A Question of Fulbe Power: Social Change, the State and Ethnic Relations in Northern Cameroon

by

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Preface

I spent the fall of 2006 in Cameroon on a study abroad program with the School for International Training. Halfway through the semester we drove north from the Southern Cameroonian town of Dschang. When we filed out of the van in Bayno, Adamaoua Province, my classmates and I commented on the seemingly clear difference between Northern Cameroon and Southern Cameroon—the climate, the landscape, the buildings, the clothing and even the physical characteristics of the people appeared different. Even over the course of two months, we had unconsciously adopted the pervasive and simplistic divisions between these two regions which characterize both national discussion and international writings. These divisions are based on real differences, which we noted, but the dominant discourse reduced such distinctions to two essentialized communities. In my initial perception, Northern Cameroon was a Muslim region, home to only one ethnic group, the Fulbe. But this is of course not the case, and many subsequent experiences introduced me to the complexity of ethnic relations in Northern Cameroon and the meaning of ethnicity in this region.

At the end of my semester abroad I completed a month long independent study project on the successes and failures of the national tuberculosis prevention and treatment program in the city of Ngaoundéré. Upon my return to the United States, I applied for and received two grants, the Davenport Grant and the Watson Fellowship, to continue research in Ngaoundéré, this time on the subject of “oral history.” I choose to return to this city because I had a base of knowledge of the political, social and economic history and because I also knew many community members—my research was greatly facilitated by these contacts and my prior knowledge of the community. By living in Ngaoundéré I was also able to access the professors and academic resources of the University in this town. Over the course of my month-long stay in Ngaoundéré, and through the help and support of many individuals in Cameroon and the United States, this thesis metamorphosized from a project about historical memory and oral history to one about the place of ethnicity using oral sources as primary material.

I am extremely indebted to the many individuals who guided me and supported me throughout this process in the United States and Cameroon, most of all to my two advisors, Professors Richard Elphick and Lorelle Semley for their insightful critiques, guiding questions and for the time and energy they put into this project; the Olin Library reference librarians who fielded my many questions; my friends and housemates, who listened to my complaints and ideas, especially those who revised and commented on my drafts in various stages of completion and disarray; and my family, for their consistent support throughout this project and in all aspects of my life.

In Cameroon, I wish to express my gratitude to Boubakari Yousouffâ and Professor Issa Saïbou for their continued advice on my evolving project; Aboubakar Yaya for his critiques and suggestions in the early stages of my research; Halima and Aliou for their aid in the logistics of interviewing; Christiane Magnido, Gaston, Boniface Noyongoyo and the SIT team for their support throughout my travels;
familile Mahoman Bello for their infinite generosity and especially Fadimatou Yousouffa, for her friendship.

Finally, my largest thanks is extended to the residents of Ngaoundéré, who were generous enough to share their stories with me, and to answer my sometimes inane questions—usecco!
Cameroon, 1975

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cameroon.html
Cameroon, 1998

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cameroon.html
Glossary

Ardo (pl. ardo’en): Fulbe chief (may refer to the head of a family, or the head of a group of several families).

Arnado (pl. arnabe): Chief of a non-Fulbe group.

Belaka: The political and spiritual leader of the Mboom people.

Debbo: Woman, wife.


Kirdi: A French term for the non-Muslim populations of Northern Cameroon.

Lamibe: Plural of Lamido.

Lamido: The king of a city-kingdom; spiritual leader of the Muslim community and head of the Fulbe state.

Lamidat: Fulbe city-kingdoms.

Matchoubé: Slave

Pulaaku: The Fulbe social code of behavior based on the importance of shame and reserve in all social interaction and the limitation of public emotions such as anger, fear or happiness.

Rimaabe: Slave or freed slave.

Rewbée: Wife from the free, Muslim population.

Rumde: Plantation slave living in villages outside of a city.

Sulabée: Concubine, or non-Muslim wife.

Tokkal (pl. tokke): Administrative unit of the lamidat composed of several lineage groups. Later, the French colonial administration tied these units to specific geographic areas and villages.
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“The Fulbe are Above-all Loyal to One Another”:
An Introduction to Political Ethnicity in Northern Cameroon

In July, 2007, one month before I arrived in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon to pursue research for this thesis, the city held ethnically-charged elections for two mayoral positions. One political party framed the elections as a way for several ethnic groups to reclaim their rightful place as the original residents *cum* rulers of the region and to challenge the power of the historically dominant, but minority, ethnic group—the Fulbe. This tactic failed. Instead, the Fulbe community rallied around the Fulbe candidates and these men won the mayorships. My host mother, a Fulbe woman, explained that the other ethnic groups in the city were unable to defeat the Fulbe because “the Fulbe are above-all loyal to their ethnic group and band together when it appears that their collective power is challenged.”¹ Other residents claimed that this election was more driven by ethnicity than any previous election in the city.² These statements suggest that ethnicity is important in Cameroonian political struggles, perhaps in a new or resurgent form. Ethnicity has been a salient feature of political and social interactions in Ngaoundéré, in Cameroon in general, and across Africa, even during the era of recent democratization. It is thus important to understand how ethnicity operates, the subtleties of ethnic relations, and the ways in which ethnic dynamics change over time. By examining the effect of regional and national politics on ethnic relations in a specific town, my research brings nuance to the study of ethnicity and politics in Cameroon.

¹ Fadimatou Yousouffa, August, 2007.
² Aminatou Aissatou, Interview, August 3, 2007; Aboubakar Yaya, July 30, 2007.
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My thesis explores changing ethnic relations in Ngaoundéré between 1946 and 1994, stressing the ways in which the Fulbe have maintained their pre-colonial hegemony in a multi-ethnic community. I rely on several levels of analysis: the effect of national events and trends on local experiences; the continuity of social, political and economic power between the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods; and the ways in which individuals experience such changes and continuities through the use of oral history. The Fulbe, who are the single largest ethnic group in Northern Cameroon, are nonetheless a minority in the region. They have dominated the Northern portion of the country since the 1830s, when they established several kingdoms in Northern Cameroon. The position of this ethnic group in subsequent eras was based in this historic power and in the connection of the Fulbe to the central government. This connection was strongest during the colonial period when the Fulbe kings, or lamibe, acted as the intermediaries and representatives of the French state, and under the rule of the first president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Fulbe an from Northern Cameroon. It was only under the rule of Cameroon’s second president, Paul Biya, that the place of the Fulbe vis-à-vis other ethnic groups began to erode, as a result of political, social and demographic changes.

Located in West-Central Africa, Cameroon is known for its relative political stability and ethnic and linguistic diversity: over 200 languages are spoken in the country. Northern Cameroon borders the Sahel, a region just south of the Sahara Desert, and is generally understood as a Muslim region although in reality it is home to a great range of religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. Northern Cameroon was administered as one provincial unit, the North Province, between 1960 and 1982; both
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before and after this period it ruled as three provinces: the Far North (or Extreme North), North and Adamaoua provinces. Ngaoundéré is the capital of the Adamaoua province and currently has a population of approximately 200,000 people. It is a useful location to study the effect of national changes on Fulbe/non-Fulbe relations because there is a relatively large Fulbe population (varying between 30% and 50%) and because Ngaoundéré was a prominent and important location during several historical moments. As a principal city of the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century and a provincial capital in the colonial and post-colonial eras, the city was closely linked to the central state in a way that more outlying regions were not. As such, Ngaoundéré is a useful location to study inter-ethnic relations in relation to broader social and political changes.

History, Theory and Methodologies

Scholarship on Cameroon has focused on politics and economics, according little importance to ethnic identity except in the distribution of power on a national level.3 For most scholars, the most important social division in Cameroonian society falls along linguistic (Anglophone versus Francophone) or religious/regional

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(Christian South versus Muslim North) lines. 4 Cameroonian history is analyzed from the perspective of regional or national events and processes, rather than local experiences. Academic work on Northern Cameroon has mainly examined the pre-colonial period, especially the Fulbe jihads of the early nineteenth centuries and the structure of the subsequent Sokoto Caliphate.5 It is only more recent work on colonial and post-colonial Northern Cameroon, generally articles, which has focused on local history and explored the modern repercussions of the socio-political structures of northern Cameroon and the links between local and national politics. 6

When scholars have examined ethnicity in Northern Cameroon they have generally focused on contemporary developments rather than historical change, used the history of ethnic relations as background information or focused on a limited time frame and region. 7 Three authors in particular, Philip Burnham, Kees Schilder and

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5 Although this falls outside of the scope of my own project, there has been a longstanding debate over the nature of these jihads, specifically concerning the religious, ethnic and political motivations for the holy war. Mervyn Hiskett, M.G. Smith, M.O. Junaid, Peter Waterman, A.H. Kirke-Greene, Martin Njeuma and Murray Last among others have written on this subject. The most prolific and respected author on pre-colonial Adamawa is Eldridge Mohammadou. His works include Eldridge Mohammadou, Fulbé Hoosere : les royaumes Foulbé du plateau de l'Adamaoua au XIX siècle (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1978); Eldridge Mohammadou, Traditions historiques des peuples du Cameroun central (Tokyo, Japan: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1990).

6 These articles have mostly come from the faculty of the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Ngaoundéré and from anthropologists working with the journal Ngaoundéré-Anthropos (a journal printed in collaboration with the University of Oslo), including Issa Saibou, Theirno Moctar Bah, Martin Njeuma, Akam Motaze, Gilbert Tageum Fah and Lisbet Holtendal.

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Helen Regis, have written nuanced works on ethnic relations in Northern Cameroon which link history, anthropology, and social criticism. I am especially indebted to their analyses of the relationships between the Fulbe, Gbaya, Mundang and others and I use their work as a point of departure for my analysis of the history of Ngaoundéré. My thesis attempts to counteract the continued homogenization of Northern Cameroon as a Muslim and Fulbe region in the major literature and popular conception by illustrating the heterogeneity of one town, Ngaoundéré. I secondly wish to reexamine the form of interaction between ethnic groups in Northern Cameroon: some authors writing about ethnicity in this region have highlighted the incorporation of the other populations into the Fulbe state and cultural system—I want to study ethnic relations in a way which acknowledges this pattern but does not devalue instances of violence, disenfranchisement and exploitation. Finally I hope to focus on understanding how individuals perceive the uses of ethnicity and how these perceptions drive interactions on a daily scale.

My examination of the interplay of local and national events is based in the argument that local ethnic interactions are greatly affected by the varying

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relationships of groups to the central state. Fredrick Cooper and others argue that Africans must necessarily orient themselves to a greater or lesser extent to the activities of the state, which has served as a “gatekeeper” at the intersection of the territory and the exterior world. The African state distributes resources, which derive from its connections to the outside world, through vertical ties of patronage. Jean-Francois Bayart described this process through the imagery of the “politics of the belly” in which individuals “eat” resources. Positions of power allow access to means of private appropriation through military resources, stable salary, and the ability to prey on other people through extortion and bribery. Resources are redistributed through an unequal, hierarchical and very personal system of distribution and a “man of power who is able to amass and redistribute wealth becomes a ‘man of honor’.” These patronage links may be the most prevalent means of distribution of resources from the state to its citizens. Perhaps more importantly, Cameroonians themselves perceive these links to be the mode of resource distribution. Within this model, ethnic groups (or other groups) are dominant when they control positions of patronage and resources such as land, skills, military

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force and even more tenuous assets which contribute to social prestige, such as religious piety.\footnote{Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change*, 1-3.}

The means by which such ethnic groups are created have been examined from many perspectives and I will briefly explain three main theories, primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism, although they have been roundly summarized and critiqued elsewhere.\footnote{See Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh, and Will Kymlicka, "Introduction: Ethnicity and the Politics of Nation-Building in Africa," in *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh, and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: James Currey, 2004); Bruce J. Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism," *African Affairs* 97, no. 388 (1998); John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Oxford Reader: Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Carola Lentz, "'Tribalism' and Ethnicity in Africa: A Review of Four Decades of Anglophone Research," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 31, no. 2 (1995).} Primordialism identifies certain ostensibly unalterable and predetermined ties, such as language, race and religion that underpin one's ethnic identity. While these ties may change over time or exist in different forms in different locations it is these “givens”, rather than personal choice, that determine ethnic identity. Primordialism focuses on the emotional, cultural and psychological motivations which link personal identities to group identities.\footnote{Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State," 309; Clifford Geertz, "Primordial Ties," in *Oxford Reader: Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41; Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power* (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 4; Hutchinson and Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*, 8; Edward Shils, "Priorial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology* 7 (1957); Crawford Young, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Class in Africa: A Retrospective," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 103, no. 3 (1986): 450. More recently there has been a trend which sees primordial links as based in genetics; given the work on race which has convincingly established that race is a social construction, it seems simplistic (and indeed dangerous) to rely on biological notions of ethnicity. For examples of such an argument, see Joshua Fishman, “Ethnicity as Being, Doing and Knowing,” in *Oxford Reader: Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 65; Pierre van den Berghe, “Does Race Matter?” in *Oxford Reader: Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 57-63.} Some authors have critiqued primordialism as ahistorical, because it treats ethnicity as unchanging and stable and is thus unable to account for change in the internal nature of an ethnic group or for individuals moving between ethnicities, despite the large amount of
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literature which shows that the choice and use of ethnicity is situationally dependent. On the other hand, the members of a given ethnic group often believe their identity to be based on ancient and stable traits even if this perception cannot be confirmed by outside historical research. Primordialism is thus useful to understand how group members conceive of themselves, as long as we recognize that these “primordial criteria” are in fact only perceived to be primordial.

Instrumentalism, in contrast to primordialism, focuses on the ways in which ethnic identity can be developed and manipulated for the social and material benefit of an individual. In this view, ethnicity is a circumstantial social construct which can be chosen, mixed, and remade to suit the needs of the individual especially in cases of competition over limited resources. An ethnic group exists as long as the demands the group makes advance the interests of its members to maximize power, wealth and honor. Instrumentalism has been critiqued for its reliance on material justifications for human actions and because it sometimes underestimates the durability of ethnic

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groupings by focusing on the changes within ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{18} Some instrumentalists argue that elite competition shapes ethnic groups and spurs group formation, a view which may rely too heavily on the idea of elite manipulation.\textsuperscript{19} Another reading relies on the “rational choice” model, in which an individual simply chooses his or her ethnicity. This reading underestimates the ways in which ethnic affiliation may be forced on an individual by other community members through assumptions about an individual’s ethnicity based on visual markers, language or other “primordial” traits. Such external ethnic assignments may limit the possibility for movement between ethnic groups, or, when it is possible to gain membership in another ethnic group, lead to a continued identification as an “imposter.”\textsuperscript{20}

The third theory, constructivism, is based in the theoretical foundations of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobswam and Benedict Anderson as well as historical studies examining the development and creation of ethnicity during the colonial period.\textsuperscript{21} Constructivism focuses on the process of creation and the fluctuations of ethnicity and sees group identity as, in Bruce Berman’s terms, the “outcome of the continuous and generally conflict-ridden interaction of political, economic, cultural forces both external and internal to developing ethnic communities.”\textsuperscript{22} The primary critiques of

\textsuperscript{18} Hutchinson and Smith, eds., \textit{Ethnicity}, 9, 34; Young, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Class," 446.
\textsuperscript{19} Brass, "Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Identity Formation."
\textsuperscript{20} For example, see Schilder’s discussion of Mundang individuals “passing” as Fulbe in Northern Cameroon. Schilder, \textit{Quest for Self-esteem}.
constructivism take offense to the extremes of this model, arguing that the focus on
the socially constructed nature of ethnicity may make ethnic distinctions appear
imagined and thus unreal when in fact communities often develop out of some basis
in a physical or cultural reality. Additionally, while constructivism often seeks to
explain the origins and development of ethnicity, there seems to be less attention to
the maintenance of a given social group. The theory relies on the idea that “once a
threshold is reached, the consciousness may become to a degree self-reproducing at a
group level” but fails to fully explain how this “self-reproducing consciousness”
exists and is perpetuated.

My conception of ethnicity rests primarily on a constructivist model, but not
to the exclusion of the other theories of ethnicity. I see Benedict Anderson’s notion of
“imagined communities” as an apt basis for an understanding of ethnicity as well as
nationalism, and the “imagined” nature of such an identity limits neither its ability to
appear real nor to inspire real actions. I accept the notion of “participant
primordialism” in which members of a given ethnic group believe they share a
common heritage and fixed cultural traits. In a multi-ethnic context, the boundaries
between ethnic groups are identified by markers, although these may change over
time. In Northern Cameroon, ethnicity is fluid in that one can adopt these cultural
markers and shift to another ethnic group in order to gain material or social benefit.
Because ethnic identity is a socialized reality which defines and limits an individual’s

23 Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 6.
24 Young, "Evolving Modes of Consciousness and Ideology," 79.
25 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,
26 Fredrik Barth, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries," in Oxford Reader: Ethnicity, ed. John Hutchinson
understanding of the world and his or her actions, ethnicity is at once a construct and a motivator for individual action.  

Religion serves as a primary boundary marker in Northern Cameroon. The Fulbe have a monopoly on the use of Islam, Muslim identity being seen as synonymous to Fulbe identity. In spite of the presence of non-Fulbe Muslims, conversion to Islam means the acceptance of Fulbe identity and Fulbe cultural traits. Likewise, conversion to Christianity is conceived of as a rejection of Fulbe culture and an acceptance of Westernized culture. Like religion, women’s interactions with the community act as “marker” between different groups. Certain behaviors, such as the seclusion of women, are seen as Fulbe while others, such as the sale of milk in the market by adult women, are ascribed to other ethnic groups or sub-groups. Among the Fulbe, men and women inhabit different and separated social spheres within the home and community and Fulbe women are expected enter seclusion after marriage. In contrast other women, whether Muslim, Christian or a practitioner of a traditional religions, have more visible social roles as farmers, market vendors or participants in ceremonial activities.

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28 Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 152.
29 Some authors have commented on the ways in which such the social and spatial divisions between Fulbe men and women ultimately rest on an unequal division of power between men and women. Mahmoudou Djingui, whose work on Fulbe marriage focuses on an analysis of language, notes that the linguistic basis for “woman” in Fulfulde is the word “submission.” Mahmoudou Djingui, "Mariage et image du mariage chez les peul," in Peuples et cultures de l'Adamaoua (Cameroun), ed. Jean Boutrais and Hermenegildo Adala (Paris: ORSTOM, 1993), 191. See also Regis, Fulbe Voices.
30 Anthropologist Lisbet Holtendahl argues that in the Fulbe community a man’s valor rests on the woman’s complete subordination to his economic control, but for other Muslim groups women may take on her own productive activities even though the husband is supposed to provide the basic necessities for the family. Lisbet Holtendahl, "Education, économie et “idéal de vie” : les femmes de Ngaoundéré," in Peuples et Cultures de l’Adamaoua (Cameroun), ed. Jean Boutrais and Hermenegildo Adala (Paris: ORSTOM, 1993), 282. See also Emanuel Gnapelle Nganyo, "La femme
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One of the most important elements of inter-ethnic interaction in Northern Cameroon is the possibility of “Fulbeization,” a process by which an individual born into another ethnic group passes as Fulbe based on their conversion to Islam, and the adoption of the Fulfulde language, common forms of Fulbe dress and Pulaaku, a social code of reserved behavior which limits public displays of emotions such as anger, fear and happiness.31 In Northern Cameroon, ethnic “conversion” is associated with religious conversion to Islam. Because Fulbe identity is defined in opposition to “pagan” identity, or the practice of indigenous religion, by converting to Islam one logically becomes Fulbe. There are several distinct forms of “Fulbeization.” For individuals, it is possible to become fully incorporated into the Fulbe community by taking on the Fulbe attributes mentioned above, and ensuring that one’s family does the same. Women who marry Fulbe men are also usually incorporated into the Fulbe group. For political leaders on the other hand, especially the traditional authorities of other ethnic groups, the use of Fulbe identity, or Fulbe-specific traits for political, material or social gain, has to be balanced with the need to retain legitimacy within their ethnic community.32 Theoretically, “Fulbeization” occurs because by becoming Fulbe an individual can tap into a new political and social network and gain tangible material benefits.

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31 Because Fulfulde is the lingua franca of the region, this is not a barrier to ethnic “conversion,” although differences in levels of proficiency are sometimes seen to mark different ethnic identities. Burnham, "L'Ethnie, la religion et l'Etat," 79. For further reading on the development and processes of “Fulbeization,” see Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference; Gausset, "Islam or Christianity?"; Philip E. Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom (Cameroon)," Man 5, no. 4 (1970); Andre Michel Podlewski, La Dynamique des principales populations du nord-cameroun (entre Benoue et Lac Tchad), 2 vols., vol. I (Paris: O.R.S.T.O.M, 1966); Regis, Fulbe Voices; Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem; Schultz, "From Pagan to Pullo."; van Santen, "Islam, Gender and Urbanisation ".

