and Sahel zone, the empire (and other empires before) had used war to acquire wealth and power over the crossroads of trade. Even in the early centuries after Christ, the inhabitants of North Cameroon established contacts across the Sahara desert with the coastal peoples of North Africa, the Egyptian dynasties and the Roman Empire. In addition to salt, gold, ivory and ostrich feathers, the most important commodity was slaves. Slavery was a common practice in Africa, where inter-group wars and in-group fights led to the capture of adversaries. Also food deficits resulted in the sale of family members to groups seen as belonging to the same ‘super group’

However, a totally different fate awaited those domestic slaves who stayed within the region, since they were treated with respect or regarded as kin within the receiving families. This is in stark contrast to the lot of those who were transported for economic reasons along the trade routes, first to the Mediterranean and later across the Atlantic (Mbuagbw et al 1987: 13). The arrival of the Islam caused the demand for slaves in North Africa to increase.

During the Bornu reign in the west, the new predatory empire in the north-east was that of the Baguirmi, with its headquarter being Massénya. They drove away the Bahr Erguig from

---

175 This was probably related to mutual language origins and resemblances.
176 The ‘trans-Saharan trade in goods and people [only … ] came to an end at the close of the nineteenth century’ (Mbuagbw a et al 1987: 14), when the power of both the Fulbe and the Bornu Empire came to an end.
their Banré homeland between Logone and Chari\textsuperscript{77}. After passing the Logone, those peoples first stayed for a number of decades in the Musgum area, before moving on. Various displaced groups travelled via the Diamaré plain as far west as the mountains, where they started to make a living and merged with the present populations. Some of these groups later returned to the central-southern Diamaré\textsuperscript{78} and established the Zumayo kingdom there. More individualistic movements were engaged in by those who worked with iron. The work of these blacksmiths, the symbolic power of their forges and their basis in towns\textsuperscript{79}, determined the structure of the societies in the pre-Baguirmi era. The Bahr Erguig, who are said to be the forefathers of, among others, the Tupuri and Mundang, travelled upstream along the Logone and Guerléo until they reached the Guissey-Tikem region. The blacksmiths are said to be the first to arrive in the Fianga and Tikem area (see Fig. 4.5 and Fig. 5.3).

More recently, in the 17th and 18th century, a counter movement started. In the Bénoué escarpment\textsuperscript{80}, pressure from the east (by Sara-Ngambay people) made the pre-Tupuri and pre-Mundang head northwards again.

In the middle of the 18th century, the eastward wave of Fulbe migration that started in Senegal several centuries earlier\textsuperscript{81} reached the Far North Province. There they met the Mandara kingdom in the north, which was a former province of the Bornu Empire and whose people had already converted to Islam earlier that century. Just like the travelling Haussa merchants, nomadic Fulbe pastoralists sought a living in the savannah areas of Cameroon. They first cohabited peacefully with the existing populations, paying tribute whenever necessary. Nevertheless, even at that time fights took place between pastoralists and agriculturalists for autonomy and control over pastures. Pontié (1979: 119) stresses the frequency of these conflicts: “continuous struggles between herdsmen and agriculturalists [because of] cattle theft, crop damage and the payment of tribute to the Zumaya chiefs”.

In the first half of the 19th century a Jihad swept through West Africa. The Fulbe armies conquered the region and established their chiefdoms, lamidats, as sub-emirates under the influential Adamawa Emirate of Yola. This, in turn, was part of the big Caliphate of Sokoto\textsuperscript{82}. The Fulbe subdue d the original populations in almost the whole of North Cameroon. In the Diamaré plain, the Zumayo kingdom was defeated and the population enslaved and/or converted to Islam. As was the case with other oppressed groups, over time they were completely assimilated into the Fulbe population. After several generations, the original background of the conquered groups was no longer recognisable. On the other hand, as the current non-Fulbe populations underline when they describe the disdain of the Fulbe, the Fulbe themselves are not entirely Fulbe because of their non-Fulbe lineages based on Fulbe men having married the women of their subjects. In addition, slaves that converted to Islam were given more possibilities and a better life and they therefore assimilated to the culture and religion of the Fulbe. As a result, the term Fulbe became almost equal to the term ‘Islamic’ in the Far North Province.