32 A political leader might adopt the symbols of Fulbe rule and style of court such as horses, dress, and procession style. Kees Schilder, "Local Rulers in North Cameroon: The Interplay of Politics and Conversion," Afrika Focus 9, no. 1-2 (1993).
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It is difficult to quantify the process of “Fulbeization” because it relies on self-identification—it is unlikely that an individual would admit to being not Fulbe if they claim this identity, and thus it is not easy to determine the percentage of the population which has “Fulbeized,” especially as the Cameroonian census rarely collects data on ethnicity. Most of the information on “Fulbeization” comes from anthropologists, and is based not in numerical studies (although the level of “Fulbeization” can be roughly measured by the growth of the Muslim population) but on community observations and the symbolic and social content of interviews in which informants identify themselves variously by their current cultural identity and their natal ethnic group. For example, anthropologist Helen Regis quotes a “Fulbeized” man whose described how his changing religious and ethnic identity was indicated by the fact that his skin has changed from “black” to “red” (Fulbe), even though he continued to describe his hair as “100% Mundang”. His ethnic transition was accompanied by a change in “racial characteristics,” but although he sees himself as Fulbe he still acknowledged non-Fulbe ancestry.33 Similarly, Shultz writes that the performance of cultural characteristics is equated with ethnic identity. One of her informants described his neighbor by saying that “he was a Fali, but then he converted to Islam’. To the question 'And what is he now?' the man hesitated and then replied, 'Now, he speaks Fulfulde.”34 The identification of cultural and physical characteristics with a (changed) ethnic identity is one of the best means to understand and look for the process of “Fulbeization.” Anthropological work also examines the ways in which individuals who convert to Islam can no longer participate in their

33 Regis, Fulbe Voices, 9-10.
34 Schultz, "From Pagan to Pullo," 54.
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natal communities (either through personal choice or family rejection), and the reasons why individuals convert to Islam and then take on Fulbe ethnic identity. They argue that “Fulbeization” occurs to some extent because of the localized nature of the many smaller Northern ethnic groups compared to the widespread presence of the Fulbe populations; if one travels to another area of Northern Cameroon, outside of the geographic range of one’s ethnic group, then the Fulbe ethnic identity may be the only one available because of it relies on religion, rather than descent, as they key to marker of a identity. The pressure to “Fulbeize” also reflects of the high socio-political status of the Fulbe community in relation to other ethnic groups, thus moments when “Fulbeization” is prominent can be used to mark moments when Fulbe identity has been valued and when the Fulbe ethnic group has been powerful.

My thesis relies on oral testimony as a primary source material. Although there are many difficulties with oral history, it is one of the most appropriate means to access African history due to the paucity of written sources across the continent, the power dynamics intrinsic in who was and is even able to write, and the biases within written sources which were often created by the colonial and post-colonial state. Oral history, as opposed to oral tradition, is based on individual and personalized

35 Ibid; van Santen, "Islam, Gender and Urbanisation ".
memories and experiences and this form of historical research is an effective way to access the opinions and stories of people who might be ignored in the dominant historical record.37

There are many difficulties with this form of historical research, including challenges inherent in cross-cultural research. As a comparatively wealthy, white, American woman, I unavoidably mediate the voices of the residents of Ngaoundéré and my need for Fulfulde-French translation further complicates the claim that the voices presented in this thesis are “authentic.” In order to limit these problems, I have treated these oral sources with the same skepticism as I would any other primary document, consulting archival material and secondary sources from anthropologists and historians to gain a different perspective in comparison to my oral sources. I also locate these individual experiences within their social context, as individual experiences and memories fit into and simultaneously complicate broader patterns of “collective representations of the past.”38 Finally, because of the overlap of symbolic and factual information within oral histories, I have chosen to highlight the perception of the past—distinct from historical fact, even though it can illuminate such “facts.” I have worked hard to acknowledge, understand, highlight, and most importantly respect, the perspective of each individual included in this thesis and the ways in which the performance of oral history is influenced by the broader cultural

38 Cooper, "Oral Sources and the Challenge of African History," 203.
setting and the specific interactions between myself and the residents of Ngaoundéré.39

My interviews are sometimes limited as a source of historical information because many individuals who I interviewed were reluctant or unable to answer my questions beyond a cursory yes or no statement. I strove to ask more specific questions in order to elicit more detailed responses, but such a tactic may have skewed the information that I gathered. Although I wanted the interviewee to shape the form and subjects of our discussion, I often pushed the interview in a certain direction simply out of a desire to get a response beyond the common statement that, “yes, many things changed.” Thus the information I was able to gather is skewed towards my own personal perceptions of Cameroonian history, which is perhaps different than how Cameroonian individuals might conceptualize the important moments in their own history. On the other hand, I have continued to use the information provided in response to such questions because, as Luise White writes, individuals may challenge leading questions when these questions did not mesh with their lived reality.40

Oral history is appropriate for research in the Ngaoundéré because the Adamaoua province, where Ngaoundéré, is located has the smallest percentage of western-educated people in Cameroon; many individuals do not speak, let alone write, in French.41 This is especially true for women, who historically have had a very low level of education and for members of certain ethnic and socio-economic

39 For the above section, see Ibid.
41 Boubakari Yousouffa, September 26, 2006.
groups. Because I am interested in individual experiences of historical moments, oral history also offers a way to access the stories of literate individuals who still may not have been included in the historical record. The interviews I conducted covered national political history, gender roles, education, ethnic relations, the role of traditional authorities, economic change, the form of marriage and other celebrations, the role of Islam within the community, and many other subjects. I conducted nearly 40 interviews with 27 people, tailoring my questions to the interests and comfort level of each individual. Although my interviewees were often presented to me by friends and academic contacts, I attempted to make my sample as representative as possible by asking to speak with a wide variety of people. My interviewees were not fully representative of the demographic make-up of the city, but I was able to conduct interviews not only with Fulbe individuals, but also with people from the Widikum, Mbororo, Mboum, Dii and Gbaya ethnic groups and with men and women ranging in age and socio-economic status. My research was hindered by a relatively short one-month stay in Ngaoundéré and by my occasional need for Fulfulde-French translation, but I was able to reach a wide variety of perspectives through this research process.

Chapter Summary and a Final Note

Chapter One introduces the historical background necessary to understand my subsequent analysis, explaining pre-colonial political structures and social hierarchies and introducing German and French colonial rule. Chapter Two details the two levels of French and Fulbe control over Northern Cameroon and examines the ways in
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which the focus on the idea of collaboration between groups obscures the deeply unequal power relations between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups, and between the French and the Fulbe. This chapter will also explore the ways in which the French colonial project allowed pre-colonial hierarchies and inequalities to continue into the late colonial era. Chapter Three charts the ways in which the Fulbe maintained regional control and gained national preeminence through the presidency of Ahmadou Ahidjo and through the mechanisms of state rule which led to the regionalization of ethnicity across the country. Finally, Chapter Four will examine the decline of Fulbe power since the 1980s. National political upheavals placed the Fulbe of Ngaoundéré at a disadvantage both in accessing the resources of the central state and in controlling regional distribution of such resources; this trend became clearly visible in the 1992 multi-party elections in Cameroon in which other Northern ethnic groups successfully competed for regional and national power as independent and autonomous groups.

Quentin Gausset aptly notes that most of the history of Northern Cameroon has focused on the power and domination of the Fulbe, as their cultural and political supremacy has ensured their access to historians, anthropologists, and even the ability to write their own histories.\(^4\)\(^2\) Despite my best efforts, I recreated some of this distortion within my research process. Although I focus on the Fulbe perspective, I am not seeking to privilege their stories over others; I have tried to read Fulbe power in relation to larger events, and to thereby counteract the effect of my own continued focus on this group. Moreover, despite my concentration on ethnicity, I hope to also acknowledge other social distinctions, especially those of class, religion, gender, level of education, level of “westernization,” and age which are sometimes linked to

\(^4\) Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?", 94.
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ethnicity and sometimes not. My focus is not on a simplistic ethnic division— rather, I highlight the historical progression of the uses of ethnicity without negating the importance of other factors in individual and group relations.
Chapter One

**From Caliphate to Colony:**

**The Social and Political History of Ngaoundéré to 1945**

Everyone shared power—it was friendship, [the Mboum] were not slaves, they were not conquered. The Fulbe took their daughters and had children with them. The Mboum are a part of the royal family, even the mothers of the kings are Mboum. They were not subjugated, they were not slaves—they were collaborators.¹

In response to my question of whether slavery had existed in Ngaoundéré, Bobbo Moussa, the Fulbe former Mayor of Ngaoundéré (1963-1980) stated definitively that the Mboum people were never slaves. Because the history of slavery continues to have repercussions for social and political power within the city, perhaps Bobbo Moussa, a politician with ties to the city’s many ethnic communities, felt the need to mask the history of inequality in the region, for he stated that not only were the Mboum never enslaved, but that they were not even conquered or subjugated. Instead he framed the interactions between the Fulbe and the indigenous population of the region as one of family connection and cooperation. His statement reflects the fact that the links between the various ethnic groups living in Ngaoundéré were complicated in the pre-colonial period, as individuals of other ethnic groups were incorporated into the Fulbe state through marriage and political connections. But Bobbo Moussa, like many of the other residents of the city, downplayed the ways in which the Fulbe kingdom of Ngaoundéré, established in 1836, also “incorporated” indigenous groups such as the Mboum into the kingdom as slaves and unequal subjects.

¹ Moussa Bobbo, Interview, August 9, 2007. « Les tous ont eu le pouvoir—C’était l’amitié, pas les esclaves, pas [conquérí], les Fulbe a pris leur filles, avoir les enfants. Mboum parti de famille royale, mères des lamibe sont Mboum. Pas soumise, pas les esclaves— [collaborés]. »
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In this chapter I will chart the history of the city of Ngaoundéré until 1945 beginning with the history of the indigenous residents and the establishment of the (Fulbe) city-kingdom (*lamidat*) in Ngaoundéré as a result of the jihads of the 1800s. Because the Fulbe were never a majority in Northern Cameroon, their control of Ngaoundéré necessitated cooperation with the other populations of the region. I will explain the political structure of this kingdom and the varying forms of incorporation and exclusion which marked ethnic relations in the pre-colonial era, highlighting the ways in which indigenous groups acted as members of the state even as they continued to be unequal in the eyes of the Fulbe. Finally, I will introduce the structure of the German and French colonial governments—Chapter Two will further explore the repercussions of colonial rule on ethnic relations in Ngaoundéré after 1945.

The “Enslave-able” and the Free:

The Political and Social Structure of Pre-Colonial Ngaoundéré

The Mboum, who are believed to be the oldest indigenous residents of the Ngaoundéré region, were hunters and farmers in the pre-colonial period, living in towns across what is now the Adamaoua province. The Mboum are divided into seven clans each with a *Belaka*, or king, the spiritual and political leader of the community, and each based in one of the seven Mboum “hometowns,” one of which is Ngaoundéré. The most powerful of these seven kings and the sovereign of the highly centralized Mboum confederation was the *Belaka* of the town of Ngan-Ha, slightly to the north of Ngaoundéré.² When the Dii (Dourou) migrated into the

² Awalou, Interview, August 8, 2007; Thierno Moctar Bah, "Le facteur peul et les relations interethniques dans l’Adamaoua au XIXe siècle," in *Peuples et cultures de l’Adamaoua (Cameroun)*,
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Ngaoundéré region in the seventeenth century they came under the nominal control of the Belaka and were incorporated into the Mboum state, although they preserved their own traditions and chiefdoms. The Dii are described most often as ironworkers, and they had a sophisticated method of creating tools and weapons, although other members of the community were herders and farmers. In the late eighteenth century, a third group, later known as the Gbaya, migrated into the easterly section of the region perhaps fleeing slave raids in what is now Darfur. The Gbaya were highly mobile and had no central state. Indeed, it is likely that many Gbaya-phone clans did not consider themselves one ethnic group until the colonial period.

Father to the North lived the Laka, Kaka, Mundang and many other ethnic groups each with their own distinct political and religious tradition. In addition to these groups, a small number of nomadic Fulbe had migrated into the region prior to the 1820s. Unfortunately, there has been little written about the history of the Adamaoua region and the interactions between these residents prior to the Fulbe conquests. Most of the information concerning the population of North Cameroon is in the form of


3 Muller offers very traditionally style ethnography of the Dii. Muller, "Identité, mobilité et citoyenneté." See also Frobenius, *Peuples et sociétés traditionnelles*, 141-152; Hino, "Towns and Villages in the Adamawa," 173-174; Adelaide Nguesta Maigan, "La culture de l’igname et les mutations socio-économiques chez les Dii de Mbe : Perspectives historique" (University of Ngaoundéré, 2000), 6-7; Souleymanou Yaya, Interview, August 9, 2007.

4 According to Philip Burnham’s research, it was only in the colonial period that a coherent Gbaya ethnic group was truly created through the forced relocation and regrouping of Gbaya-phone peoples into “mono-ethnic” communities and the widespread acceptance of cultural symbols such as manioc and Christianity as symbols of Gbaya identity. Burnham, *Politics of Cultural Difference*, 70-95. For more information on the Gbaya, see Bah, "Le facteur peul," 67-68; Frobenius, *Peuples et sociétés traditionnelles*, 109-120; Hino, "Towns and Villages in the Adamawa," 173-174; David Mokam, "L’impôt de capitation et la crise économique du 1929 au Cameroun sous l'administration française," *Annales de la FALSH de l'Université de Ngaoundéré* IV (1999): 11.

ethnographies, rather than histories, and those histories which do exist are based almost exclusively on oral traditions. It is clear however that when the Fulbe entered the region they encountered a strong, centralized Mboum state and several other, less defined, states and ethnic groups.

In the early-1800s, Usman don Fodio led a religious uprising against the nominally-Muslim Hausa state in Northern Nigeria and established the Sokoto Caliphate, also based in Northern Nigeria. Subsequently a series of jihads swept Nigeria and Cameroon. Ngaoundéré was captured by Fulbe jihadists in 1836 and a kingdom was established in the city. In my thesis, I will use the term Fulbe to describe the sedentary, highly Islamicized section of the larger Fulani ethnic group. The Fulbe are distinguished from the pastoralist Mbororo by their residence pattern, economic activity, level of Islamicization, marriage habits and gender role, although both groups identify as Fulani. Although the settled Fulbe community was not monolithic and there was an uneven distribution of wealth in the form of slaves, horses and access to political positions, there were few class distinctions among the Fulbe.

Instead, the dominant division in Northern Cameroon after the installation of the Fulbe state was between Muslim and non-Muslim—this division closely

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7 Azarya argues that there were class divisions among the aristocratic Fulbe connected to the palace and “commoners,” while Burnham and Last argue that such divisions were more fluid. I side with Burnham and Last. Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change*; Philip Burnham and Murray Last, "From Pastoralist to Politician: The Problem of a Fulbe "Aristocracy"," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 133-135, no. XXXIV-1-3 (1994).
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correlated to a division between free and “enslave-able” and Fulbe and non-Fulbe. 8 Only Muslims were seen as full members of society although Muslim groups such as the Hausa, Borneau and Kanuri were distinguished from the Fulbe. These other Muslim groups were predominately traders, whereas the Fulbe identified as pastoralists. The Fulbe were also distinguished from other Muslim ethnic groups by their reliance on the Fulbe-specific behavior code of Pulaaku and “racial” characteristics. 9 There were even distinct tax categories for Fulbe and non-Fulbe Muslims, although these ethnic divisions were complicated in everyday social interaction. 10 For example, while the four legal wives of the king (as distinguished from his many concubines) had to be Muslim, but not necessarily Fulbe, the most important court dignitaries and the king himself had to be Fulbe. 11 The Fulbe controlled the majority of the resources in Northern Cameroon, including political offices, the military and judicial system, taxes, slaves and manpower, land and cattle and they monopolized the use of Muslim identity. 12 But again, the distinctions between Muslim ethnic groups were unimportant compared to the overarching

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8 These divisions were closely linked to stereotyped economic specialization; Fulbe pastoralists were identified in opposition to “non-Fulbe” agriculturalists.
9 Several authors commented that the visual identification of “racial” characteristics has become less important for the Fulbe, as these sedentary populations have a history of assimilation of non-Fulbe through marriage (Fulbe men and non-Fulbe women), creating a community which does not fit with the stereotypical visual markers. Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 53-4; Jean-Claude Froelich, “Le Commandement et l’organisation sociale chez les Foulbe de L’Adamaoua (Cameroun),” Études Camerounaises 45-46 (1954): 32-33; Jean-Claude Froelich, “Ngaoundéré: la vie économique d’une cité peul,” Études Camerounaises 43 (1954): 7; Aboubakar Garba, Interview, August 4, 2007; André Gondolo, “Evolution du Peul urbain: Ngaoundéré” (paper presented at the Pastoralists of the West African Savanna: Selected Studies Presented and Discussed at the Fifteenth International African Seminar, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, 1970), 302; verEecke, “The Slave Experience in Adamawa,” 31; Walker, "From Cattle Camp to City," 57-58.
11 Ibid; Garba, August 4.
12 Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 208-212; Burnham and Last, "From Pastoralist to Politician."
division was between Fulbe freemen and *Haabe* ("pagan") "slaves," or more accurately, "enslave-able" peoples.

Although certain prominent figures in the Mboum and Dii populations (such as the *Belaka* of the Mboum) converted to Islam shortly after the Fulbe conquest, historically non-Muslim groups continued to be regarded as non-Muslims and thus potential slaves according to Muslim texts and traditions. In Ngaoundéré most of privately owned slaves were Laka and Kaka, brought by force to the kingdom from more Northern regions, and Gbaya from the Gbaya tributary states in the East. Indigenous peoples such as Mboum and Dii were seen as the "slaves" of the palace. Though there were theoretical differences between slaves and the subordinate, subject groups which were indigenous to the Ngaoundéré region, in practice little distinction existed. Even though Islamic law encouraged the conversion and subsequent manumission of slaves, in Ngaoundéré none of these populations were actively proselytized, as Islam served as the marker of free status reserved almost exclusively for the Fulbe. The Mboum, Dii, Gbaya, Kaka, Laka, and many other groups were collectively referred to by the Fulbe by terms *Haabe* ("pagan" or "infidel") and *Matchoubé* ("not free" or slave) in spite of political connections between the leaders of certain communities (such as the Mboum) and the Fulbe state. Individual and

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13 Awalou and Souleymanou Yaya both state that the conversion of the Mboum and Dii political leaders respectively occurred in the 1800s, when these populations created political and military pacts with the Fulbe state. Awalou, August 8; Yaya, August 9.


15 There is evidence that the Fulbe did not actively seek to convert their indigenous neighbors, in spite of the use of Islam as a justification for their conquest, because Muslims could not be enslaved. Lacroix (1966) in Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change*, 24. See also Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 17; Mohammadou, *Fulbé Hooseere*.
unique ethnic identities were thus suppressed into a single identity, whose sole logic was in its opposition to Fulbe identity.

Ngaoundéré was one of several kingdoms, or lamidats, in Northern Cameroon. These city-kings were subordinate to the Emir of Yola (Nigeria), and were the outposts of the vast Sokoto Caliphate. Each kingdom was ruled by a king, or Lamido (plural Lamibe), the political and spiritual leader of the (Muslim) community and a group of Muslim and “slave” dignitaries of varying level of importance. The most important dignitaries were part of the faada, a group of nobles who advised the king and had the ability to enthrone and depose him. Each dignitary had several chiefs (ardo’en) who reported to him and each chief controlled an administrative unit, or tokke (singular Tokkal) consisting of several families or villages. These units were not based around geographic locations but rather familial connections. The palace and the central government apparatus were located in the city of Ngaoundéré, but the kingdom encompassed a much larger, predominately rural region.

Mboum, Dii and Gbaya individuals became Matchoubé, or “slave,” dignitaries and as concubines and the Ngaoundéré kingdom may have even used “pagan” symbols as part of its legitimacy and incorporated Mboum political structure into the form of the state. The “slave” dignitaries were able to amass great wealth, as they

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16 Burnham and Last also offers a description of the many possible forms of the Fulbe state within different locations in the Sokoto Caliphate. Burnham and Last, “From Pastoralist to Politician.”
17 For a discussion of the tokke Mahmoudou Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse : les Fulbe de Ngaoundéré face au processus de modernisation" (University of Tromso, July 2000); Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 26-28, 53; Ngoh, Cameroon, 1884-1985; Mohamadou Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels au Nord Cameroun : cas de Belaka Mboum et Mbere XVIII-XXe siècles" (University of Ngaoundéré 2004).
18 Personal communication with Mohammadou Eldredge in Lisbet Holtendahl, "Women's Control-- Control over Women: Women's condition in the Development of Urban Culture in Ngaoundéré,
collected taxes and troops for the king and were able to capture and keep booty and slaves in war.\textsuperscript{19} Because many important figures in the king’s home, such as his guards and personal secretaries, were “slave” dignitaries, these individuals may have been able to influence his policies and actions. They were often trusted more than the king’s Fulbe advisors.\textsuperscript{20} Additionally the mother of the king was tacitly expected to be Mboum according to some sources; the queen mother held a great deal of power as a liaison between the populations and her son, as she often lived outside of the palace.\textsuperscript{21} The incorporation of indigenous women into the palace literally created connections between the Fulbe and these groups over generations. Such ties were symbolically reinforced by placing individuals from other ethnic groups in positions of potential power as queen mothers, wives and advisors to the Fulbe king.

But even though “slave” dignitaries held an important role within the palace, their position and concurrent power was based on their subordinate status.\textsuperscript{22} They were trusted because they could never become king. These positions were not hereditary, unlike the Fulbe dignitaries’ posts, signifying the lack of long-term social mobility for “slave” nobles and their descendants. The Fulbe dignitaries controlled

\textsuperscript{19} The translation of the term Matchoubé as slave comes from Aboubakar Garba and Froelich. Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 18; Garba, August 4. For more information on the role of these “slave” dignitaries see Bah, "Le facteur peul," 75; Burnham, \textit{Politics of Cultural Difference}, 19; Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale."; Garba, August 4; Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?."; Mohammadou, \textit{Fulbé Hooseere}.

\textsuperscript{20} Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale."; Garba, August 4; Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?.

\textsuperscript{21}Dikku, Interview, August 4, 2007; Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 38; Garba, August 4.

\textsuperscript{22} Although in Ngaoundéré, “slave” dignitaries were totally dependant on the king and their presence did not challenge the general Fulbe control, in other Northern Cameroonian kingdoms such as Rey-Bouba and Tibati the Fulbe kings relied more on non-Fulbe populations. Aissatou, August 3; Awalou, August 8; Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 223.
the majority of the *tokke*, the family units through which taxes were collected, and were thus able to access a great deal of wealth in comparison to the “slave” dignitaries.\(^{23}\) The *faada*, the group of nobles who choose the new king, was all Fulbe and the “slave” dignitaries were informed afterwards of the choice of the new king.\(^{24}\) Finally, the presence of parallel titles for Fulbe and “slave” dignitaries suggests that these individuals operated in fundamentally separate worlds—that is, a Muslim world and non-Muslim world—such divisions, along with association of Islam with civilization suggest that “slave” dignitaries were seen as separate from the locus of power of the state. The Fulbe domination of influential government positions within the palace solidified and reflected their communal power and the ways in which the kingdom was deeply linked to the Fulbe community.

The power of the Fulbe ethnic community was also represented in the person and power of the king. The king had to be the son of a previous king, which gave him membership in the Fulbe ethnic community even if his mother was not Fulbe because ethnicity and heritage is charted patrilineally among the Fulbe. The king also acted symbolically as the first among equals in the Fulbe community. The land “owned” by the king was in fact the property of the Fulbe community. A French scholar-administrator later commented:

> All of the *Lamido’s* territory….is the indivisible property of the Fulbe collective, overseen by the *Lamido*….The true owner of the conquered territory is the collective….\([\text{although}]\) in practice, everything occurs as if the *Lamido* was the true owner of the land.\(^{25}\)

\(^{23}\) Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 32-33.
\(^{24}\) In the colonial period, as we will see, the *faada* proposed a nominee to the French administration who would then decide if they would approve the choice. Nonetheless, it was only after they had obtained the support of the administration that the *faada* would inform the Matchoubé dignitaries of the name of the new king. Ibid.: 34-36; Garba, August 4.
\(^{25}\) Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 29. « Tout le territoire du [Lamido]…est la propriété indivisé de la collectivité peul, gérée par le Lamido….La vrai propriétaire du territoire
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The king was the leader of the Muslim community, and was seen as the spiritual heir of Mohammed; indeed according to Aboubakar Garba the son of Lamido Mohammadou Abba (1948-1956), as the leader of the Muslim community the king was accorded rights similar to those of the Prophet Mohammed by being able to “marry” more than four wives. His comment indicates that, whatever the scriptural basis for such a claim, the residents of Northern Cameroon saw a strong association between the religious and political power of the king. In Northern Cameroon Islam is a key component of Fulbe identity and the reverse is also true: to be Muslim is to be Fulbe. The position of the king as the leader of the Muslim spiritual community reinforced his position as the primary actor of the Fulbe community so while the king was often not “genetically” Fulbe, he was for all intents and purposes, Fulbe.

Because early authors writing about ethnic relations in Northern Cameroon focused on the relationship between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups as one of exploitation and oppression, later writers sought to challenge this notion by highlighting the ways in which subject populations collaborated with and resisted Fulbe control, and the ways in which the strength of the Fulbe state rested on the integration of subject population into the palace, as described above. These later

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26 Ibid.: 43; Garba, August 4. For a more in depth discussion of the religious role of the king, see Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse".

27 Gausset suggests that the king was biologically non-Fulbe, and should thus be seen as a member of the local population. But this argument, while true, ignores the fact that the Fulbe place primacy on paternal descent, language, culture and religion as markings of ethnic identity. Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?," 100.

28 The traditional style of history of Northern Cameroon, which identifies a hierarchical relationship between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups based on violence and exploitation was strongly supported by French colonial writers (as it justified French intervention in the social structure, where they so chose). See Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale."; Froelich, "La vie économique d'une cité peul."; Rapport annuel du gouvernement français à l'Assemblée Générale des
authors certainly were able to nuance the understandings of social relations across Northern Cameroon, but they sometimes fail to acknowledge the ways in which collaboration and incorporation were signs of an unequal power between other groups and the dominant Fulbe population. Further, the focus on integration and cooperation can obscure the exploitation and inequality within the Fulbe state. Even though certain Mboum, Dii and even, to a lesser extent, Laka, Kaka and Gbaya, individuals were included in the power structure of the kingdom, and even though certain slaves may have held a great deal of power, this does not negate the brutality of the system nor the marginal identity of the slave and subject populations. The kingdoms of Northern Cameroon were ultimately Fulbe states, and other groups had to cooperate because the Fulbe held a real and overarching power in the region. The power of the kingdom was not solely based in these visible forms of accommodation, but was intimately connected the exercise of power of the Fulbe over the other groups living in Ngaoundéré.

This power dynamic occurred because of the ways in which the Fulbe came to be accepted as representatives of civilization. The Fulbe identified themselves as “civilized” as opposed to the “pagan” populations of Northern Cameroon, who were dismissed as lacking religion and culture.\textsuperscript{29} This image was predicated in part on the literacy of the Fulbe community, their identification with a broader Islamic culture and the association of the Fulbe with urban centers. Fulbe political control of the region further enforced this image in the eyes of the local populations and the Fulbe

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item This interpretation was then challenged by authors who focused on the incorporation of subject populations such as Aissatou, August 3; Bah, "Le facteur peul."; Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?.”
\item Schilder, \textit{Quest for Self-esteem}, 37.
\end{itemize}
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self-identification as “bearers of culture” was accepted by many groups across Northern Cameroon, such as the Mundang, Nyam-Nyam and Gbayas. These groups emulated the Fulbe by developing political hierarchies within their own autonomous communities based on the structure of the Fulbe kingdoms, adopting symbols of Fulbe power such as turbans and concubines, and using Fulfulde words such as Lamido to describe these new political positions.\(^{30}\) The adoption of Fulbe political hierarchy was not about the inherent value of these structures, but rather that they were linked to an idea of what constituted a “civilized” community. Although some groups rejected Fulbe social structures and used covert means to challenge and undermine Fulbe rule, Fulbe culture came to represent “civilization” in Northern Cameroon.\(^{31}\)

The links between indigenous groups and the Fulbe state also existed within an entrenched system of slavery, though the nature of slavery in Africa has been part of an ongoing academic debate. One group of scholars argues that slavery in Africa is not comparable to American plantation slavery because of the possibility for social mobility on the part of the slave, especially over several generations, and the wide array of statuses and levels of social exclusion described with the term “slavery.” Others see African slavery as an institution predicated on the permanent exclusion of the slave from the kinship structures of the enslaving community and thus as a

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\(^{30}\) For example, after contact with the Fulbe, the Nyam-Nyam began to elect chiefs called lamibe who took on the symbolic markers of Fulbe power such as the turban, Muslim identity, and many wives; likewise the Gbayas adopted Islam and Fulbe cultural practices after contact with the Fulbe state. Burnham, *Politics of Cultural Difference*, 92; Burnham, "Regroupement' and Mobile Societies," 583; Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom," 680-81; Schilder, *Quest for Self-esteem*, 118-124.

\(^{31}\) Aissatou, August 3.
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perpetually less-human, socially dead, individual. Both approaches note that there are “a range of coerced relationships, stress a process of incorporation [of the slave into the master’s community] and...see the slave essentially as an outsider.” In Ngaoundéré, slaves were theoretically able to gain their freedom through conversion to Islam, to transcend material barriers, for example by becoming a wealthy slave dignitary in the palace, and even to inherit their master’s estate if there were no living relatives. There was also paternalistic discourse of the relationship between slaves and their owners, although statements of family connection between slave and masters should be treated with caution – while slaves may have been regarded as family, their master’s family was their only real kin, and such “family” ties did not prevent mistreatment or brutality.

Slave labor on plantations provided the economic foundation of the kingdom, and slaves also served as the primary trade item between Ngaoundéré and other cities in the Sokoto Caliphate. In the 1890s Ngaoundéré was referred to by one European observers as a slave trader’s El Dorado and it was estimated that 8,000-10,000 slaves


33 Klein, Slavery and Colonial Rule, 9-10.


35 One elderly Fulbe woman stated “There were many slaves but they were treated like the children of their masters…They all loved their masters” [« Il y avait beaucoup des esclaves, mais ils sont traités comme les enfants par ses parents … Tout aiment leur maitre.] Hadjadidi, August 15. Her statement was corroborated by her grand-niece, who translated this interview, who remembered taking food and gifts to elderly former slaves with Hadjadidi and by secondary sources on slavery in the is Sokoto Caliphate such as Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 19; verEecke, "The Slave Experience in Adamawa," 37.
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were captured annually for local use and trade throughout the Sokoto Caliphate. In the pre-colonial era, there were more slaves than freemen in Ngaoundéré; the ratio of slaves to free people sometimes approached 2:1 and never fell below 1:1. In Yola, Nigeria, the capital of the Sokoto Caliphate’s Adamaoua Province, commoners held often held between five and twenty slaves, while nobles often owned hundreds.

In Ngaoundéré, there were four different forms of slavery which allowed for different levels of autonomy and material benefits for the slave: domestic servants, plantation/village slaves, concubines, and the slaves of the Lamidat, or the state. Domestic servants lived in separate buildings within the home compound and were relatively well-cared for and considered in some respects part of the family. Plantation slaves, called rumde, lived in mono-ethnic communities on the outskirts of the city. An individual Fulbe might control one or several of these villages and use the harvest in his own home; such plantations constituted the principal source of food for the urban populations of the kingdom. According to French scholar-colonial administrator Jean-Claude Froelich, these villages were populated by Kaka and Gbaya who “were displaced en masse with their chiefs and their things and installed

40 Froelich, "La vie economique d'une cite peul," 8; Hadjadidi, August 15.
41 Froelich, "La vie economique d'une cite peul," 8; Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20.
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in agricultural colonies …their chiefs are named by the king.”\(^{42}\) The existence of these slave plantations likely served to limit and stabilize the ownership of slave populations, that is, to make slave owners more invested in retaining and maintaining the system. Some authors writing about slavery in Africa have noted that those societies which relied on slavery as a widespread institution, especially plantation slavery, were less incorporative than other societies and thus that in communities like Ngaoundéré the social mobility of slaves was often quite limited.\(^{43}\)

Many women slaves became concubines. Fulbe men were limited by Muslim law to four wives and chose these wives, \textit{rewbée}, from the free Muslim population. Rich men often took many more non-Muslim women as concubines, \textit{sulabée}—sometimes to secure alliances, sometimes simply out of desire.\(^{44}\) While Muslim women were married in a ceremony presided over by an \textit{Imam}, concubines did not have such a ceremony and unlike free women, there was no bridewealth exchanged for them.\(^{45}\) Once married, concubines and wives were secluded in the home and their children were considered Fulbe. But free-born women did have more status: they lived in chambers with only their children, while a concubine would share a room

\(^{42}\) Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 21. « Ils été déplacés en bloc avec leur chefs et leur biens et installés en colonies agricoles à proximité de Ngaoundéré…leurs arnabe sont nommés par le Lamido. »

\(^{43}\) Lovejoy, \textit{Transformations in Slavery}, 9-12.

\(^{44}\) In this vein, Madame Dikku claims that she was chosen by \textit{Lamido} Babba Djelani because she was beautiful. Dikku, August 4. It is also important to note that many of these “non-Muslim” women converted to Islam after entering their husband’s household Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 38; Dori Spellian Lukong, "Fulani and Mbum Women in the Lamidat of Ngaoundéré from Origin to 1907: A Historical Study of Gender and Power" (University of Ngaoundéré, 2002), 62.

\(^{45}\) In Northern Cameroon, it is common for a dowry to be paid to the husband’s family—the lack of such a material transfer demonstrates the minimal worth of the concubine from the perspective of the husband. Dikku, August 4; Denis Whyte, Jon Jerstad, and Lisbet Holtedahl, \textit{The Sultan's Burden} (New York: Filmmakers Library, 1994), Videorecording (vid).
with her children and servants.\textsuperscript{46} Divorce was common and relatively easy for Muslim women in Northern Cameroon, and divorced women could easily remarry.\textsuperscript{47} Concubines could not use this recourse as they were not married under Islamic law, and sometimes ran way to avoid an unhappy marriage. Additionally, concubines were presented as sexual objects. Their virginity was not valued and they might be used for their sexuality, for example by being forced to perform provocative dances or being offered to visitors as “entertainment.”\textsuperscript{48}

Finally, the state (\textit{lamidat}) held many slaves. Some of these slaves fell into the categories above (plantation slaves, domestic slaves, concubines) but there were additional categories of slaves in the palace. Slaves, known as \textit{dogari}, made up the bulk of the army and the police forces of kingdom, and even had the ability to arrest and imprison Muslim men and women.\textsuperscript{49} There were also many slave nobles who, as was discussed above, gained riches and political power from their place within the palace. These dignitaries often gave daughters or sisters as concubines to new king as a sign of the alliance between populations and in many cases the king was often the child of a concubine.

The question is whether the people who worked in the palace, especially the “slave nobles” and concubines were slaves, allies or something in between. The identity of these individuals is highly debated—especially the use of the term “slave” in reference to Mboum and Dii populations. An older woman living in Ngaoundéré,

\textsuperscript{46} Gnapelle Nganyo, "La femme Mboum de Ngan-Ha", 59.
\textsuperscript{47} Dikku, August 4; Mamadidi, Interview, August 15, 2007. For an interesting discussion of Fulbe divorce practices in Futa-Jallon see Diallo Telli, "Le divorce chez les Peuls," \textit{Presence africaine} (Oct/Nov 1958).
\textsuperscript{48} Klein, \textit{Slavery and Colonial Rule}, 246-249.
\textsuperscript{49} Aissatou, August 3.
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Hadidjatou Bebbé, who is herself Mboum and worked as a servant in the palace in her youth, referred to the Mboum as slaves, saying: “the king’s tribe was the Mboum and they worked in the kitchen, did everything”. 50

But other residents, including Bobbo Moussa, the former mayor and Fulbe politician, suggested that the Fulbe formed reciprocal relationship with other ethnic groups based on mutual need. Awalou, the son of a Dii man and a Mboum woman, said that in his grandparents’ time, the people who worked in the palace were not slaves, but rather that the ability of the king to take concubines and servants from the local population was a sign of his political and military prowess rather than a system or institution of slavery. 51 Dii politician Souleymanou Yaya used the same word as Mayor Bobbo Moussa, “collaborator,” in his description of the relationship between the Fulbe and the Dii. 52 These two men portrayed a “collaborator” as one who shares power, in contrast to a “slave” who is in a position of subordination. Indeed the use of the term “collaborator” softens and obscures the image of slavery and the reality of exploitation between slave and master, replacing it with the idea of a partnership between equals.

Souleymanou Yaya even initially assumed that my question about the existence of slavery had to do with the Atlantic slave trade, and denied that a slave-trade had existed in Northern Cameroon. By assuming that I was referencing the Atlantic slave trade, Yaya downplayed the extent and importance of slavery in Northern Cameroon. Such a tactic obscures the vast use of slaves in Northern Cameroon; the Adamaua region provided the majority of slaves for the entire Sokoto

50 Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20.
51 Awalou, August 8.
52 Yaya, August 9.
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Caliphate in the nineteenth century. The comparison between the two forms of slavery hearkens back to academic discussions of slavery which attempt to soften the image of the severity of slavery in Africa by comparing it to plantation slavery in the Americas. By focusing on the idea of “collaboration,” residents of Ngaoundéré absolved themselves from the way they personally may have benefited from the history of unequal power in the region. As there continue to be social repercussions for those individuals who are named as “slaves” or descendants of slaves, perhaps the avoidance of the term also reflects a silence around peoples’ slave origins—Yaya and Awalou in particular are members of formerly “enslave-able” populations.

The ambiguity of the status of these populations also comes from the fact that the Mboum and Dii were differentiated from other Northern Cameroonian populations, and occupied an intermediary step between the “slave” peoples and the Muslim Fulbe. This uncertain position is marked by the fact that most Mboum and Dii leaders converted to Islam and that the Mboum and the Dii remained on their lands and retained their own political structures, although the Fulbe king controlled the nomination and actions of their political leaders. French bureaucrat turned anthropologist Jean-Claude Froelich said the following about the Dii:

They have conserved their entire social organization, their villages, their political hierarchy under the rule of their traditional authorities, their beliefs and their customs; nothing has changed in their way of life, but they are politically answerable to the Lamido and pay tribute to the Fulbe state.

Mboum and Dii villages were placed in under the control of “slave” officials, most of who were drawn from these two groups.  

These populations paid tribute to the Fulbe state in the form of agricultural products and yearly quota of workers for the palace. These workers were essentially slaves. One Danish anthropologist, writing about ethnic relations in Northern Cameroon argues that the gifts of children to serve in the palace was commonplace in kingdoms across Cameroon and was not a sign of subordination of non-Muslim groups to the Fulbe but rather indicates that these groups accepted the king as their leader. But I have not found any indication, in any of my reading, that Muslim groups in Northern Cameroon gave servants or workers to the palace as tribute—this seems to have been specific to “vassal” populations and thus a sign of their comparative exploitation and their association with “slave” groups.

Even though there were legal distinctions between the vassal groups who paid taxes to the state and slaves, whose taxes were paid by their owners, in practice there was little differentiation in the treatment of these groups. Because the Fulbe ideology identified a division between Muslim and “non-Muslim” individuals—which correlated to the division between the Fulbe and non-Fulbe populations and between free and not-free status—ethnic identity and social status limited the role of “non-Fulbe” groups even if they were not technically slaves and essentially made them “enslave-able.” In the logic of the Fulbe-dominated world, slaves and

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55 Bah, "Le facteur peul,” 75; Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 46; Mohammadou, *Fulbé Hooseere*.
56 Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 14; Holten Dahl, "Education, économie et “idéal de vie”," 278; Mohammadou, *Fulbé Hooseere*, 280; Mukum Mbaku, *Culture and Customs of Cameroon*, 65; Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ".
57 Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?," 104-105.
58 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale.", Mohammadou, *Fulbé Hooseere*. 