\textsuperscript{77} At a latitude of 11 to 11.5 degrees, to where the Bahr Erguig river enters the Chari.
\textsuperscript{78} Where Moutourouw and Lara are now situated.
\textsuperscript{79} This can still be seen in the different mini-fortress-like shaped villages along the Logone, as well as in the Banré societies.
\textsuperscript{80} Upstream parts of that river along what is now the Cameroon-Chad border, latitude 9 - 9.5 degrees.
\textsuperscript{81} According to De Bruijn and Van Dijk (1995: 47) “the Fulbe entered the inner delta of the Niger during the 15th century.” From there, they spread further to the Hayr in the east.
\textsuperscript{82} See, for example, Njeuma (1978).
Of course several defeated ethnic groups kept on resisting their conquerors because of their desire for autonomy and the harsh practices of the Fulbe. In the Diamaré, the Guiziga have a reputation for being very fierce in that respect. In addition, some ethnic groups resisted Fulbe domination by hiding in the mountains (Mandara) or the swamps, as their forefathers had done. These populations attacked incoming Fulbe and (later) others from their refuge positions. Because the political organisation of the mountain peoples was totally decentralised, - meaning that each household head was chief in his own dominion - defeating such a group was almost impossible. As regards the Matakan, for example. Martin (1970: 180) describes the necessity of “conquering house per house”. And some groups did manage to defeat the Fulbe completely. For example, the Mandara kingdom in the north-west, the Kotoko in the Logone floodplain and the Tupuri in the ‘bec-du-canard’ (See figure 4.5), who never became Fulbe subjects. In the second half of the 19th century, the Tupuri’s system of habitation in concentration centres made it possible for them to halt a major Fulbe coalition in Gouyou. Nevertheless, the Tupuri-northward movement was halted and they even had to retreat to the Touloum-Guidiguis-line until the beginning of the 20th century, when the Germans took over (Seignobos 2000b: 44-47).

At the end of the 19th century, a new conqueror - this time an Arab from the north called Rabah - invaded the region. Although he put an end to the violent internal conflicts between local populations, his forces massacred these same inhabitants. After seven years of terror he died in 1900, after the French had defeated him in the neighbourhood of Fort Lamy (N’Djamena).

The Germans had started crossing the region on expeditions in search of natural resources in the early 1890s. Because the Fulbe sultans in the more southern areas objected to their passing through their territory, fights took place. It was only in 1901 that the Germans really started to conquer the region. They tried to pacify the area and used violence against humans and the destruction of belongings as a means of achieving this. They did not interfere with the lamibé (Fulbe chiefs) except from giving them guns to consolidate (and in practice improve) their position, thereby allowing the Fulbe chiefs to continue dealing with the Kirdi. It was only in 1913 that the Germans started to transfer some authority to non-Muslim chiefs in cases of ethnic resistance against Islamic chiefs.

The violence against the local population continued during World War I. On the one hand these were war-related actions: different persons and ethnic groups were mobilised by allied forces or the Germans and had to fight for their ‘friends’, after which the losers were punished by the winners. On the other hand, in the later war years, the war was used as a pretext to conquer the last Kirdi groups in the mountains, who had never before been subdued.

This continued after the war when the French were in control. In addition, the French wanted to stop the aggression between the different groups, for example over wanted or raped women or over contested borders, the violent plundering of neighbouring villages, violent actions against (suspected) sorcerers, the existence of customs of specific ethnic groups of it

181 English expeditions crossed the region from the beginning of the 19th century onwards. It is from them that we have learned about the slave tributes, raids, trade and transports of different ethnic groups, as well as the pillage of villages, the burning of crops and the confiscation of cattle perpetrated by the different Fulbe chiefs.

182 "...il faudrait conquérir gay/par gay, jusqu'au dernier" - See Talwé (2003).