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marginalized groups were associated with one another, in opposition to the Fulbe. Anthropologist Quentin Gausset has argued that prohibitions on cattle ownership and Muslim conversion for non-Fulbe population during the pre-colonial period were not about defining slave status, but about maintaining ethnic boundaries between the Fulbe and other populations. But where ethnic boundaries were so closely correlated with who could be enslaved these limitations marked both ethnic divisions and the distinction between “slave” and free. Those populations who were subjects rather than the slaves were still subordinate to the Fulbe because the many forms of collaboration and exploitation in pre-colonial Ngaoundéré all ultimately occurred in reference to Fulbe power. Even when the colonial state imposed itself on the region, it did not displace the existing social structure, but merely added another layer to the hierarchy already in place.

German and French Colonization of Northern Cameroon

In 1901 a military expedition sent by the German colonial government overthrew the king of Ngaoundéré. The Germans had established a colony in Southern Cameroon in 1884 but they did not venture northwards until the expansion of French and British forces made them nervous about securing their own interests in the interior of the continent. The Germans then systematically conquered the kingdoms of Northern Cameroon, and separated them from the former regional capital of the Caliphate, Yola, which was now in British Nigeria. The colonial government established the Northern Cameroonian town of Garoua as the new political and spiritual capital of the Northern Cameroonian kingdoms. The Germans

59 Gausset, "Historical Account or Discourse on Identity?,” 106-107.
used indirect rule in Northern Cameroon, and thus allowed the Fulbe to rule much as before: the Germans did not enforce their abolition of slavery and the Fulbe continued to conduct slave raids and place heavy taxes on subject populations. Indeed the Germans helped Fulbe leaders subdue other Northern populations who had not previously been under Fulbe control.  

After Germany’s loss in World War I, its colonial territories were divided among the victorious nations. Cameroon was set up as a mandate territory of the League of Nations, and the administration of the territory was divided between the French and the British; Ngaoundéré was in the French section. When the French first took over control of Cameroon after World War I, they essentially adopted the German form of indirect rule in Northern Cameroon and relied heavily on the kings. The early French colonial government tried to limit the mobility of non-sedentary groups such as the Mbororo and the Gbaya by placing them in village groupings and used the Fulbe as aides in the submission of the surrounding regions. For example, when a theft occurred, the French would send the Fulbe cavalry to recover the stolen item. The French supported the Fulbe political system in Northern Cameroon, but they were also willing to accommodate the interests of other ethnic groups against the Fulbe where it was politically expedient or necessary—for example after the Gbaya

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60 Although the German colonial government likely altered and affected ethnic relations, I was not able to research in depth. For more information on the effect and role of German colonization see Eckert, "Slavery in Colonial Cameroon 1880s to 1930s."

61 Aissatou, August 3; Burnham, *Politics of Cultural Difference*, 33; van Santen, "Islam, Gender and Urbanisation": 405. The early French colonial government was essentially beholden to the Fulbe for control of the region. One French official stationed in Ngaoundéré wrote in 1918, “We do not know a single person in town besides the Lamido and his dignitaries and we could not survive more than a few days without his cooperation” Capitaine Ripert, "Situation politique de la region de Ngaoundéré," in *Documentations ORSTOM, Dossier Adamaoua, no.III* (Yaounde, Cameroon: 1918), 384. cited in Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change.*
of the Mbere region east of Ngaoundéré rebelled against Fulbe control in the late 1920s the French removed this group from Fulbe administration.\(^{62}\)

Although Cameroon was technically a mandate territory (first under the League of Nations, later under the United Nations) the French drew on their experiences in their other colonies in administering the territory. In the nineteenth century, the French had defined their colonial mission through the term “assimilation,” which encompassed a broad array of legal, cultural and moral meanings but which rested on the notion that human equality could be attained through the acceptance of French culture and incorporation into French political structures.\(^{63}\) After the turn of the century, the idea of assimilation was abandoned and replaced in most colonies by the concept of “association,” which focused on cultural and political incorporation in the distant future and stressed the development of a Westernized, francophone African elite and the maintenance of separate spheres for Africans and Europeans.\(^{64}\) By the time Cameroon became a mandate territory of France in 1916 the colonial government had moved away from the previous “equal races policy” in which a French administrator was linked to small community units through village chiefs and towards a more indirect form of rule.\(^{65}\) The French sought to rule their territories through local and traditional authorities, known as chefs, or

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chief, although they incorporated these leaders into the colonial state and generally limited their autonomy. The term *chef* applied both to newly created positions and to pre-existing kings and leaders who were co-opted into the French political system. The French government taxed indigenous populations heavily, demanded the service of forced labor and employed the *indigénat*, a system of punishments—fines, arrest, jail sentences of up to 15 days without appeal—which could be imposed arbitrarily on Africans by any French colonial administrator for minor offences, independently of the court system.

During World War II, Cameroon and French Equatorial Africa (AEF) remained loyal to and under the control of Free France. In 1944, the leaders of the Free French movement met in Brazzaville, Congo to revise French policies towards its colonial territories. This conference promised to abolish the *indigénat* and forced labor, to rescind the dual status of French residents and indigenous Africans (by abolishing the position of *sujet* or “subject”), and increase African political participation in the French empire. The Brazzaville Conference also re-affirmed the idea that African colonies could work towards independence *within* the French Union, that is, towards self-governance as a form of independence. In 1946, at the end of

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66 Indeed, knowledge of French language and customs was seen as more important than traditional legitimacy, which speaks to the anticipated and desired role of these “traditional” rulers. In the 1930s, the French began to place more emphasis on the legitimacy of chiefs in the eyes of the population in an attempt to combat civil unrest and limit the effects of the “revolutionary demands” of the educated elite. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 7, 174-175, 183-198; Hubert Deschamps, "Et Maintenant, Lord Lugard?", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 33, no. 4 (1963); Peter Geschiere, “Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy, French and British Style," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63, no. 2 (1993): 155-156.

67 Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 88. For more on the history of the *indigénat*, see Asiwaju, "Control Through Coercion." Awalou also offered a very interesting story about his grandfather who worked building roads for the French on a forced-labor crew. His grandmother would prepare enough food for two months, which his grandfather would carry with him at all times—when the food ran out, the laborers would be sent home. Awalou, August 8.

68 By contrast French West Africa (AOF) was under Vichy rule until 1943.
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World War II, the French began to implement some of these reforms, especially through the pressure of newly elected African representatives to the French National Assembly, who pushed the French government to enact the changes proposed at the Brazzaville Conference.69

These changes in French policy and practice after 1946 altered the relationship between the French and traditional authorities. The colonial administration became more critical of the kings and modified the political structures of the territorial bureaucracy in ways which were detrimental to the autonomy of these traditional authorities. At the same time, the French still relied on the Northern kings to shore up French power in the face of challenges from the growing Francophone elite. The fluctuating interactions between the colonial state and the kings in turn affected the dynamics between the various populations of the city. Because Ngaoundéré was simultaneously the principal city of the French administrative unit of Adamaoua province and of the Ngaoundéré kingdom, the interconnections between the world of the colonial administration and that of the indigenous residents of the town were complex and built upon shifting and competing authorities and forms of subordination.70 The political structure of the colonial state overlapped with the Fulbe “colonization” of the region and the French installed themselves on top of the political and social structures developed by the Fulbe.

70 Ngaoundéré had been a very important city in the pre-colonial Sokoto caliphate and in the colonial period too the city was significant enough that the Minister of the French Union visited it during his tour of the protectorate in 1948. Rapport annuel 1948, 11.
In 1955 the Mboum king, Belaka Saoumboum, went on a hunger strike in protest of Fulbe control over the Mboum state. Since the establishment of the Fulbe kingdom at Ngaoundéré, the Belaka had been a vassal ruler under the Fulbe king. The links between the two states had been strengthened over time through the marriage of Mboum women to the Fulbe kings.\footnote{Although the Mboum king could not marry Fulbe princesses.} The tension between Belaka Saoumboum and Lamido Abba had begun when the Belaka refused to be enthroned in the Fulbe style, attempting to assert greater autonomy from the Fulbe state. The two leaders later sparred over who had the right to control the towns in the northern reaches of the Ngaoundéré kingdom, near Ngan-Ha, as the French had given the Belaka the right to collect taxes in that area independently of the Lamido. The tension between these two traditional authorities was fundamentally about the ability of Lamido Abba to control Belaka Saoumboum as past Fulbe Lamibe had controlled past Mboum Belakas. The colonial government, which recognized the authority of both men and paid them both a salary, alternately supported one and then the other in order to solidify their own power. In response to the mounting conflict, the French punished both leaders, ruling that the king of Ngaoundéré could no longer claim tribute in the form of slave labor, or “yearly servitude,” and simultaneously stopping the Belaka’s allowance from the French colonial administration. But the French did not remove the Belaka from the oversight of the king in the administrative hierarchy of the Ngaoundéré district. Finally, in response to this assault on his power by Belaka Saoumboum, Lamido Mohammadou Abba named a usurper Belaka to reside in
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Ngaoundéré, prevented Belaka Saoumboum from entering the city and even attempted to found an alternative capital city to Ngan-Ha. Although Lamido Abba was not totally successful in limiting the power of the Belaka, he was able to maintain control over the Mboum and Dii population.²

Under the colonial government, the same modes of cooperation and hierarchy which had occurred under the pre-colonial state continued to exist. The French presence provided these two sovereigns new partners and new avenues to gain control in their respective communities. Both the Belaka and the Lamido attempted to use the colonial state as allies against one another, and the French likewise partnered alternately with each leader to secure their own position. And yet, in this story, the French had only a bit part: they were arbitrators to a conflict which had less to do with the colonial administration than with the continuation of pre-colonial relationships and interaction. The conflict between the Belaka and the Lamido indicates the ways in which the French state affected, but did not control, the political and social worlds of colonial Ngaoundéré. This was in large part because the French choose to use the pre-existing social structure as the basis of their administration of the region.

This chapter will examine the overlapping waves of Fulbe and French control and administration in Ngaoundéré and the interconnection between the populations within each state. I will begin by discussing the ways in which the unequal and uneven hierarchy of power along the lines of ethnicity and religion in the pre-colonial period continued to exist in the colonial world. Slavery persisted in the city due to the failure of the French project against this institution, and the colonial administration

² Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ", 29-52.
furthermore supported the unequal distribution of power among the various groups living in Ngaoundéré. The second section will focus on the relationship between the colonial state and the Fulbe kingdom (*lamidat*). While the French undermined the Fulbe kings, ultimately these kings retained much of their authority in relation to the population – the connection between the Fulbe state and the colonial government reinforced the power of the kings in the eyes of the population. Finally, I will examine more specifically the overlapping and complimentary “colonizations” of Ngaoundéré—Fulbe and French. Many residents of Ngaoundéré focused on the idea of “collaboration” between various indigenous populations and between these groups and the French. Their statements assume that collaboration marks an equal relation between individuals or between groups; I will examine why so many individuals and primary texts use the term “collaborator” when they are in fact talking about systems of exploitation and subordination.

“Free and Equal”?: Slavery and Social Hierarchies in Late Colonial Ngaoundéré

The French Administration does not recognize the status of “un-free,” these old distinctions have disappeared and, today, all of the residents of the *lamidat* are free and hold equal rights…. ³

When I was young, there was still slavery—my father had slaves who worked on a farm for us…. ⁴

The pre-colonial social system of slavery and subordination was only partially undermined in the colonial period. Slavery continued to exist until the 1960s and the

³ Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 19. « L'Administration français ne reconnaissant pas le statut d’homme non-libre, ces anciennes distinctions ont disparu et, aujourd’hui, tous les habitants du lamidat sont libres et égaux en droits …et dans la pratique…les anciens captifs sont devenus progressivement et sans violence des hommes libres qui continuent à vivre en symbiose au milieu de leurs anciens maitres. »

⁴ Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20.
Mbuyom, Dii and other groups living in Ngaoundéré remained subordinated to the Fulbe population. The French colonial administration spoke of the abolition of slavery but they were unwilling or unable to enforce their own laws against the institution. The Fulbe continued to exploit the labor of former-slaves in a system which was little different from that of the pre-colonial period—socially, politically or economically. The Mbuyom and Dii, who had been members, if unequal and exploited members, of the state continued to play the same supporting role in the Fulbe state. The French needs for an administrative hierarchy and their racist understandings of Fulbe and Muslim communities led them to support the Fulbe state and social hierarchy tacitly and explicitly. The Fulbe thus maintained their social pre-eminence under the colonial state, vis-à-vis the other populations of Northern Cameroon.

The Fulbe still did not compose the majority of the population in the Ngaoundéré kingdom. In 1954 in Ngaoundéré, a city of 13,000, the Fulbe made up approximately half the population, with historically Muslim ethnic groups such as the Kanuri, Borneau, Hausa, Muslims made up three-quarters of the population. However in the kingdom, which included the city and many subordinate towns and villages, the Fulbe were only a quarter of the population—non-Muslim ethnic groups made up 70 percent of the population, of which one-third were described as “ex-slaves” by French administrator/anthropologist Jean-Claude Froelich. The difference in the ethnic make-up of urban and rural areas of the kingdom was linked to the persistence of exploitive economic structures. Muslim traders, merchants and bureaucrats in the Fulbe state lived in cities like Ngaoundéré; rural areas were populated by slaves

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living on plantations and other agriculturist groups (who were not Fulbe) who were politically subordinate to urban Fulbe populations.

In urban regions, the French census listed the category of *serviteurs,* or “servants,” together with the Fulbe (“Fulbe et serviteurs”). It is interesting that the French identified these individuals by their economic status rather than their ethnicity, and that they were listed together with the Fulbe. These “servants” were domestic slaves (or former slaves) who would have lived in the household compound and been counted with the Fulbe family by census takers. Even within the French census, it is clear that the relations of slavery had not disappeared, even if they were hidden through the more neutral term “servant” or hinted at in the ethnic make-up of urban and rural populations.

The French administration was unwilling to acknowledge the continuation of slavery in Cameroon. Instead the French claimed credit for bringing peace to the region and halting the slave raids and “savage wars” of the nineteenth century. Slavery had been abolished in France and French territories in 1848 but this law had not been enforced until the 1900s when the slave trade began to be prosecuted. Even at that time, the law was more about preventing new enslavements than emancipating all slaves. French authors writing about Ngaoundéré in the 1940s and 1950s dismissed the notion that slavery continued to exist. According to Froelich:

Today, all of the residents of the Lamidat are free and hold equal rights … The former captives have become, progressively and without
violence, free men who continue to live in symbiosis with the world of their former masters.  

But what Froelich saw as a “symbiosis” between worlds others saw a continuation of the pre-existing system; many residents of the city stated that slavery continued until 1960. The “old distinctions” in status had not in fact disappeared but remained encoded in social interactions and economic structures. Even if we accept that these “former captives” were no longer slaves, historians and sociologists writing about slavery in Northern Cameroon specifically and across the African continent have noted that legal measure had little effect on the reality of slavery and that exploitation continued—the lives of former slaves hardly changed in the colonial period.

In fact, slave raiding in the areas outside of Ngaoundéré continued into the colonial period, although it was eventually halted by the French in the 1940s. The administrator Froelich also noted obliquely in his 1954 article on Ngaoundéré that “despite the administrative actions, every year the courts see several cases of the trade and abduction of children.” While the slave trade became quite limited—because it was easier to limit—many households continued to own slaves. Several informants spoke of their personal experiences of slavery, mostly as slave owners, in their

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9 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 19. « Tous les habitants du lamidat sont libres et égaux en droits … les anciens captifs sont devenus progressivement et sans violence des hommes libres qui continuent à vivre en symbiose au milieu de leurs anciens maîtres. »

10 Aissatou, August 3; Bobbo, August 9; Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20; Hadjadidi, August 15; Yousoufà, Personal Communication, August.


12 Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 32-33.

13 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 19. « Malgré l’action administratrice, les tribunaux connaissent chaque année quelques faits de trait et rapt d’enfants. » See also Burnham, "Regroupement' and Mobile Societies,” 581. The continued enslavement of children sometimes a result of pawning by family members and thus tied to broader economic downturns. Klein, Slavery and Colonial Rule, 232.
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childhood. 14 Hadidjatou Bebbé, a Mboum woman born in 1946 in Ngaoundéré discussed how slavery continued to exist in her childhood:

The Fulbe did not do anything, the slaves farmed for them, washed their clothes... When [I] was young, there was still slavery—[my] father had slaves who worked on a farm for [us]...slavery existed until [I] was about 10.15

Her comments highlight both the continuation of the slave system and the overlaps of power between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups. As indicated in her quote, the ownership of slaves was not limited to the Fulbe ethnic group—Mboum individuals were also able to own slaves and were more generally incorporated into the structures of power, although often at an unequal level.

Hadidjatou Bebbé’s statement about the continuation of slavery into the colonial period is complimented by that of a Fulbe woman, Hadjadidi, (~b. 1930) the daughter of a wealthy Fulbe man, and the granddaughter of a Fulbe noble on her mother’s side. Her comments below were translated from Fulfulde by her grand-niece.

There were many slaves...Some slaves lived in the fields, and farmed for the family. Some slaves lived in the house, as property of the house, they lived in front of the house. They would get up very early to wash the millet and draw water from the river. Other slaves were wet-nurses for the children, each child had their own nurse...Other slaves cooked. There were around 50 slaves, to divide all of the work. Before he married her mother, Hadjadidi’s father had 20 slaves. But Hadjadidi’s mother was the child of a lamidat,16 her father was the head of the Fulbe army, the kaigama. So he had many slaves, and Hadjadidi’s mother came with 30 slaves. Fulbe women never had very

14 Something similar occurred in the Nigerian section of the former Sokoto Caliphate where small scale slavery continued into the colonial era. verEecke, “The Slave Experience in Adamawa,” 24-26, 40-45.
15 Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20.
16 This could mean simply that her father was a member of the faada, or, as nobles within the palace were often related to the king, that she was biologically a relative of a king.
much work, because there were slaves. Instead they would make little weavings out of bamboo.

When Hadjadidi was married, her parents gave her a slave to help with the cooking. When she gave birth, they gave her a slave to take care of the baby.\textsuperscript{17}

From both of these descriptions, it is clear that slavery, in its many forms, existed into the 1940s and 1950s, when these two women were children and young wives and mothers. Hadjadidi’s personal history also suggests they ways in which wealth and slave ownership were linked to the power structure of the kingdom— her grandfather was a noble in the \textit{lamidat} and he was wealthy enough to present his daughter with a gift, or dowry, of 30 slaves for her wedding. Additionally, Hadjadidi herself received slaves as a gift from her parents, speaking to the accumulation and distribution of wealth across generations. The pre-colonial place of the Fulbe influenced the colonial position of this group, which in turn affected the role of the Fulbe in post-colonial Cameroon. The transfer of wealth (first in the form of slaves, later through other means) across generations contributed to continued power of the Fulbe community, while the legacy of slavery and political subordination ensured that other groups were placed at a disadvantage.

Slavery remained a core component of social relations in Northern Cameroon in the 1940s and 1950s—even if the French would not admit this fact.\textsuperscript{18} The French

\textsuperscript{17} Hadjadidi, August 15. « Il y avait beaucoup des esclaves…Autres esclaves vivaient dans le champ, cultivaient pour la famille. Les esclaves vivaient dans la maison, propriété de la maison, ils habitaient devant la maison. Ils se levaient très tôt, elles pilliaient le mil, puisaient l’eau à la rivière. D’autres esclaves sont les nounous des enfants, chaque enfante a une nounou…d’autres esclaves préparaient la nourriture. Il y avait vers 50 esclaves, repartir les tâches. Avant de marier avec sa mère, son père a eu 20 esclaves, mais elle est d’une Lamidat, son père était le chef des armées peuls, le \textit{kaigama}. Donc il a eu beaucoup des esclaves et elle est venue avec 30 esclaves. Les femmes Fulbe n’ont pas eu beaucoup de travaille parce qu’elles ont les esclaves. Donc elles fabriquaient la petite lie [sic] en bambou. Quand elle (Hadjadidi) s’est mariée, ses parents l’ont donnée une esclave pour aider à la cuisine. Quand elle a accouchées, ils l’ont donné une esclave pour s’occuper de bébé. »
did little to enforce their laws against slavery, fearing social disorder and upheaval. They would only free slaves if they wanted to punish a specific owner and they even used legal restrictions on the movement of peoples to return runaway slaves.\textsuperscript{19} Yet the French abolition of slavery made social and physical mobility a possibility. Because the French had done away with the legal category of “slave,” slaves had more opportunity to claim their freedom through the court system, to negotiate over the price of labor, and to have greater control over their families; children and spouses could not longer be sold away from the family.\textsuperscript{20}

Even though the legal status of “slave” no longer existed, the Fulbe retained control over land and political control over former slaves, so the system of exploitation continued after the legal abolition of slavery. Freed slaves often had no connection to a family or kin group other than that of their masters and remained on the land or in the home of their former master and continued to provide services to the family (sometimes out of coercion, sometimes out of free choice). As in other slave-owning regions, although slaves were technically able to move freely across the territory, there were strong barriers to emigration: a slave might have little or no knowledge of any other home and masters often used coercion to force former slaves to remain. Those slaves who stayed on their master’s lands had to work in the fields in order not to be evicted, and masters were able to put political and social pressure

\textsuperscript{18} Burnham, \textit{Politics of Cultural Difference}, 174-175. In the early twentieth century the French freely admitted that slavery existed in their African colonies and that they were unwilling to change this system so as not to upset the social order. Manning even notes in his book on francophone sub-Saharan Africa that the French initially attempted to protect the institution of slavery in their colonial holdings, but slaves themselves took advantage of the French presence to run away or demand freedom through the courts. Manning, \textit{Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa}, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{19} Azarya, \textit{Aristocrats Facing Change}, 74-76.
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on former slaves in order to induce them to work—for example a recalcitrant slave might be sent to work in the public works.  

The continued exploitation of former slaves should be seen as *more* than economic exploitation, signaling a social component to these interactions. The term “slave” continued to be acceptable and there was a distinction between “slaves” and “clients” who freely choose their patrons, and between “free man” and “freed slave” which highlighted the historic status of these individuals. Former slaves were at a social disadvantage in many situations, for example they faced ostracization and difficulties when they attempted to marry “free” individuals.  

Even in the present day, naming someone as a slave or as a descendant of slaves has a great affect on their social status and even personal self-worth. The combined economic and social pressures meant that the “slavery” which existed in colonial Ngaoundéré was much closer to the pre-colonial system of slavery than to a world in which “free men … live in symbiosis with the world of their former masters.”

Those populations, such as the Mboum and Dii, who had occupied an intermediary role between “slave” and “free” in the pre-colonial period, continued to act as members of the palace and subjects to the Fulbe kingdom, this dynamic not being upset by the installation of the French colonial government. In 1954 French administrator Froelich wrote that

The Mboum are still considered to be an integral part of the *lamidat* and pay the *zakkat* (religious tax) in millet to the treasury; they must,

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23 Aissatou, August 3.
beyond this, make in-kind payments to the Lamido for the maintenance of his home. Furthermore, the former vassal groups provide many gifts and concubines at the coronation of each Lamido.\(^\text{24}\)

The word “still” is important here because it indicates the continuation of pre-colonial structures into the colonial era: the taxes, the “in-kind” payments of food, goods and labor (slaves) for the palace all continued even after the establishment of the overarching French state. The tensions between the Mboum and Fulbe populations, and between these two states, as described in the opening of this chapter illustrate the ways in which the French colonial government balanced the competing demands of the populations of Ngaoundéré. The Mboum king, Belaka Saoumboum, was able to protest the existing role of the Mboum in relation to the Fulbe kingdom by appealing to French interests in maintaining order—his ability to challenge the Fulbe Lamido by staging a hunger strike was only successful, was only possible, because of the presence of the French state. Thus in 1955, shortly after Froelich published his article, the “in-kind” payments of laborers were stopped by order of the French.

In spite of French support for the Mboum Belaka in this particular instance, and in spite of the fact some population regarded the French as liberators from the Fulbe power, the colonial administration ultimately reinforced the social division of ethnic groups implemented by the Fulbe.\(^\text{25}\) The dichotomy of Muslim and “non-Muslim” which had existed during the pre-colonial period was maintained in large part because this racialized hierarchy fit with French understandings of a racially-

\(^{24}\) Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 21. « Les Mboum sont encore considérés comme partie intégrante du Lamidat et payent au trésor la zakkat du mil ; ils doivent, en outre, au Lamido des prestations en nature pour l'entretien de son saré... En outre, les anciens groupements vassaux fournissent de nombreux cadeaux et concubines a chaque nomination de Lamido. »

\(^{25}\) Saliou and Schilder write about the ways in which indigenous populations regarded the French as liberators from Fulbe control. Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ", 29-30, 48-52; Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem, 142.
based social hierarchy and because of the French need for a bureaucratic hierarchy to facilitate tax collection and other administrative tasks. The pre-existing hierarchy of ethnicity in Northern Cameroon was tacitly accepted by the French and thus the social structure of the pre-colonial period, specifically the enslavement and subordination of certain groups, was maintained into the late colonial period.

The French encoded divisions between the ethnic groups in the region through their administrative practices—although certain divisions based on ethnicity and religious identity had clearly existed in the pre-colonial period as well: “free” Muslims, slaves, and “vassals” had paid different taxes; the city had been divided into mono-ethnic neighborhoods; Muslim and non-Muslim dignitaries had worn different styles of clothing. In Northern Cameroon, as across the continent, the colonial government (in addition to missionaries and anthropologists) solidified and/or restructured ethic divisions based on their own perceptions of ethnic and racial difference.

In Ngaoundéré, the French colonial government collected taxes based on ethnic identity. The “Fulbe and servants” paid 180 francs per person, the Mboum, 100, and the Dii and Kaka (listed together) 100 as well. The delineations between ethnic groups were literally charted through tax collection, especially because these distinctions were linked to stereotyped economic specialization and status. The association of “Fulbe and servants” also suggests that the taxes of slaves continued to be paid by their “former” masters, just as had occurred under the pre-colonial Fulbe

27 Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State."  
state. In a different sense, the French enshrined new ethnic divisions. The French colonial government separated the Mbororo and Fulbe communities, both considered Fulani, by using the *role supplémentaire*—under which taxes were paid to a French administrator, rather than to a chief or *Lamido*—to collect taxes from mobile Mbororo population. The colonial government also distinguished between Fulbe and Mbororo cattle herds for “veterinary reasons”. These distinctions in the tax code thus separated groups which may have been aggregated in the past.

The French administration furthermore tried to place groups in ethnically homogenous towns and forced non-sedentary groups such as the Gbaya to settle in villages—creating mono-ethnic communities and new ethnic identities, for example, Gbaya-phone clans became Gbaya. French attempts to associate certain groups with a physical area, and to limit the residents of a given town to the members of a single “ethnic group” in many ways created new ethnic identities out of a amalgam of smaller, linguistically-connected groups.

Anthropologist Philip Burnham, writing about ethnic relations in Northern Cameroon, has noted that in the colonial era ethnic divisions were used for:

> Taxation, labor recruitment, village resettlement and chieftaincy, judicial procedures, agricultural development…there were few domains of public life where ethnicity was not significant in determining a person’s relationship with the colonial state.

The use of ethnicity in defining the relationship between the state and the individual enshrined ethnicity as a means to access the state. The pervasive use of ethnicity within daily political and administrative affairs, in conjunction with French

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30 Burnham, "'Regroupement' and Mobile Societies."; Schilder, *Quest for Self-esteem*, 144-156.
promotion of Fulbe cultural values, privileged the Fulbe in relation to the other ethnic groups of the region.

The French regarded the Muslim Fulbe population as superior to the other residents of Northern Cameroon. This was in part because of the history of French relations with Muslim groups across their colonial territories and because of the specific historical relationship between the French and Fulbe in other regions of West Africa. Though the French alternately criticized Islam as un-African or as mixed with indigenous religions, Islam was often seen as superior to African religions. 32 Between the 1890s and the 1940s, Christopher Harrison argues that the prevailing view of Islam among French colonial administrators shifted from a fear of pan-Islamic movements to a localized view which identified certain Muslim leaders as allies (moderate, pro-French) and others as foes (fanatical, anti-French). 33 The French sought to create and cultivate alliances with those moderate groups, in order to ensure their own image as supporters of Islam and thus limit the effect of “fanatical” Muslim criticism. In Northern Cameroon, the French regarded the Fulbe as a moderate group, and thus were willing to partner with the kings.

The French also had a specific history with the Fulbe (in Futa Jallon and across West Africa) and complex ideas about this ethnic group. One French administrator writing in the early 1900s identified the Fulbe as the “intellectual and military elite” of the continent and French writers and bureaucrats were impressed with the “racial” characteristics (lighter skin and finer features) and socio-political

32 At various points in time, some French scholars portrayed Islam as a foreign religion, or as so connected with pre-Islamic customs that it could be considered “African.” Christopher Harrison, France and Islam in West Africa 1860-1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
33 Ibid., 96-99, 158.
organization of the group. The “higher intelligence” of the Fulbe meant that they were both admired and distrusted by the French who also described them as too clever, sneaky, intolerant of colonial authority, double-dealing and overly devout. In general, the lighter-skinned Fulbe were absorbed into the Hamitic myth, which posited that certain light-skinned groups of Africans were the descendants of the Biblical Ham, and that it was these “European” Africans who brought or created all civilization, technology and culture on the African continent. This conception of the Fulbe was based in an evolutionary model of race, in which Europeans represented the high point in a system of universal ranking and lighter-skinned Africans were seen as inherently superior to darker-skinned Africans. The racialized language and imagery of French colonial sources thus identified the Fulbe as a superior “race” and the Fulbe social structure—the well-established state, the “civilized” nature of the group—appealed to French (and other European) administrators and writers in comparison to other indigenous groups.

34 Harrison writes that most European observers writing in the late 19th century and early 20th century ranked the Fulbe at the top of a hierarchy of African ethnic groups, based on “scientific” and “superficial” characteristics such as beauty and cleverness. Indeed one official recommended Fulbe women as colonial wives in his “Practical Guide” for young colonial officials. Ibid., 58-59, 70-71.
35 Ibid., 68-89.
36 Edith Sanders charts the changing use of this term as a reflection of European views about Africans. The initial Hamitic hypothesis was based off of the biblical story of Ham, and posited that Africans, as Ham’s descendants, were cursed. A later form of the Hamitic hypothesis developed after Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt. This version attempted to understand the historic glory of the Egyptian civilization. Archaeologists and scholars proposed that the Egyptians were the descendants not of Canaan, who had been cursed, but of Ham’s other, un-cursed son, Mizrain. The Egyptians and other “Caucasoid” Africans were separated from “Negroid” Africans and it was these “Caucasoid”-Hamitic Africans who were said to be the bearers of all culture and civilization to the African continent. The Fulbe were assumed to be part of this group. Edith Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origins and Functions in Time Perspective," The Journal of African History 10, no. 4 (1969).
In Northern Cameroon the racialized hierarchy of the French dovetailed with the tendency in pre-colonial and colonial times for both Muslims and non-Muslims in Northern Cameroon to regard Muslim (Fulbe) culture as civilized.\textsuperscript{39} In the pre-colonial period, neighboring groups adopted Fulbe political structures—in the colonial period, the French contributed to this process by pushing other ethnic groups in Northern Cameroon to use Fulbe political structures and nomenclature. For example, the French used the Fulbe term for king, \textit{Lamido}, instead of \textit{chef} to refer to all of the traditional political leaders of Northern Cameroon, not just the Fulbe kings, indicating their conception that this state structure was both uniquely strong and the norm in Northern Cameroon.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed the French even awarded a Mousgy chief a medal comparing him to “the best Fulbe \textit{Lamibe}.”\textsuperscript{41} The French essentially promoted the Fulbe state as the normative political structure of the region by using Fulbe terminology and by pushing other ethnic groups to create hierarchical states in the model of the \textit{lamidat}.

Likewise, the French adopted the Fulfulde term \textit{Haabe}, “pagan,” in some instances and introduced the synonymous term \textit{Kirdi} for use official documents such as censuses and the Annual Report to the United Nations. While the French choose to use a new word, perhaps out of a sense of critiquing the religious/cultural ideologies of the region, they in fact supported these same exact notions. The French identified

\textsuperscript{39} For more on the ways in which Fulbe culture was adopted by neighboring populations, see Azarya, \textit{Aristocrats Facing Change}, 43-47; Burnham, "Regroupement' and Mobile Societies."; Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom."; Schilder, \textit{Quest for Self-esteem}.

\textsuperscript{40} Azarya, \textit{Aristocrats Facing Change}, 68.

\textsuperscript{41} Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 42.
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the Fulbe as separate from an undifferentiated mass of indigenous resident and subtly reinforced the Fulbe idea that they were better than and distinguished from the conglomeration of all of the varied ethnic and religious groups of Northern Cameroon.\(^{42}\) The French would even excuse the Fulbe from forced labor because of they were “unsuited” for this type of work.\(^ {43}\) Such actions reinforced the self-conception of the Fulbe as aristocratic, as they rejected agricultural work and manual labor because they identified this type of work as inferior and degrading. The French thus accepted the dichotomy of Muslim/“pagan” and continued to marginalize “pagan” people in the face of Fulbe “racial superiority.”

The continued economic and social primacy of the Fulbe, combined with the slowly loosening bonds of slavery led to the development of the process of “Fulbeization,” the adoption of Fulbe ethnic identity through conversion to Islam and adherence to Fulbe cultural traits.\(^ {44}\) Although the political leaders of other ethnic groups such as the Mboum and Dii had converted in the past, it was only in the late colonial period that “Fulbeization” really began to take place among the wider population, especially in the larger towns of Northern Cameroon. In one sense this phenomenon marked the relaxation of pre-colonial ethnic division—in the past the Fulbe had limited conversion to Islam in order to protect their unique ethnic identity and to legitimate their use of slavery. It also illustrates the fact that with the decline of the slavery system, former slaves were more able to move into new communities and

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\(^ {44}\) The information in the following paragraph comes from these authors, unless a specific author is noted. Ibid., 84; Gausset, ”Islam or Christianity?.”; Leis, ”Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom.”; Podlewski, *La Dynamique des principales populations*; Schilder, *Quest for Self-esteem*; Schultz, ”From Pagan to Pullo.”; van Santen, ”Islam, Gender and Urbanisation “.
to adopt a new identity. Indeed, the Fulbe identity was in fact virtually the only identity available for someone who had been enslaved and who did not know their natal kin group. Larger towns became the locus of “Fulbeizing” activity because they allowed anonymity to individuals rejecting the slave identity and because of the connection between urban spaces and Fulbe spaces. Cities like Ngaoundéré were predominately Muslim, and those individuals who moved to the cities often adopted this identity to fit in with the dominant culture. 

Although the development of the process of “Fulbeization” suggests that the strict hierarchy of distinctions between ethnic groups was loosening, as individuals could now “change” their ethnicity, it also indicates that the Fulbe still held a position of privilege within the larger community, as their identity and their world was desirable. By the end of the colonial period, many populations such as the Mboum, Dii and Laka had become majority Muslim.

The French presence did not ultimately undermine the ethnic hierarchy of the pre-colonial period. The inability or lack of desire on the part of the French to truly undercut the institution of slavery and their promotion of the Fulbe as a model of civilization reinforced the cultural superiority of the Fulbe and privileged Fulbe culture over those of other ethnicities. Additionally, the French supported the political power of the Fulbe through their connections to the Ngaoundéré kingdom and, notwithstanding their attempts to limit the power of the king, upheld the importance of the kings in relation to the population.

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45 van Santen, "Islam, Gender and Urbanisation ".

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A Second Colonization: French Control of the Kingdom of Ngaoundéré

In 1948, Lamido Mohammadou Abba was enthroned for the second time as the king of Ngaoundéré, after being deposed and exiled by the French in 1939 for opposing reforms proposed by the colonial government. In a ceremony presided over by the Imam (religious leader) and the Alkali (judge), Lamido Abba was presented with a boubou (robe) and dressed in a white turban, the sign of his power and authority. His links to the local population and to the French colonial state are illustrated in this passage from Jean-Claude Froelich’s article on Ngaoundéré:

[The members of the faada]...go in procession to announce their choice to the French Regional administrator; with his permission, they return to the palace...and tell him of his selection....The whole town is in celebration....The head of the Region congratulates the new Lamido and offers him advice....When the ceremonial presentation of the turban is over, the dignitaries and the population are admitted to present their gifts. The dignitaries, the village chiefs, offer a horse or cow; the residents of the town and the surrounding area offer small gifts of food.

The king’s dual role, as representative of the population in the French government, and as representative of the French government to the population is exemplified in the role of the Regional Administrator and the presence of the local population at his coronation. Although the French subordinated the king to their own bureaucracy, they did not destroy the fundamental structure of the kingdom, nor did they undermine the power of the king in relation to the indigenous community of Ngaoundéré; indeed the

46 Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ", 43.
47 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 36; Garba, August 4.
48 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 36-37. « Ils viennent en cortège, rendre compte leur choix au chef de Région ; avec l'approbation de celui-ci, ils retournent au saré… ils lui annoncent son élection. …Toute la ville est en fête. …le chef de Région félicite le nouveau Lamido et lui donne les conseils….Dès que la cérémonie du turban est terminée, les dignitaires et la population sont admis à présenter leur cadeaux. Les dignitaires, les chefs de village, offrent un cheval ou un bœuf ; les Meskin de la ville ou des environs donnent de petits cadeaux de produits vivriers. »
king’s association with the French gave a new justification for his perceived political power. Lamido Mohammadou Abba and subsequent kings of Ngaoundéré retained power over the city-state because they appeared to control pre-colonial duties and powers and because of their association with the powerful colonial state.

Several changes after World War II altered the ways in which the French interacted with the ruling chiefs of Northern Cameroon, as the French began to limit the role of the kings. After Cameroon became a trust territory of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 the French were forced to administer the territory with UN oversight and with regard to UN expectations. Other reforms in the administrative structure of the French Union between 1944 and 1965 (such as the Brazzaville Conference and later the Loi-cadre reforms) allowed for greater political autonomy within the colonial territories. These changes marked important shifts in the tenor of colonial rule, and in Cameroon the French increasingly looked to partner with both the kings and the growing numbers of Westernized Cameroonian elites, évolués or “evolved ones,” and to develop new forms of political participation.

The Trusteeship agreement between France and the UN directed that Cameroon be administered with the goal of self-governance or independence. But for all practical purposes the Trusteeship agreement still allowed France to administer Cameroon “as an integral part of French territory” with the exception that all of the taxes collected in mandate territories were spent in the territory, whereas the colonial

49 Some members of the U.N., notably the anti-colonial block, hoped that this provision would lead the full independence but the French saw Cameroon independence as compatible with self-administration within the French Union. Gardinier, United Nations Challenge to French Policy, 6; Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 83-84. Then, beginning in 1949, the U.N. Council on Trusteeship periodically conducted information-gathering missions to Cameroon (the 1952 delegation included an Australian, a Chinese, a Belgian and a Salvadorian) and Cameroonians often addressed the U.N. missions through petitions. Souleymanou Yaya, a primary school teacher in Mbe at the time, recollected that a delegate visited his school as part of the 1955 U.N. Mission Yaya, August 9.
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taxes were divided among the territories of the larger AOF or AEF community. According to the Bertrand Lembezat, the Chief Commissioner of the French Union (Haut Commissaire de la République d’Outre-mer) in the 1950s, who had served as the head of the sub-division of Mora in North Cameroon from 1938-1939, France held “nothing less than full initiative and responsibility of the methods of control” of Cameroon and other Trust territories.

The French implemented the same laws in Cameroon as in their other colonial territories and thus left open the possibility that Cameroon would someday be fully incorporated into the French Union. French language and civilization were emphasized and a centralized administration controlled the budget and other administrative structures much like in other French colonies. The French had considerable interest in Cameroon due to its proximity to French Equatorial Africa and its potential resources; in the 1950s France invested more public funds in Cameroon than in any other African territory. The colonial administration hoped that Cameroon would become a self-administering state within the French Union just like other French colonies.

Throughout the 1940s and especially after the Brazzaville Conference, the colonial administration increasingly relied on Cameroonians not simply as administrators of French central government, but also as partners in the legislative

50 Article 4A of Trusteeship Agreement for the Territory of Cameroons under French administration, as approved by the General Assembly on 13 December 1946, United Nations. 9 June 1947 (Lake Success, 1947).
51 Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 82. « Quelles que soient les modalités du contrôle, l’administration française ne gardera pas moins, sans partage, initiative et responsabilité. »
53 Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 105.
55 Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 200.
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and executive branches of the territorial government. The colonial government increased both the number of enfranchised people and the size of the Cameroonian legislative bodies in part because of the Brazzaville Conference.  

Further reforms in 1956, known as the *loi-cadre* reforms, allowed the Territorial Assembly greater oversight over the budget and the administration of domestic affairs. These reforms also introduced the democratic election of ministers to the executive branch, although this branch was under the final control of the appointed territorial governor. As a result of these changes, the French government began partner more and more with educated African elites (who were often organized within political parties and trade unions), rather than chiefs and kings. In Chapter Three we will explore the role of these new political elites in greater detail. Here we will focus on the ways in which the French continued to rely on the Northern Cameroonian kings as intermediaries and bureaucrats in the regional administration, even as they worked to ensure that the power of kings was subordinate to the power of the colonial state.