183 Van Beek (1989: 619): "...matters grew far worse for the local people after the installation of indirect rule."

184 For an explanation of the term ‘Kirdi’, see next section and box 4.1
being honourable to kill, the assassination of Fulbe authorities and the theft of their cattle on the basis of age-old hatred by non-Fulbe and because of tax-collections, etc. Ancient French colonial administration reports of ‘expeditions’ reveal a certain astonishment at the resistance offered by the indigenous population: ‘Quoiqu’on en ait dit, c’est une fait que les Kirdis de ces régions montagneuses inexplorées continuent à vivre à l’état de guerre endémique et font fi de l’autorité’ (ANY, APA 11768/D in Beauvillain 1989).

Although the French administration imposed the rule of non-violent intervention in their pacification campaigns, those villages that had the reputation of terrorising their neighbours were severely punished: “Les représailles administratives peuvent faire plus de victimes que les incidents eux-mêmes” (Beauvillain 1989: 336). In cases of tax-collection, as well, the military basically used force to coerce the population to pay. Reversely, they encountered violent resistance from those Kirdi people who used pre-emptive defence. The use of the Fulbe chiefs as go-betweens in the French system and the fact that these chiefs continued with their slave trade activities, as well as their abuse of power until even after World War II, gave rise to many skirmishes, military reprisals by the French, etc. However, the involvement of Fulbe chiefs in cross-border thievery (Nigeria, Chad) was never punished by the French, although they were removed from their function if the practices became too obvious. However, not all regions were ruled indirectly by ‘traditional chiefs’.

From the mid 1920s onward, several cantons were placed under direct administration because of failing legitimacy and growing abuse of power by the Fulbe chiefs, and thus a growing agitation among their subjects, the indigenous inhabitants who were referred to by the French and the Fulbe alike as ‘pagan’. In these regions the French tried to install ‘animist chiefdoms’ with the aim being indirect rule which would avoid direct confrontations. Another reason was that they did not have enough civil servants. “L’idée directrice est la suivante: pénétrer et pacifier le pays et rendre à la majorité païenne (93%) sa liberté vis-à-vis des envahisseurs Foulbé.”(ANY, APA 11618, in Beauvillain 1989: 362). Because the French wanted the chiefs to comply with their administrative system, they overlooked the fact that most of the animist chiefs only had a moral-religious role. Once again, the traditional system was moulded into western ruling ideas: ‘neo-traditionalism’188.

Apart from military interventions the French also set up medical care facilities, helped to improve cultivation practices, built wells and established schools (mostly to provide for educated chiefs and civil servants). Because they only ‘modernised’ the more accessible areas, people were pulled out of the mountains and sometimes even pushed by forced resettlement. Because the Fulbe elite did not ‘give’ their own sons to the ‘whites’, but forced the sons of their slaves to go to the ‘white’ schools, western education was synonymous with the emancipation of the non-Muslim groups. After independence, not much changed at first. President Ahidjo kept his Fulbe ‘kin’ in place as chiefs of the traditional Fulbe courts. Despite the fact that, in general, Fulbe education continued to lag behind, he also allocated them good positions in the national government189. Although he managed to incorporate the elite from other parts of the country as well, other ethnic groups from the north were still excluded. Yet, some of the lamibi who nowadays serve as official first degree administrative leaders are converted

188 “European colonialism was carried out through the imposition of a hierarchy of ‘traditional’ chiefdoms, some created anew where there were none” (Ignatowski 2001: 39).
189 See, for example, Gaillard (1994) or Mouiche (2000: 54-55).
autochthons who ‘bought’ their positions in a kind of election procedure. Indeed, most administrative posts in the Far North are nowadays occupied by non-Muslims.

*Cultural differences and identity*

Islamic influences and the invasion of the Fulbe in the ‘Grand Nord’ at the beginning of the 19th century initiated the development of a “northern Cameroon” identity. Until then, the area had been a multicultural melting pot of different ethnic groups, mostly related to each other via mutual ancestors, but with more emphasis on differences in culture than on similarities. The subsequent ‘foreign’ Empires with different centres that mostly left the autochthonous population in peace (after victory) did not try to bring together the various subjects, but they governed their territory from afar on the basis of regional (however vague and shifting) boundaries. This continued under the Fulbe reign. Yet, the overtone of the Fulbe hegemony and their political and administrative organisation of one Emirate covering the whole of Adamawa, constructed a regional political-economic realm *vis-à-vis* (this time) the rest of the Sokoto Caliphate of which it was part.