In their 1948 Annual Report to the UN, French administrators spoke of the need to curb the power of traditional authorities, especially in the North and the West of the territory. To do so, French administrators removed regions and ethnic groups (especially non-Muslim populations) from the oversight and administration of the kings and installed new district chiefs who reported directly to the French

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56 Lewis, "One Hundred Million Frenchmen," 129.
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administration. The French described such actions in their official reports as the emancipation of these populations from the Fulbe [“l’émancipation des Kirdi”]. By fragmenting the Fulbe kingdoms, the French challenged Fulbe authority within Northern Cameroon and limited the autonomy of the kings and their nobles to control the functions of the state.

The French restructured the administrative units of the kingdom, the family units, or tokke, in 1949. These units had previously been based on lineage ties but the French linked each unit to a specific village or region in order to facilitate the collection of taxes and labor for public works projects, both of which were collected through the political hierarchy of the Fulbe kingdom. Although the king and his dignitaries continued to control the hierarchy of the kingdom, the French decision to change the fundamental structure of the tokke demonstrated the king’s lack of autonomy and French designs to make the structure of the kingdom fit into the French administrative hierarchy.

In the late colonial period, the French began to implement new administrative structures, such as the Council of Nobles (conseils de notables), meant to curb the power of the kings and to “[increase] the participation of the population in the management of public affairs.” Each Council of Nobles was composed of village

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60 Although this occurred mainly in rural regions or outlying towns, rather than within Ngaoundéré itself. For more information concerning French separation of ethnic-administrative units, see Burnham, "Regroupement' and Mobile Societies."; Rapport annuel 1949, 32; Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ".
61 Rapport annuel 1949, 32.
62 Burnham also writes that the French wished to turn the lineage-based tokke into village units because the French assumed that the village was a pre-colonial unit which could be easily integrated into the French administrative system. Burnham, "Regroupement' and Mobile Societies," 585.
63 Rapport annuel 1948, 23. « Qui permettra à la forme traditionnelle d’autorité qu’est la chefferie de se transformer dans le sens d’une plus large participation des populations à la gestion des affaires publiques. »
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and district level chiefs, who were appointed by the governor and were consulted by the local administration on taxes, markets dates and so forth, although they had no independent powers.  

In Ngaoundéré, the Council initially consisted of ten to twenty chiefs (superior, district, and regional) and representatives of different ethnic groups. In 1949 the size of the Council was enlarged to thirty to forty members including “representatives of traditional associations, economic societies, local cooperatives and trade unions.” The Council essentially acted as a link between the kings and the French and served as another means by which the French could control the political independence of the traditional authorities.

Then in the 1949 French report to the UN, the French explained that they wished to “replace the Council of Nobles, with Regional Councils…who will participate more actively in the regional administration.” The decision to move away from the use of the Councils (and thus away from a reliance on traditional authorities) coincided with the creation of a new form of a city council: Mixed Urban and Rural Communes (communes mixtes urbaines and communes rurales). These elected city councils were initially started in cities such as Douala and Yaoundé so as to administer indigenous Cameroonians and French citizens who were not organized by ethnic group or pre-colonial states—in their need to create an entirely new administrative structure to administer non-homogenous communities, the French

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64 Although Alice Conklin writes about Councils of Nobles in French West Africa in the 1920s, Victor LeVine claims that in Northern Cameroon they were based directly off of the pre-colonial council, the faada. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, 192, 205-206; Le Vine, From Mandate to Independence, 92-97.
65 Le Vine, From Mandate to Independence, 94.
66 Rapport annuel 1949, 32. « Une nouvelle réorganisation des Conseils de Notables est prévue très prochainement, pour assurer une meilleure représentation des intérêts économiques (coopératives) et syndicaux : c’est le premier stade d’une réforme qui tend à subsister, aux Conseils des Notables, des Conseils Régionaux... qui participeraient plus activement à l’administration régionale. »
clearly assumed that mono-ethnic communities were the norm elsewhere. Urban Commune governments, which included both French and African representatives, helped the regional administrator develop a budget; Ngaoundéré became an Urban Commune in 1952.\textsuperscript{67} Once again, the presence of this alternative administrative form was an attempt to undermine the relevance of the kings and his court in the daily administration of the town.

French administration not only altered the political structure of the kingdom and some of functions of the king, but also symbolically undermined the image of the kings. As in other colonies, the French deliberately destabilized the authority of individual chiefs and kings by using traditional authorities to implement unpopular policies and exiling those who failed to comply with the administration’s demands such as with \textit{Lamido} Mohammadou Abba.\textsuperscript{68} Likewise the French had a hand in the election of new kings: \textit{Lamido} Abba’s nomination was approved by the colonial government before it could be announced to the community and the French presence at the enthronement ceremony of \textit{Lamido} Abba demonstrated their control over the political system of the city.\textsuperscript{69} When the king needed to speak with the regional administrator, he had to go to the administrative offices in the Centre Commercial, rather than vice versa. The French administration used the 14\textsuperscript{th} of July to display the wealth and military might of France through parades of army corps in the town.

\textsuperscript{68} For a more detailed description of the reasons behind \textit{Lamido} Abba’s exile, see Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 39; Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ", 43.
\textsuperscript{69} Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 36-37.
Finally, the development of a new elite based around the colonial administration, such as translators, was also a challenge to the place of the king and his court.\textsuperscript{70}

All of this served to limit the power the king under the colonial government, to ensure that the king knew who was in charge of the city. But the French did not wish to undermine his authority completely. The power of the king of Ngaoundéré over the residents of the city was useful to the French. Northern kings oversaw development projects, collected taxes through the existing hierarchy of the Fulbe state, judged customary court cases, conducted censuses, and used their police and military forces for the benefit of the French.\textsuperscript{71} The French walked a fine line between ensuring the subordination of the kings to colonial administration and suggesting the benefits the kings could find in cooperation. The French could be very generous to kings, for example bringing certain kings, including \textit{Lamido} Mohammadou Abba, on visits to France; limiting the presence of Christian missionaries in Northern Cameroon; respecting Muslim holidays and even constructing mosques such as the main mosque of Ngaoundéré.\textsuperscript{72} Such appeasement was necessary, because the kings were essential to the colonial government as intermediaries between the population and the government.

For their own part, the kings retained legitimacy and authority in the eyes of the population as partners with the powerful French state and because they continued

\textsuperscript{70} The information above comes from Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 226-230.
to hold many of the symbols of their pre-colonial power.\textsuperscript{73} Alice Conklin has argued that traditional authorities across French-controlled Africa needed to collaborate with the French because they had lost a great deal of their authority under the colonial state and because their position was increasingly challenged by the development of the francophone African political class.\textsuperscript{74} While the kings of Northern Cameroon were likely concerned about the growing francophone political elite and thus felt pressure to work with the French, their power was not wholly reliant on the French administration, perhaps because the political elites were weaker in Northern Cameroon than in other regions of Cameroon and other French colonies. Furthermore, the kings retained their most important form of legitimacy—their symbolic religious function—as well as economic and political functions derived from the pre-colonial state.

Like other indigenous leaders across French-colonized Africa, Fulbe kings were able to use their position as intermediaries to amass wealth and gain access to land, technology and capital. They took a percentage of the French taxes for their own use instead of receiving a fixed salary, which some authors argue allowed them greater possibility for wealth accumulation.\textsuperscript{75} They remained in control of most, if not all, of the disparate groups who had acted as tributary states in the pre-colonial period and collected taxes and labor from these groups for the French. In other parts of

\textsuperscript{73} The effectiveness and authority of chiefs varied by region. In locations where the French relied on previously established kingdoms, traditional authorities often retained considerable authority in their communities by relying on pre-existing forms of legitimization. For an in-depth discussion of the regional use and effectiveness of chiefs, see Peter Gescherie’s article comparing the chiefs of the Maka of South-Eastern Cameroon and the Bamiléké of South-Western Cameroon under the colonial rule. Gescherie, "Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy, French and British Style."

\textsuperscript{74} This tension will be discussed further in Chapter Three. Conklin, \textit{A Mission to Civilize}, 204-205.

\textsuperscript{75} Azarya, \textit{Aristocrats Facing Change}, 56-7, 72-75; Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 227.
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French Africa, the administration divided kingdoms in order to limit the power of the indigenous state but this did not occur in the same way in Ngaoundéré. 76 True, some groups such as the Gbaya, were removed from Fulbe control and this could be seen as a splintering of the state. However, these removals occurred rarely and out of specific situations, not out of a French plan to break up the Fulbe state. Thus the Fulbe kings were for the most part able to retain the image of autonomy and legitimacy based on the maintenance of pre-colonial geographic boundaries of the kingdom. To some extent, they also retained power by manipulating the system, for example, by doing and saying different things in front of different populations. Some kings would privately tell the residents of their towns not to enroll their children in French school and receive a payment from these residents for protecting their children, but demand that these same children enroll in school when the French were present, thus retaining the support of the colonial state. 77

The kings of Northern Cameroon also preserved a great deal of their pre-colonial status and authority. Though many kings and political leaders living under French rule lost their military authority, this was not the case for the kings of northern Cameroon. 78 The king’s private police force, known as *dogaris* continued to arrest

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76 This may be because, as Azarya claims, the geographic location of Ngaoundéré meant that colonial supervision was less or because the pre-colonial kingdoms were strong and organized enough to withstand some of the pressure from the French state. Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change*, 66, 106; Burnham, ”'Regroupement' and Mobile Societies,” 582; Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom."


individuals and detain them in a prison on the palace grounds. Additionally, “Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, the Lamido [presided], from 9 am to 2 pm, over a court composed of three Muslim judges and a secretary.” This court applied Islamic law and was mainly concerned with issues of inheritance, domestic issues (abuse, divorce) and the status of former slaves, as criminal cases had been removed from its authority in 1946. Control of these courts allowed the Fulbe king and his advisors to act as the arbiter of right and wrong, fitting into the king’s position as the spiritual leader of the Muslim community. The king also opened prayers, named religious officials such as the imam and alkali (judge) and was seen as the final authority on religious matters. He announced the beginnings of fasts and celebrations, a duty which was taken over by the Cameroonian state in the post-colonial era. Finally, the kings not only collected French taxes, but also continued to demand those taxes collected by the Fulbe state in the pre-colonial era: religious taxes (zakat), inheritance tax (usura) and grazing taxes (soffal).

79 Those arrested included concubines who attempted to run away, and even political demonstrators. Dikku, August 4; Garba, August 4; Abdouraman Halirou, "Le lamido Yaya Dairou de Maroua, 1943-1958," Ngaoundéré-Anthropos III, no. 1 (1998).
80 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 44. « Le lundi, le mardi et le mercredi, Le Lamido préside, de 9 h. à 14 h. son tribunal composé des trois Alkali et du Secrétaire. »
81 It was relatively common for the French, in Muslim areas, to allow courts based on Islamic law to operate in tandem with the colonial judicial system. The court was ultimately controlled by the French administration and if an individual was unhappy with the sentence of, in this case the king, they could appeal to the French judicial system. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, 90-91; Froelich, Cameroun/Togo, 74-75; Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 51-52; Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 96-99.
82 Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 218.
83 Djingui and Azarya write that the kings could only keep 10% of the taxes collected, but it is unclear if this cut came from the taxes they collected for the French or the customary taxes which they continued to collect. Froelich’s work is the closest I have to a primary source, and he makes no mention of a limitation on these traditional taxes. Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 41-42, 56-7, 72-75; Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 227; Le Vine, From Mandate to Independence, 97. For a fuller description of these taxes, see Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 46-50.
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The populations of Ngaoundéré greatly respected the kings in this period. This was in part the result of his generosity to the community: he distributed gifts, which ranged from livestock to clothes to slaves, to the palace nobles each Friday and to the entire population at certain festivals. In both informal discussion and formal interviews, the older residents of Ngaoundéré focused on the fact that the king’s power was much greater in the late colonial period than today. Several individuals spoke of the wealth of the king, and his ability to exploit the community, as signs of his authority. Mairné (~b.1937) and Madame Dikku (~b. 1940) discussed the king’s power in terms of his ability to enter the private space (home) of others without an invitation, which is very unusual in Fulbe culture. Mairné noted that even princes of the palace could not do this. She also indicated that the population respected the king by kneeling much as if “in prayer” and never looking directly at his face when they came in contact with him. The use of religious imagery when referring to actions towards the king once again highlights his religious authority.

According to Madame Dikku the king had a great power in relation to the population and even in relation to the French, who had to come to him before establishing and acting on any policies [“ils demandent d’abord”]. Madame Dikku also explained that her husband, Lamido Babba Djelani, the brother and successor to Lamido Abba, was deposed in 1960 not by the colonial state or the Cameroonian

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84 Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 219; Garba, August 4; Mairné, Interview, August 11, 2007.
85 Dikku, August 4; Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20; Hadjadidi, August 15; Yaya, August 9. This is also supported by other authors. In Leis’ study on ethnic relations, he states that that informants told him that the colonial period was the most ‘autocratic’ time for Fulbe rulers. Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chieftdom," 679.
86 Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20; Mairné, August 11.
87 Dikku, August 4; Mairné, August 11.
88 Mairné, August 11.
89 Dikku, August 4.
state, but by the Fulbe Council of Nobles (faada). She declared that he was deposed because he “gave too many gifts, he squandered money and he declared that slavery was over. The nobles did not like this—the population thought he had gone mad, and that he wasted their wealth.” Through these comments, Madame Dikku suggested that the Fulbe state (not just the king himself) continued to direct internal affairs and to act with power in relation to the French state. The residents of Ngaoundéré regard the colonial-era kings as very powerful, especially in contrast to the present-day kings. While these statements cannot fully illustrate how the kings might have lost power under the French, as compared to the pre-colonial era, they do indicate that the kings continued to be perceived as powerful and sovereign rulers, even under French colonial rule.

As a mediator between the population and the colonial administration, the king remained a powerful political actor. The key question concerning the French-Fulbe relation is whether the authority of the king decreased during the late colonial era; but this question deserves a two-part answer. On the one hand the authority of the king decreased in relation to his pre-colonial power as a result of French actions—his autonomy was limited by French actions. But on the other hand the perceived power of the kings in relation to the community was not undermined by the French because of the continued use of pre-colonial positions, symbols and rituals, in conjunction with the image of the kings as partners with the French and thus partners in French

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90 Ibid. « "cadeau" beaucoup, il gaspille la richesse, et lui a déclaré que il n y a pas l’esclavage. Les notables ne l’aime pas –c’est seulement pour ce la population pense qu’il a devenu fou, et qu’il a gaspille la richesse. ] »

91 Indeed, in Leis’ study on ethnic relations, he states that that informants told him that the colonial period was the most ‘autocratic’ time for Fulbe rulers. Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom," 679.
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power. In many ways the idea of the continued authority of the Fulbe kings was about their ability to appear to be in an equal relationship with the French colonial administration. This image of “collaboration” between the kings and the French contrasts with the reality that the power of the Fulbe kings was circumscribed by the French state. Although many residents regarded the connection between the French and Fulbe state as one of partnership, it was in fact a relationship of unequal inclusion, just as the connection between the Fulbe and other indigenous groups was marked by an uneven incorporation into the system of power.

Collaboration and Colonization:
Parallels and Overlaps in the Fulbe and French States

When the French colonized Fulbe-dominated Northern Cameroon, they placed their political structures on top of the existing Fulbe structures. We can look at the dual “colonization” of the region in multiple ways. One is through the overlaps between the French system and the Fulbe state and the effects of this overlap on the lives of residents of the city. Another is through the parallel forms of “collaboration” between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups in the region, and between the French and the Fulbe.

The overlap of French and Fulbe structures supported Fulbe supremacy in the region, as was suggested in the discussion of the continued racial hierarchies. For example there existed parallel systems of French-language and Qur’anic education. The colonial administration encouraged Western, state-sponsored education, especially for the children of elites but faced resistance from the residents of
Ngaoundéré and from Northern Muslims in general. Although the majority of French language schools were run by the French colonial government and were not explicitly tied to missionary organizations, many Muslims feared that French schooling would lead to conversion to Christianity and a loss of (Fulbe) ethnic identity and thus resisted sending their children to French schools.  

Perhaps there was some justification to this fear, considering a general French interest in using education as a means to incorporate Africans into the French cultural system. But the French were willing to make concession to parental and communal fears and the colonial government began to use Arabic in the secondary school established in Garoua in 1953.  

Such a concession was necessary because the colonial administration was especially interested in educating the children of elites (especially the children of the king) in order to create allies among the existing elites and to enable the new generation of chiefs to work well with the administration.

92 Ahmadou Bello, an elderly Fulbe man, stated that he had only attended two years of Western school because in his youth the Fulbe were not yet comfortable [très habitué] with white customs and feared conversion. Likewise, because of this fear, a Fulbe women Mairné, age 67, and her brothers attended only Qur’anic school, and when the French came to check that the children of the household were enrolled in school her parents would hide the children. There are even stories that non-Fulbe household servants would be sent to school in the place of the Fulbe children and that families would move so that their homes would be farther from French schools. Bah and Fah, "Les elites musulmans et la politique ", 1-27; Ahmadou Bello, Interview, August 15, 2007; Garba, August 4; Mairné, August 11.

93 Bah and Fah, "Les elites musulmans et la politique ", 127; Garba, August 4; Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 119; Ngoh, Cameroon, 1884-1985, 96. For a more general look at education, French and Qur’anic in sub-Saharan Africa, see Manning, Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 98-100.

94 This was the first “franco-arab” school established in Cameroon, and rather unusual in the use of Arabic. For a discussion of the Qur’anic education in Cameroon, see Serge Genest and Renaud Santerre, "L’école franco-arabe au Nord-Cameroun," Revue canadienne des études africaines 8, no. 3 (1974).

95 Several authors have commented that the essential goal of the French educational system was not educational but political, and Nguime believes that beyond creating an educated (and sympathetic) political class, the French were also interested in creating a division between the francophone and arabophone youth of Northern Cameroon. Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change; Genest and Santerre, "L’école franco-arabe," 591; Mbengue Nguime, "L'Autorite Traditionnelle, l'Ecole et la Jeunesse."

Ngoh, Cameroon, 1884-1985, 95-96.
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The French colonial government accepted the importance of Islamic religious education, and sought to incorporate this into their own educational system in order to appease the elites of Northern Cameroon. But the Qur’anic schools were themselves a mark of the pre-existing “colonization” of North Cameroon by the Fulbe and a sign of the Fulbe culture which excluded the majority of the indigenous populations. Only a small percent of the population attended Qur’anic school in this period and these children were drawn from the upper strata of the Fulbe Muslim community. By focusing on educating the children of “elites,” who were most often Fulbe members of the palace, the French reinforced the idea that the Fulbe were the pre-eminent social group and preserved the existing structures of power in Northern Cameroon. On the other hand, groups such as the Dii took advantage of Western education as a way to challenge the Fulbe, seeing French education as offering as an alternative, literate, source of legitimacy. The acceptance of French education by other populations allowed these groups to dispute Fulbe control of the city by using French structures. In 1958 the French even named a Mboum man, Jean Ndoume Oumar, as the first mayor of Ngaoundéré. His election to the position of mayor was seen as a rebuff to the Fulbe for not adopting French education.

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96 All of the Muslims I interviewed attended Qur’anic school regardless of gender or level of French education but this may over-represent the level of Islamic education, especially in the colonial period, due to class bias or some other biases. According to the only scholarly work on Islamic education in Northern Cameroon, only 10% of the population had been to Arabic school in the 1960s (compared to 1-4% who had attended French school). Renaud Santerre, *Pédagogie musulmane d'Afrique noire: L'Ecole coranique peule du Cameroun* (Montréal: Les presses de l'université de Montréal, 1973). Froelich also describes Qur’anic education, Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 64-68.

97 Mbengue Nguime, "L'Autorité Traditionnelle, l'Ecole et la Jeunesse," 20; Yaya, August 9.

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The overlap of French interests with the pre-colonial divisions of economic labor and power meant that such hierarchies were also reinforced in the colonial era. The French attempted to increase economic development in Northern Cameroon by advocating for the expansion of an export economy based in cotton and peanuts, especially farther north, and strongly supported the cattle trade in Ngaoundéré itself. By 1954 they had built roads linking Ngaoundéré with other major cities (Douala, Yaoundé and Garoua) and even constructed an airport equipped with refrigerators to facilitate the transport of beef to the southern regions of the country and French Equatorial Africa.99 Most of the population of the kingdom subsisted on small-scale agriculture and food production consisting of “small gardens growing legumes, peanuts, corn [and] small-scale herding.”100 The large cattle herds were owned and raised by the Fulbe and Mbororo—the divide between pastoralist and farmer had been conceptualized (and to some extent enforced) as an ethnic division.101 By focusing on beef as the primary export commodity of Ngaoundéré the French thus maintained the privileged position of the Fulbe in a new economic system.

The colonization of the city by the French was directly linked to and supported the existing hierarchies between the Fulbe and other residents, promoting the interests of the Fulbe more than any other group. Because they controlled the economic and political positions of the city, the Fulbe were better placed to take

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99 In part, the focus on economic development, which is clear in publications by the French government and French observers such as Lembezat and Froelich, comes from the fact that the French civilizing mission was inherently linked to economic advancement, Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, 52; Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 295-6; Froelich, "La vie économique d'une cite peul," 7; Lembezat, Le Cameroun, 167-168.
100 Bobbo, August 9. This is contradicted to a certain extent by Froelich, who writes that unlike most cities in Africa the residents of Ngaoundéré do not grow their own food but subsisted on food from their plantations or bought food in the market. Froelich, "La vie économique d'une cite peul," 54.
advantage of the new forms of economic and political power developed by the colonial government. The maintenance of the Fulbe power in the city was also based in the continuity of wealth over generations. Slaves had been the main form of wealth in the pre-colonial period and although many Fulbe individuals had held no slaves, the ethnic group collectively benefited from the institution of slavery through intergenerational transfers of wealth derived from slave ownership, that is, from the accumulation of other forms of wealth such as cattle and cash through the sale of slaves and the products generated by slave labor. The transfer of wealth over generations and the continued importance of slave ancestry in social relations suggest that ethnic divisions continued to be marked by unequal levels of wealth and communal power in the colonial period.

The “collaboration”—between the Fulbe and indigenous population and between the French and the Fulbe—heralded by residents as a sign of equal power was in fact more indicative of the need for subordinate groups to work with the dominant power. The idea of collaboration itself is interesting. Although it was used positively by residents of the city, it can have negative connotations as well, for example, French collaborators with the Vichy regime are not regarded in a positive light. In Ngaoundéré the term is used to avoid discussing the patterns of exploitation between populations.

In the pre-colonial and colonial period, the Mboum and Dii had been privileged to a certain extent in relation to other indigenous populations. But these groups were still limited in their social mobility and political autonomy, and sometimes protested these limitations, as seen in the opening story about Belaka.

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102 Froelich, "Commandement et l'organisation sociale," 19; Mairné, August 11.
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Saoumboum and *Lamido* Mohammadou Abba. The tussle between these political leaders occurred because although the *Belaka* and many Mboum individuals were collaborators with the Fulbe state, they were never equals. The *Belaka* was essentially controlled by the king: he was enthroned by the Fulbe *Lamido* and he was unable to as an autonomous political figure. His power was tied to that of the more powerful Fulbe state. When the *Belaka* protested his limited sovereignty and autonomy, the *Lamido* was unwilling to offer him a greater role—his place was as a subordinate within the hierarchy of the Fulbe kingdom.

All of the same things could be said for the Fulbe king in relation to the colonial state. The kings had to collaborate with the French because they were in a weaker position than colonial administration. Collaboration was an ambivalent activity, because while it suggests cooperation it does not in fact denote equality between the partners. Collaboration presumes a stronger and a weaker group (the collaborators)—not on equal footing but on unequal planes. In colonial Ngaoundéré, the collaboration between different groups is as a sign of the parallel and interacting waves of colonization: the collaboration between the Fulbe and indigenous populations in the initial Fulbe “colonization” of the region; and the collaboration between the kings and the French in the French colonization of the city.

It is interesting then that residents of the city focus both on the connections between the populations of Ngaoundéré and between the French and Fulbe state using the positive idea of cooperation. Their focus on the integration of a group into the structure of the French or Fulbe state in fact indicates the ways in which current resident attempt to reclaim the history of a community, be it Mboum, Dii, or
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indigenous Africans, by presenting this community as an actor in the history of the region. It may also suggest the ways in which the negative aspects of the social structure of the city are glossed over, as a means to justify, or perhaps limit a modern critique. Given the use of ethnic identity as a way to challenge political dominance in the 2007 election, perhaps those individuals who focused on the integration of Mboum and Dii communities into the Fulbe state did so to counteract the claims on the part of these populations that they needed to “reclaim” political power—for why would it be necessary to reclaim power if these groups had always been partners in the Fulbe state?

The multiple layers of control and hierarchy within the city ultimately did not undermine the ethnic hierarchy of the pre-colonial period. The French were more than willing to use the pre-existing Fulbe structures for their own benefit.\textsuperscript{103} French educational and economic policies consolidated Fulbe social control; their promotion of the Fulbe as a model of civilization reinforced the cultural superiority of the Fulbe over the other ethnic groups living in Ngaoundéré. The French supported the political power of the Fulbe through their connections to the lamidat, notwithstanding their attempts to limit the power of the king. Thus in spite of their important role as members of the Fulbe state, and in spite of the occasional support of the French for the demands of these groups, the “non-Fulbe” populations of Ngaoundéré continued to be subordinated within two overlapping “colonizations”; French and Fulbe. Even in the late 1950s and 1960s, when at the complex of political power in Northern

\textsuperscript{103} In fact the French used a form of indirect rule in Northern Cameroon very much in the British Lugardian style of indirect rule, which was in fact developed in the Nigerian section of the Sokoto Caliphate. Fredrick Lugard, "Fredrick Lugard instructs his officers on how to implement indirect rule," in \textit{Africa and the West: A Documentary History from the Slave Trade to Independence}, ed. William Worger, Nancy Clark, and Edward Alpers (Phoenix, Az.: Oryx Press, 2001).
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Cameroon began to incorporate new francophone elites and the French began to slowly withdraw from the newly conceived nation of Cameroon, Fulbe control of Northern Cameroon continued, for reasons we will see in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three

The Making of the “Muslim North”:
Regionalization and Fulbe Dominance in Northern Cameroon

After independence, everything became easy….It was like there was money falling from the sky. The door, which had been closed during the French reign, was opened….Oh, people celebrated a lot—there was money everywhere!¹

Madame Dikku’s effusive description of Cameroon’s life after independence, which took place on January 1, 1960, exemplifies the positive sentiment with which residents of Ngaoundéré remember this event and the subsequent presidency of Ahmadou Ahidjo. Ahidjo, a Fulbe politician from the city of Garoua, governed Cameroon from 1960 until 1982, and many individuals, especially Fulbe individuals, glowingly remember the security and ease of life under his rule.² They speak of the educational opportunities, the safety of the country, and the lack of corruption.³ While nostalgic for a time before the political, economic and social turmoil of the 1980s and 1990s, such statements also reflect the perception, if not fact, of the stability and national importance of Northern Cameroon under Ahidjo’s regime.

Because President Ahidjo’s political support was based in the North, many Cameroonians believe he systematically privileged this region, and individuals from this region, in his government. Broader state policies of regionalization also contributed to Fulbe dominance of the local multi-ethnic communities of the North. The maintenance of Fulbe hegemony in Northern Cameroon between the 1960s and the 1980s was initially based on an alliance between the kings and the new French-

¹ Dikku, August 4.
² Ahidjo technically ruled Cameroon from 1958, when he was elected as prime minister of the provisional government.
³ Dikku, August 4; Garba, August 4; Mairné, August 11; Mohaman Toukour, Interview, August 21, 2007.
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educated elite in the North, and later on Fulbe dominance on a national scale. After Ahidjo came to power he centralized the state, an act which went hand in hand which his professed desire to create a united nation and a single Cameroonian identity. The Fulbe were well placed to take advantage of the resources of the central state and to control regional politics in Northern Cameroon. Even the common conception of a “Muslim North” is itself a manifestation of Fulbe political dominance.

The “Young Turks”: The Rise of a New Political Elite

In the 1950s, French-educated Northern Cameroonian Muslims, mostly, although not exclusively, Fulbe, began to coalesce into a group sometimes known as the “Young Turks,” or “Young Muslims.”\(^4\) The most prominent member of this group was future-president Ahmadou Ahidjo and many of the other “Young Turks” would become important players in the national government and state party after independence.\(^5\) Many of these men had studied together in Yaoundé, as there were limited educational opportunities in Northern Cameroon and most had returned to Northern Cameroon in the 1940s and early 1950s after completing their education. Individually they created several cooperative political associations such as the Association Amicale de la Benoue, Association Amicale de la Dimaré and Association

\(^4\) It is unclear when and how this name became attached to the Muslim politicians of Northern Cameroon, but it is used in almost all of the secondary literature. The term really seems to reference the class of Northern francophone political elite, many of who became prominent members of the post-colonial administration, rather than a set group. The name probably developed because of the way that this group of Muslim politicians was identified with the Muslim Turkish nationalist movement of the early twentieth century.

\(^5\) For more on Ahidjo’s early personal and political life see Maimatou, "Le tremplin politique d'Ahmadou Ahidjo (1946-1966)" (University of Ngaoundéré, 2002).
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_Amicale de la Adamaoua_ and later formed a political party together.\(^6\) The French initially suspected that this group supported Arab-Muslim nationalism, but later came to see them as essentially conservative and thus good partners in comparison to Southern Cameroonian politicians.\(^7\)

One of the radical Southern parties which the French sought to counteract was the _Union des Populations Camerounais_ (UPC). The UPC was founded by Ruben Um Nyobe and other union members in 1948 in the Southern Cameroonian city of Douala. The party vocally advocated for the full independence of Cameroon and for the reunification of the British and French mandate territories. The French colonial administration was scared by the UPC’s connection to the communist African Democratic Rally (RDA), by their desire to remove Cameroon from the French Union, and by their aggressive and embarrassing (to the French) petitions to the UN against French rule.\(^8\) After being banned by the colonial government in 1955, the UPC began a guerilla war in Southern Cameroon which lasted until the 1970s. Although the UPC could not participate in the 1958 provisional government their political and extra-political tactics in the 1950s forced more moderate parties to adopt their political program, specifically the ideas of full independence, the reunification of French and British Cameroons and the establishment of a unitary state.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) The RDA cut ties with the UPC at the request of the French government (with whom they were cooperating at the time) in 1955. Cooper, _Africa since 1940_, 46-47, 73-76; Mukum Mbaku, _Culture and Customs of Cameroon_, 68. For more on the colonial policies which allowed for the creation of political parties see Keese, "Quelques Satisfactions d‘Amour-propre.;" Lewis, "One Hundred Million Frenchmen."

\(^9\) In reality, the UPC was legalized in 1960, and certain members of the party participated in the new state. However, most of the key figures in UPC had been killed by this point, and their political heirs continued to fight as _maquisards_ in the forests of Southern Cameroon.
Furthermore, fear of the UPC pushed the French to permit and even support the growth of political parties in other regions of Cameroon, especially Northern Cameroon, in the hopes of developing a domestic opposition to the UPC.

When the UPC began to recruit members in Northern Cameroon in 1954, the French actively undermined the party by suggesting to Northern Muslims that the UPC simply was interested in converting Northerners to Christianity.\(^{10}\) Distrust of the UPC and other southern political parties was further encouraged by the kings, who feared that democracy would undermine their own political power. This distrust was compounded by differences between these regions, especially in the level of education, dominant religion, primary economic structures, and level of French-sponsored development.\(^{11}\)

In addition to fostering a negative sentiment against the UPC in Northern Cameroon, the French established and nurtured pro-French political movements in this region.\(^{12}\) In 1954 the colonial administration created *Mediafrancam* (*Mediation Franco-Camerounais*) explicitly as a counter-organization to the UPC. *Mediafrancam* was the only contemporary party which did not advocate for immediate independence or reunification and supported the inclusion of Cameroon in the French Union, even going so far as to suggest the secession of the three Northern provinces from

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\(^{10}\) Felix Moumie, one of the key members and founders of the UPC, traveled to Northern Cameroon in the 1950s in order to recruit members. But the kings (especially Lamido Yaya Dairou) rejected his attempts and partnered with the French administration to have Moumie arrested and ejected from Northern Cameroon. Halirou, "Lamido Yaya Dairou," 157-159.

\(^{11}\) Azarya thinks that the UPC may have been more successful in the mid-1950s, after more anti-colonial sentiment had developed in Northern Cameroon, but by that point, the UPC had been outlawed. Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change*, 219-220; Bah and Fah, "Les elites musulmans et la politique ", 130-131; DeLancey, *Cameroon : Dependence and Independence*, 28; Maimatou, "Le tremplin politique", 36.

\(^{12}\) These were not all Fulbe parties, for example Souleymanou Yaya founded the short-lived *Rassemblement Democratique de la Juenesse Dourou (Dii)*. Maimatou, "Le tremplin politique", 18.
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Cameroon and their incorporation into the French Equatorial Africa as a part of Chad. 13 While Mediafrancam was primarily composed of Southern Cameroonian administrators living in North Cameroon, many kings were members of this party because of pressure from their superiors in the French administration, and because they saw this party as the best alternative to the UPC; Lamido Mohammadou Abba was in fact the president of the Ngaoundéré branch. 14

But Mediafrancam failed to win broad support among Northern Cameroonians and the Fulbe kings soon began to partner with the Muslim political elite. Some kings, like Lamido Haytou Dairou of Garoua, were reluctant to work with the “Young Turks” out of fear that this group would usurp their political power and because they saw these “common-born” politicians as unworthy of political rule. Dairou even attempted to unite all of the Fulbe kings in a confederation (like one set up in Northern Nigeria) in order to preserve regional autonomy, but this plan failed. 15 Instead, most of the traditional authorities chose to partner with the “Young Turks.” They were more afraid of the “modernization” proposed by Southern parties such as the UPC, than of Muslim politicians who had pledged to respect the Islamic values of Northern Cameroon. 16 The collaboration between the “Young Turks” and the kings was officially and fully established in 1958 with the creation of the Union Camerounais (UC). The party was initially conceptualized as a Fulbe party, and although the UC included non-Fulbe members it was necessary for all members to

15 Schilder, "Local Rulers in North Cameroon," 54.
16 In the end, the French were important in limiting support for Lamido Dairou, Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 229-295; Halirou, "Lamido Yaya Dairou," 157-159; Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem, 158-164.
adhere to the norms of Fulbe culture. Indeed the symbol of the party was a cow, an ethnically coded symbol for the Fulbe in Northern Cameroon. At the first party conference, in Garoua, party president Ahmadou Ahidjo proposed that the UC would support the “traditional” (Muslim Fulbe) values of the North and reject any attempts to secularize Northern Cameroon. The UC was very strong in Northern Cameroon: the UN visiting mission of 1958 wrote:

> It is clear from all that the Mission saw and heard in Ngaoundéré that the influence of the Mouvement de l’Union camerounais is preponderant there. Everyone of any importance is a member of that party or supports its aims.\(^\text{18}\)

While the “Young Turks” operated as the political and national face of the party, collaboration with the kings was vital at the local level. In the 1950s, the kings still held enormous power over the people of Northern Cameroon, and the new political elites parlayed the support of the kings into support at the polls. Schoolteacher and future journalist for the official UC paper, Souleymanou Yaya recalled that the support of Lamido Mohammadou Abba of Ngaoundéré was important to local support [ralliement] of Ahidjo, as residents of the city generally followed the political suggestions of the king. Yaya estimated that 98% of voters in the town of Mbé outside of Ngaoundéré voted for Ahidjo in the Territorial Assembly elections of 1956, when he was a schoolteacher in that town.\(^\text{19}\) The kings essentially

\(^{17}\) Bah and Fah, "Les elites musulmans et la politique ", 117-119.


\(^{19}\) The kings may also have supported Ahidjo because Ahmadou Mahondé, the opposing candidate, was seen as even more of a threat. Mahondé symbolically identified himself with the Christian and indigenous populations by using stalk of millet as the symbol of his candidacy; Ahidjo choose a cow’s head, a Fulbe symbol. Maimatou, "Le tremplin politique", 39-54.
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directed the political world by determining the “political orientation of the community,” in the words of Jean-Francois Bayart.\(^\text{20}\)

Throughout the 1950s, the French colonial government, the kings and the rising political elites worked together to maintain political control. The French drew from the power of both the kings and the “Young Turks” in an attempt to create a stronger power base for themselves vis-à-vis the political developments in Southern Cameroon. Additionally, they were interested in cultivating ties with Muslim rulers due to their conflict in Algeria.\(^\text{21}\) Royal dignitaries and the kings themselves were drawn to the French and the French-educated Muslim politicians because of their deep fear of the effect that democratization (and Christian proselytization) might have on their own power. The new French-educated Muslim elites, who were themselves divided into conservative and traditional factions, sought to claim power by operating within the Francophone political sphere and by incorporating the support of the traditional authorities of Northern Cameroon. With the withdrawal of the French from Cameroon in 1960, and the placement (“election”) of Ahidjo as president, the “Young Turks” were best able to capitalize on this three-way collaboration through their position as the national representatives of Northern Cameroon.

Ahmadou Ahidjo had been elected by the Territorial Administration as prime minister of the provisional government of Cameroon in 1958, after the regional administrative units of French Equatorial Africa (AEF) and French West Africa (AOF) had disintegrated due to political pressures, but prior to the full independence of French colonies from the French Union. He was elected with the support of the UC

and the colonial government, who facilitated a secret deal to oust the previous prime minister, Andre Mbida. Northern Cameroonians aligned with the UC made up over 43% of the representatives in the Territorial Assembly and were able to create a coalition with parties from the North-West and East provinces to control the legislature. Though Ahidjo’s political power throughout his presidency depended on the Muslim Fulbe of Northern Cameroon, he began to consolidate power within the central government, especially within the executive branch, displacing the power of the traditional authorities of Northern Cameroon. The Fulbe power that remained became based in new connections to the central state and to Ahidjo himself.

Ahidjo consolidated power on two levels, by centralizing the state and maximizing the power of the presidency. He began by pressing vigorously for the incorporation of other political groups into the UC, breaking up other parties’ meetings and making it difficult for them to register and place their names on the ballots. He also harassed opposing candidates and arrested those party leaders who disliked the idea of a one party state. This pressure culminated with the creation of a single national political party, the Union Nationale du Cameroun (UNC) in 1966 and

23 Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem, 158-164.  
24 Ahidjo justified the strength of the state as “a precondition both for the development of our Country and for the social progress of our citizens” and as necessary to ensure international respect for the nation. Ahmadou Ahidjo, Opening Address of the National Conference of the Cameroon National Union, (25 November 1973) cited in Ahmadou Ahidjo, A Compilation of Speeches Delivered by H.E. Ahmadou Ahidjo, President of the United Republic of Cameroon, 1973-1978 (Yaoundé: Secretary of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Cameroon, 1979), 88. Also, Bayart, "One-Party Government," 125.  
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Cameroon remained a one-party state until 1990.\(^\text{26}\) The links between the party and the state were enshrined in a new constitution written in 1966, and as the president of the country and the head of the UNC, President Ahidjo controlled political expression within the country.

Political discussion was repressed and a high premium was placed on obedience to the state; several people remembered this period as one in which a central, omnipresent state directed the lives of individuals and allowed no opportunity for dissent.\(^\text{27}\) In part this repression was due to, or at least justified by, the prolonged war against the guerilla forces of the UPC in Western Cameroon, who were condemned in government publications as enemies of the nation, terrorists and madmen.\(^\text{28}\) A 1962 law against “subversive activities” broadly construed essentially allowed for the repression of all freedom of opinion and political opposition and this law was very strongly enforced. The Penal Code of 1967 further expanded the imprisonable activities related to press freedom and “provided the authorities with more flexibility in their choice of repressive measures.”\(^\text{29}\) Several state institutions, including the national police, secret police units, the Documentation Service (SEDOC) and the Brigades Mixtes Mobiles (BMM), who had a reputation for torture, conducted surveillance and intimidated citizens to prevent them from challenging the political system. Ahidjo even acknowledged the authoritarian nature of his government, but stated that this “unpleasant” repression should be accepted by

\(^{26}\) The one-party state is not unique in the African context, Cooper, *Africa since 1940*.

\(^{27}\) Aminatou, Interview, August 21, 2007; Garba, August 4.


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Cameroonians for their own security.30 Because state control was so expansive, there was no place for opposition within the government nor for “outsiders”, political or otherwise, to gain influence within civil society.