The building of precisely this region was based on geographical features that had for centuries promoted cross-cultural interactions. “In origin, river Benoué and its tributaries together with Lake Chad and the numerous rivers that drain into the lake provided the natural regional foundation” (Njeuma 2000: 3). It was the abundance of the grazing lands in this whole area that the Fulbe had sought when they first came to Cameroon, as dispersed groups of herders. With their wealth of cattle and the regional possibilities to maintain them, they transformed Adamawa into the richest of Sokoto’s emirates.

Here, like more to the west, the Fulbe mixed the Islamic religious values and the hierarchical political organisation related to it (for example chiefs were also religious leaders) with their own “pulaaku” culture and concept, that was built on the possession of cattle and the resistance against “ecological and social insecurities inherent in the pastoral [...] way of life in the Sahel” (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995: 193). In general, De Bruijn and Van Dijk say, “the religion of the Fulbe is an amalgam of [Fulbe] custom [...] and Islam” (id). They included in their cultural religious complex all those individuals who wanted to acquire the same (socially elevating) opportunities and who therefore converted to Islam. The Fulbe overlords also did not hesitate to use “local knowledge and popular acclamation” (Njeuma 2000: 6) and to incorporate local leaders in their sub-regional councils. Yet, their efforts to “subdue all peoples in the geographical region equally” (Njeuma 2000: 7) while these had been used to unrestricted movements. and the Fulbe disdain of non-Islamics as ‘barbarians’ and *Kirdi* (see box 4.1) united those erstwhile so divided ethnic groups.

---

112 Prefects and sub-prefects are mostly from the South, where Christianity is more abound.  
114 See also Montz (2003) on the mixing of Islamic religious notions and rules (for example on individual rights on property) with original Fulbe values, such as the family survival on the basis of common resources (cattle) as highest good.  
115 This is called “fulbeisation”. In those days it entailed an almost total change of culture. Fulbeisation was also expressed as a general incorporation of Fulbe customs in habits of other ethnic groups (for example the Fulbe dress code, especially for chiefs). Nowadays, the term is almost totally restricted to Islamisation.
Box 4.1 The Term Kirdi

When the Fulbe first arrived in the north of Cameroon, just before the beginning of the 18th century, they had not yet (totally) converted to Islam. In those days they used to call the non-Fulbe "haabe" (sing. "kaado"), which means 'barbarians', 'those with a different, inferior culture'. Only after the start of the jihad did the Fulbe start to denounce all non-Islamic, non-Fulbe, groups using the kanuri word "Kirdi". Originally this term meant 'pagan'. According to Mohammadou (1984: 140) the term was brought by the French from Chad after the defeat of the Germans in 1914. Ignatowski (2001: 359) traces the origin of the term back to the Arabs (Kurds), and gives Rabah the honour of having introduced it for the Mandara Mountains inhabitants during his attempt to conquer the region. Anyway, the name soon became short for - in the eyes of the Fulbe - un-civilised and rebellious peoples. The European colonisers (German and French) first used the term with a same negative denotation, namely 'savage' and 'violent'. It was only after independence that the term acquired a more positive meaning being used by Cameroonian Catholic priests who were trying to mobilise the multitude of indigenous ethnic groups in the mountains on the basis of a shared interest vis-à-vis the ruling Muslim population. Schilder (1994): “Baba Simon redefined the pre-existing kirdi term into a positive social identity, generating self-esteem rather than feelings of inferiority”. With the introduction of the multi-party system in Cameroon, the term Kirdi quickly acquired political overtones. In the same vein as the negritude movement of Senghor, 'kirditude' was instigated by the cultural-political movement in Yaoundé of northern non-Muslim elites: Dynamique Culturelle Kirdi (DCK).

Thus, although on the one hand the Fulbe managed to unite the north and to develop the identity feelings of belonging to the north of Cameroon, on the other hand they succeeded in binding the rest of the population together in a non-Fulbe, non-Muslim identity. Other Muslim groups such as the Mandara or the Kotoko were exceptions because they formed their own states, even before their Islamisation, and were not subdued by the Fulbe\textsuperscript{14}. Neither did the Haussa and Shoa Arabs regard themselves as being from the same Muslim lineage as the Fulbe. The divide between the Muslim overlords and the rest was intensified by the way in which the colonial powers ruled and their preference for Islam as a “civilising” mission (Murfett 1964, in Njeuma 2000: 31) over the traditional religions. On the other hand, the Germans favoured the south with its geographical wealth over the north, therewith creating a regional dichotomy that emphasised again a northern versus a southern identity.

The dual identity of 'being a northerner', but at the same time 'being a Kirdi', that is 'not a Muslim' (heralded by Christian priests, see Box 4.1), continued during the French colonial period. Especially in the early French period, and again under Ahidjo, non-Arabic Muslims\textsuperscript{15} were favoured politically and in the administration. This duality still persists today\textsuperscript{16} despite the break up of the north into three different Provinces by president Biya who feared religious regionalism. However, it seems as if religion is not an important factor. Within ethnic groups, different numbers of people convert to Islam or Christianity\textsuperscript{17} although a certain pattern can

\textsuperscript{14} For the Mandara, see Bourrais (1984); for the Kotoko, see Van Est (1999)
\textsuperscript{15} In contrast with the Shoa Arabs in the northern parts of the province, who the French feared would collaborate with people like Rabah (see the former sub-section) and form a pan-Arabic realm
\textsuperscript{16} See all the "open letters" to the President in various newspapers in Cameroon in 2003 and 2004 from the Northern elite who refer to their northern identity when they claim more investments and more State positions for the North
\textsuperscript{17} Different sub-groups can be found of both religions in the North of Cameroon (see, also, Seignobos and Nassouri
be distinguished per ethnic group. This only adds a third variable to the identity formation. However, the strongest loyalties still seem to lie in original ethnic values as well as the ‘North Cameroonian’ position. According to Njeumá (2000) the ethnic factor is predominant. With the emergence of the multi-party system, he recognizes a development of “boundless political competition, especially ethnicisation of political ambitions” (id: 28).

However, the different ethnic groups are too small to form a threatening unity vis-à-vis the ruling party. Historically, the Far North can be separated into regions of ethnic groups that show cultural and organisational similarities, mostly born from the similarities in the physical surroundings and the historical patterns and economic ways of living that those physical surroundings have incurred. Thus, in general, the population of the province is divided into the ethnic groups from the mountains, the plains and the floodplain. More precisely, these regions are subdivided into the mountains proper and the high plateaux, the foothills, the plains more or less surrounding these foothills and the plain in the bec-du-canard, with the floodplain and the adjacent river band and its dwelling mounts during the inundations as the final area with adapted ethnic groups18. It has to be stressed that within such regions the diversity is also enormous (see Figure 4.5), both because the different groups each chose different survival options from the surrounding environment, and because a group always wanted to distinguish itself from another.

In general, the Kirdi groups are all quite ‘egalitarian’, although still more or less acephalous groups versus hierarchical organisations with a central chief can be found20. The first, the individualistic construction of society, is a way of living in the mountains and plateaux where the remoteness from other groups and the relative security from invasion rendered a one-person authority and a strong coherence unnecessary. In the plains, on the other hand, the pressure from invaders and the quick acceptance of strangers within the villages (both as refugees and as a result of the more wide-spread migratory habits) increased the threat to ethnic stability, whereupon members of the group started to stress their ethnicity and intensify the links to own rules and customs (socio-religious control). It is a normal pattern of creating we-they divides whenever physical and economic boundaries are less pronounced.

As a result, the different ethnic groups in the plains and along the river show great differences with regard to proneness to adopt modernisations, both in agriculture and in schooling, differences in the influence of land masters on allocation of land, in inheritance practices and, as has been mentioned, as regards the adoption of “new” religions. Ways of dealing with violence also differ enormously. In some societies conflict is hushed up and violence is a taboo21, in others ancient warrior heroes are constantly remembered in songs and narratives which urge the same

(2000)). The major divide in the Christian churches is that between Catholicism and Protestantism. But the latter is again made up of several church communities, such as Lutherans, Pentecost, Adventists, etc. Islam is adhered to in different forms, from very strict to more or less loose (for example the nomadic Fulbe, called M’bororo), and is varyingly influenced by ethnic customs. The form of Islam practised in the floodplain is more similar to that of the Arab world. Seignobos (2000c: 56) mentions that the new Islam converts in Maroua are more radical than the old Fulbe Muslims who “dément dans un intégrisme plus intellectuel avec le Wahabisme”

18 See also Njomahâ (2004 41 and 49-50)

19 According to Anyangwe (1984 30) neither of the two extremes can be found in Cameroon. With its historical high frequency of mutual contacts between different groups, the mutual exchange of habits has been such that every group has at least a kind of chief, and even highly centralised groups do not permit their chiefs to have total political and military power.

20 For example, the Hopi Indians in the United States or the Ayur Vedic tradition in India.
Figure 4.5  Ethnic Diversity (impression) (based on Beauvillain 1989; Meurs and Felix 2001; Seignobos 2000b)
fearlessness. Such songs can be used by leaders - or mutually within groups - to engender a sphere of bravery and this can then lead to the use of violence.

Last but not least, the different groups also show great differences in engagement in political affairs. As a result of these differences, of the ‘cross-cutting’ religious conversions and of the existing North Cameroon identity, the above-mentioned ethnisation of politics does not strictly follow ethnic boundaries. Some groups with high political ambitions try to promote their own party, thereby transgressing group boundaries (e.g. the MDR of the Tupuri), but lots of own group members still (or again) follow the lead of the RDPC. On the other hand, the original “Fulbe-party”, the UNDP, is seen by many, Fulbe and Kirdi alike, as the only way to break the dictatorial power of the RDPC. The stronger, southern opposition party SDF has not (as yet) succeeded in binding followers in the north.

Therefore, depending on the wisdom of the next president (elections in October 2004) and his government, the North will act as a bloc vis-à-vis the rest of the country. The different ethnic and religious groups will oppose each other or a strong and self-confident but diverse North will serve as an enriching, constructive entity in the whole of the United Cameroon.

---

20 For example in the Zulu tradition.

21 Conversely, different groups can have different reputations regarding their fierceness in conflicts. Generally, this is (also) based on past experiences or historical narratives, whether or not nurtured by the involved group. An example is the resistance of the Tupuri to the Fulbe that quickly gave them a majority position in the military ranks (Ignatowski 2001).

22 In some cases it does, but then the ‘before politics’ period already revealed a problematic ethnic divide that is now used by certain leaders (see, e.g., Socpa (2002) or Onambélé (1992) about the controversies between the Kotoko and Shoa Arabs in the Logone floodplain).

23 Mouvement Démocratique pour la Défense de la République.

24 However, Mouché (2000: 66) states that “le recrutements politiques du RDPC et de UNDP permettent de relativiser les clivages ethnico-religieux”, but the MDR is still a “parti tribunitien Toupouri”.

25 In the first multi-party elections in Cameroon (1992) the UNDP and MDR gained quite a lot of seats in parliament as a response to the economic malaise under the RDPC. Biya reacted with a policy of dividing the different groups of the North along ethnic lines (see Mouché 2000). For example, he made the UNDP lose its “Islamic” identity, based on the preference the Fulbe and Kotoko had acquired during the Ahidjo period. Haussa and Shoa Arabs could easily be persuaded to vote RDPC. Combined with fraud and intimidation during subsequent elections (Mouché 2000: 73-83), and the inevitable fear of the Fulbe elite of losing their positions if they continued to follow the UNDP, the RDPC gained in numbers at each subsequent election.

26 Rassemblement Démocratique des Peuples Camerounais

27 Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès.

28 Social Democratic Front.