Ahidjo subordinated local and regional autonomy under the power of the federal government by decreasing the number of provinces from 10 to 7 in 1966. This move also strengthened his regional base in Northern Cameroon by uniting the three northernmost provinces into one province, the North province, with its capital in his hometown of Garoua. The national government had firm control over local and regional affairs. Although there were periodic elections for national and regional posts, these were controlled by the state and party, so that a single candidate would be chosen by the central committee of the UNC and the election would serve as a referendum on that individual.31 Prefects, sub-prefects and administrative officials at the district level were all appointed by president himself.32 The federal control of these regional positions speaks to the consolidation of power within the central administration. This power was extended to an even more local level, as mayors were in turn appointed by the prefects.33 The centralized control was further enacted through the ministries, especially those related to finance, commerce and industry, which theoretically had representatives in communities across the country.34

33 Bobbo, August 9.
34 Burnham, "L'Ethnie, la religion et l'Etat," 82; Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 38.
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Ahidjo also consolidated power through the changing relationship between the Anglophone and Francophone portions of Cameroon. The two sections of the former-German colony were united as a federation in 1961, with the prime minister of West (Anglophone) Cameroon serving as the second in command of the state. The constitution gave broad powers to the federal government over the two states, West Cameroon and East Cameroon, and under Ahidjo this power was used to limit the input and autonomy of the Anglophone minority under the wishes of the Francophone majority. In 1972, Ahidjo disbanded the federation and created a highly centralized unitary state, further ensuring control of the country at the central level, under his direct control.

The power of the state was concentrated in the position of President and in the person of Ahmadou Ahidjo, who was seen as the embodiment of the nation. He was regarded as more than a president, but also as the father and the founder of the nation. Ahidjo was treated and remembered with greater respect than his successor, Paul Biya; when he visited a town, the entire community would be required to remain indoors until Ahidjo had arrived at his destination. In the 1960s Ahidjo’s actions, however minor, made the front page of *The Press of Cameroon*. In contemporary government publications and biographies Ahidjo was described as exceptional, a “symbol of the nation and its unity,” a wise, ascetic and selfless leader, and as the

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36 Garba, August 4.
37 *The Press of Cameroon* even commented positively on the arrests of the leaders of other political parties, such as Andre Mbida and generally parroted Ahidjo’s statements in the article "Mbida, Bebey Eyidi arrêtés à Yaoundé," *La Presse du Cameroun*, Saturday June 30 and Sunday July 1 1962. I do not know how representative this is of newspapers in Cameroon at this time however. *La Presse du Cameroun* January 1- July 1, 1962.
creator of the Cameroonian nation. Mohaman Toukour, a former member of Ahidjo’s personal guard, described Ahidjo as so devoted to his country that he would sleep very little and work a great deal and that “he reads a lot, but he does not speak much. He is honest!...He is a good man…He sleeps alone.” Toukour highlights both Ahidjo’s morality, “he sleeps alone,” with his work ethic and links these to his ability to be a good president. The positive imagery of Ahidjo and the concurrent centralization of the state under his control meant that the state became essentially a manifestation of Ahidjo’s personal and governmental power.

The centralization of the national government under Ahidjo was accompanied by the loss of political power of the traditional authorities of Cameroon. The reduction in the power of these leaders stemmed from Ahidjo’s rhetoric about the need to end “tribalism” and build a national Cameroonian identity, which naturally reduced the practical role for traditional authorities. In Northern Cameroon, the kings remained key players within the UC, but their authority was always circumscribed by the needs of the party and the state. The post-colonial state limited the administrative role of the kings and the prefecture system displaced the kingdom as the intermediary between the state and the people. Village heads, who had formerly reported to the

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39 Toukour, August 21. « Comme il travaille beaucoup, il dort peu. Il lit beaucoup, mais il ne parle pas beaucoup. Et il est honnête….C’est un homme droit….Il dors seul. »
40 Many authors and informants noted the reduction of the power of Northern Cameroonian traditional authorities under Ahidjo: Aissatou, August 3; Bobbo, August 9; Burnham, "L'Ethnie, la religion et l'Etat," 83; Dickson Eyoh, "Contesting Local Citizenship: Liberalization and the Politics of Difference in Cameroon," in Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa, ed. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh, and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), 101; Mukum Mbaku, Culture and Customs of Cameroon, 65. Gondolo on the other hand believes that the kings were very important for the administration because they continued to manage ethnic conflicts. Gondolo, "Evolution du Peul urbain", 315.
king and he to the colonial administration, now reported directly to the prefect and sub-prefect. While the French colonial administration had allowed the kings to continue to levy traditional taxes and thus maintain some level of political authority, under Ahidjo neither the kings nor palace dignitaries were able to collect these taxes, to “own” and distribute unfarmed land, or to operate prisons and private police forces. In fact, the kings no longer had a role in tax-collection at all, and thus could not longer take a percentage of state taxes as they had done in the colonial era. In 1977, the state even issued decree 77/245 which reorganized the chefferies and reduced the power of traditional authorities by making them salaried administrators subject to administrative sanctions.

There were instances, especially in the early 1960s, and in rural isolated kingdoms such as the Lamidat of Rey Bouba in the North Province, in which the kings demonstrated continued social and political control over their communities. Additionally, the kings retained a certain level of communal authority as spiritual leaders, a role which Ahidjo could never claim, even though state tried to take on a religious function, for example by proclaiming Muslim holidays over the national radio station and later the national television channel. If the kings so chose, they could be incorporated into the state as bureaucrats, but whereas under the French

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41 Although according to Victor Azarya, courts continued to function until the 1970s and the zakat (religious tax) was still gathered unofficially. Aissatou, August 3; Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 178-182; Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 230.
43 Aissatou, August 3.
44 According to Bobbo Moussa, the sub-prefect of the Rey Bouba Subdivision from 1980-1984, the Lamido retained a great deal of control in this region because there was no administrative representation within Rey Bouba and the Lamido was the only government official within this region. Bobbo, August 9; Boutrais, "La vache ou le pouvoir," 357-8.
45 Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 229.
administration the kings as a group were included in the state bureaucracy, even if the French limited their role, post-independence their incorporation was not automatic. Traditional rulers were used to provide symbolic capital for new political elites, but they did not participate in the governance of the country, the region, or even the sub-region. Thus real political power shifted from the kings to the new (Northern) political elite who came to dominate the government of the independent Cameroon; these elites were Fulbe and “Fulbeizing” individuals.46

**Regionalization and Ethnicization in “One Cameroon”**

Ahidjo’s government actively promoted rhetoric of “non-tribalism,” although in reality the state pursued a policy of regional representation through unofficial quotas for government jobs. This policy led to the conflation of regional and ethnic identities and hid local social dynamics; the dominant ethnic group of a region was able to monopolize local political positions and national representation of that region, and to present a cultural homogeneity which reinforced political claims.47 In North Cameroon, the dominant group was the Fulbe, and they were privileged both within the centralized government, and within the regional structures of Northern Cameroon. In this section, I will explain how Fulbe access to the central state can be seen in the

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46 As will be explained later, the process of Fulbeization continued rapidly under Ahidjo. It is impossible to know which individuals were Fulbe and which were born into other ethnic groups and took on Fulbe identity. It is likely that many individuals did so, hence the use of the term “Fulbeized.” When I refer to the Fulbe community in this chapter, it includes both those individuals who were born Fulbe and those who chose to “convert,” as both identified as Fulbe and gained something from this identity.

47 Similarly, in Nigeria competition at the national level occurred between parties dominated by regional groups which led to a mix of ethnic and regional patronage. Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 69-70.
position of Northern bureaucrats in the administration and how the Fulbe community controlled regional political structures to the detriment of other ethnic groups.

A key component in Ahidjo’s ideology was the idea of “national unity” – this image was contrasted to the “divisive factors” of “tribalism” and Anglophone/Francophone regionalism.48 “Tribalism” in Ahidjo’s usage denoted the use of ethnic or regional identities as a basis for exclusionary political organization.49 The Cameroonian government under Ahidjo avoided working with traditional governmental structures (as is seen in the decline of the role of the kings in Northern Cameroon) and shut down organizations “exhibiting an exclusively tribal or clan character,” including soccer teams.50 This struggle against “tribalism” was most often framed in terms of the reunification of a family and focused on the creation of a single national identity for both the Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians and for Cameroonians of all ethnicities.51 In a speech to the UC party congress in July 1962 Ahidjo stated

We are determined to purge our policy of every consideration, every factor likely, directly or indirectly, to foment and foster tribal differences. National unity means that in the workyard of national construction there is neither Ewando nor Duala, Bamiléké not Bulu, Fulbe nor Bassa; we are, one and all, simply Cameroonians. Nevertheless, in Cameroon tribes are realities; but they are realities into which the leaders of the party or of the State should search very


49 The term derives from the rather derogatory use by colonial administrators and anthropologists who saw this form of political organization as a flaw in African politics—the term has fallen out of scholarly use because of the past connections between anthropology and the colonial project, and because the term “tribalism” continues to have misleading and negative connotations. As analyzed in Peter P. Ekeh, "Social Anthropology and Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa," Comparative Studies in Society and History 32, no. 4 (1990). Also, Africa Policy Information Center, "Talking about "Tribe": Moving from Stereotypes to Analysis," (1997).


51 Ahidjo, As Told by Ahmadou Ahidjo, 38; "Ten Years of Service," 93.
diligently for those characteristics most calculated to help in grafting the tribes one into the other, in merging them together, in order to hasten national unity. Tribal differences should never be exploited to set Cameroonians at daggers drawn.  

Ahidjo charged that those who used ethnic identity in the political arena only did so for personal gain. He identified regional and ethnic identities as opposites of a national identity, because of their ability to disrupt the coherence of the nation. In all of his speeches, Ahidjo clearly identifies ethnic politics as a national scourge, and encourages action based on a common Cameroonian identity. His rhetoric focuses on the common identity of Cameroonians and on the idea that the Cameroonian people have “the feeling of belonging to a single Nation”. His speeches and policies thus condemned the political uses of ethnic identity in no uncertain terms.

Instead the Cameroonian state turned to a policy of “regional equilibrium” in which top positions of the state government and the party were carefully awarded to individuals from different regions. Ahidjo justified his policy in the following way:

Cameroon civilization was founded on equilibrium: equilibrium of regions, none of which should be at a disadvantage; equilibrium through social justice in such a way that division based on wealth does not succeed tribal divisions; equilibrium between towns and countryside, agriculture and industry, manual workers and civil servants in such a way that economic development is carried out in a spirit of national solidarity; equilibrium between adults and youth, between past and future, in order to adapt the traditional African values to the order founded on modern technology…

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52 Ahidjo, *As Told by Ahmadou Ahidjo*, 38. See also Ahidjo, *Compilation of Speeches by Ahmadou Ahidjo, 1973-1978*.


54 “Ten Years of Service,” 52.

55 Ahidjo argued interestingly enough that a single national party represented the desires of the people to act as a unified, single group Ahidjo, *As Told by Ahmadou Ahidjo*, 39-45; “Ten Years of Service.”


57 Ahmadou Ahidjo, *Presentation of the Third Five-Year Development Plan at the National Federal Assembly* (Yaoundé: Ministry of Planning and Territorial Development, 1971), xviii.
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His focus on equilibrium fits seamlessly into other statements about the need to build national unity. In order to achieve this desired balance between different regions Ahidjo increased the number of civil service posts and used quotas to fill both these positions and ministerial posts. Individuals from different regions had to meet different criteria to fill the same positions, in order not to punish the less-educated regions of the county. The political need for continued balance meant that no one could be appointed from one region without another being removed, although regional balance was less about a real balance of power than about the illusion of such equality.\(^\text{58}\) Ironically, regional identification was enforced by the requirement that people work in the regions in which they lived.\(^\text{59}\) Broader regional and cultural divisions were also emphasized through the division of the nation into three regional prefectures: Northern, Southern and Anglophone. Prefects were mainly assigned to their “home region” writ large. Although prefects could be and were transferred between regions, few people from other regions worked in the Prefecture of Northern Cameroon.\(^\text{60}\) These three administrative divisions fell along lines of “inalienable” differences of language and religion and the government’s use of such divisions contrasts to their stated idea of national unity, which one might assume would lead to a greater mixing of civil servants across regions, especially because prefects were appointed by the President himself.


\(^{59}\) Bayart, "One-Party Government," 128.

\(^{60}\) Ngayap, *Qui Gouverne?*, 183-195.
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Many Cameroonians believe that Northerners were privileged under Ahidjo’s regime, due to their religious and ethnic connection to the president, although some authors analyzing the Cameroonian state have instead pointed out the limited number of Northerners in mid-level bureaucratic positions.\(^{61}\) In the primary academic work on this topic, Victor Azarya concluded that the Fulbe, as identified by Muslim names, held a disproportionate amount of real power compared to their population size and the under-education of the region.\(^{62}\) Azarya argued that the ministerial system held greater symbolic power, while the territorial/prefecture system had more real power and uses numerical evidence to demonstrate that Muslims dominated the important ministries (such as defense), the prefectures of Northern Cameroon, the army, and Ahidjo’s personal guard.\(^{63}\) While Azarya’s argument is compelling, he leaves open several questions about the meanings of symbolic power: for example, were ministers able access to state resources? But his argument does suggest the ways in which Northern Cameroonians were connected to state power and state resources especially through connections to the president, rather than through the channels of the bureaucracy.

Northern Cameroonians were not explicitly overrepresented in the national government: in 1982, the region held 29% of the population and 22.5% of representatives in the national government.\(^{64}\) As suggested above, Northern

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\(^{61}\) Gondolo, “Evolution du Peul urbain”.

\(^{62}\) Here once again Fulbe ethnicity and Muslim identity are conflated. Azarya assumes ethnic and regional (Northern) identity can be identified through Muslim name in his analysis of the members of Ahidjo’s government.

\(^{63}\) My argument here is very much concerned with political dominance: other authors, such as Mukum Mbaku, have argued that the economic sphere was dominated by southerners at this time. Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 168-171; Burnham, "L'Ethnie, la religion et l'Etat," 82; Mukum Mbaku, Culture and Customs of Cameroon, 68.

\(^{64}\) Ngayap, Qui Gouverne? , 71.
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Cameroonian were well established within certain ministries including the Ministry of the economy, public works and the armed forces. Northern ministers retained their positions for long periods of time. The head of the armed forced, the “Young Turk” Sadou Daouda, was the longest serving minister (almost 22 years as of October 1982). Out of the other 21 ministers who remained in a single post for more than 10 years, almost half were northerners. This is all the more impressive considering 79% of ministers remained in the government for less than 4 years. Additionally, several Northern Cameroonian “Young Turks” and personal friends of Ahidjo did not appear on the official government lists but still held considerable power within the state. The bulk of the military and police force, especially at the higher levels of the corps, was made up of Northerners. The top military leadership was very stable, and these men were most often from the North. For example, the “Young Turk” Samuel Kame, an original member of the UC, was essentially the permanent secretary of national defense. It was these Northerners who acted as important liaisons between the people and state resources, in part because they held important strategic positions in the government.

There was an uneven distribution of resources between regions of the country, which Ahidjo justified based on the fact that:

There are also natural and historical imbalances that should be corrected through a judicious policy of balanced development of all the

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65 Ibid., 78.
66 Ibid., Table 7, 41-47.
67 Ibid., 55-95, 103-131.
68 It was not just the Fulbe who were in the military. A large percentage of the Army Corps was made up of other Northerners. It is interesting to note that the Fulbe stereotype of the violent and aggressive “Kirdi” was played upon through the inclusion of these groups into the armed forces. Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 158; Ngayap, Qui Gouverne?, 211-219.
69 Ngayap, Qui Gouverne?, 103-131.
70 Johnson, The Cameroon Federation, 232.
regions of the country. Indeed in the long run these imbalances, unless they are progressively minimized, may, through the sentiments of frustration that they necessarily create, threaten national solidarity. This is why I have consistently accorded particular attention to this problem. In so doing, there is not question of favoring this or that region. My action in this field as in others is motivated by patriotism and the conviction that nations which accept second-rate citizens have no future.71

Resources were distributed unevenly among the different regions of the country supposedly in order to combat historic inequities. Northern Cameroon was one of the provinces which benefited from this policy, and was privileged over other regions through funding and development projects, especially in export-oriented agriculture (cotton), and the development of regional infrastructure through roads and large projects such as a train line.72 Additionally there was a strong emphasis of development of education in this region, and the central government allowed Northerners to win posts with lower level of education than individuals from other parts of the country. According to one source, Northern Cameroonians were even given bank loans without the proper guarantees.73 All of this was legitimated through the idea of balanced development, but there was still the strong conception that the North was privileged beyond what was necessary. Other regions, such as the East province, which were similarly underdeveloped in the colonial period, did not receive such extensive services.74

If we accept Cooper and Bayart’s argument that access to state resources is mediated through contacts with the government, than the Fulbe were linked to the

72 Toukour, August 21; Yousouffa, Personal Communication, August.
73 Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 158.
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state through connections to the military, to private aides to the president and to Northern ministers. The power of this ethnic group was not in their overt dominance of national political structures but in the stability of Northern party and government members. Even more importantly than access to the state on the national level, the policy of regionalized representation pushed competition for resources and power to the local level, that is, from a competition between groups over national positions to a competition between local groups over control of regional positions and thus access to the central government.75 Certain ethnic groups became associated with regions, regardless of the real diversity of those areas or the real geographic spread of said ethnic group.76 In Northern Cameroon the Fulbe were to capitalize on their historic power to monopolize local political structures.

Le Grand Nord: Manifestations of Fulbe

Political and Social Hegemony in Northern Cameroon

The powerful Northern political bloc which developed during Ahidjo’s regime involved more than Fulbe individuals, bringing in other Muslims from the rest of Cameroon and other ethnic groups from the North.77 But Northern Cameroon was conceptualized as an exclusively Muslim Fulbe region. The Fulbe impressed their language, religion, political culture on the region and those who wished to be involved in the political world had to adopt these characteristics as well. This

occurred in spite of the real ethnic diversity of the region. In 1977 out of a total population of 76,000 people, Ngaoundéré was home to 43,600 Fulbe, 8,400 Dii, 7,500 Mboom, 4,300 Gbaya, 3,400 traditionally Muslim groups (Hausa, Borneau, Arab Choa), 1,200 Laka, 700 Kaka, 300 Mbororo, 300 Bamiléké. At the regional level however, the Fulbe comprised only 25-30% of population. The Fulbe were the largest single ethnic group in Northern Cameroon, but in this era they dominated the political posts and cultural representation of Northern Cameroon to the exclusion of the many other groups residing in and indigenous to the region.

Fulbe individuals dominated the local structures of government. Political scientist Victor Azarya noted that out of the twenty-four governors, prefects and sub-prefects who worked in North Cameroon during Ahidjo’s presidency, half were Fulbe, a quarter “Kirdi,” and a quarter were other Muslims. At the highest level (governors and prefects) four out of six were Fulbe, one was “Kirdi”, and one was Kotoko (a historically Muslim ethnic group); all of these men were Muslim. The prefect and governor posts were furthermore very stable: although across Cameroon, most prefects stayed in office for less than five year, in the North Province, most prefects were in office for more than five years. There was also only one governor of the province, Ousmanou Mey, from 1963 to 1982. The stability and monopolization of government post by Fulbe or “Fulbeized” individuals contrasts with the fact that Fulbe comprised only one-third of population of the region. The national government chose these individuals, suggesting a link between Ahidjo’s centralized power and Fulbe control of the local state apparatus. The apparent

79 Ngayap, Qui Gouverne?, 183-195.
80 Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 168.
concentration of Fulbe individuals in urban areas may have also contributed to their ability to control these political structures, and to suppress the varied ethnic and religious traditions of the region.

The central government’s focus on regional equilibrium led to a conflation of ethnicity and regional identity; in Northern Cameroon this operated for the benefit of the Fulbe, and the Northern region of Cameroon became conceptualized as a Muslim, Fulbe region. While this phenomenon was perhaps not new, the French too had privileged the Fulbe identity over those of other groups, the Cameroonian state supported this conceptualization to an extreme. The colonial government had been willing to undermine the Fulbe and visibly promote the interests of other groups when it suited their political needs. The Cameroonian state under Ahidjo instead took consistent measures to limit the place of non-Fulbe, non-Muslim voices. While the colonial government had recognized other Northern ethnic identities when is suited them, Ahidjo’s regime silenced these voices and supported only the Fulbe community. Indeed, it appears as if the Cameroonian government had an interest in promoting the image of a Muslim North, whereas the development of this image under colonial rule was more the byproduct of other needs, goals and strategies.

The limited conceptualization of Northern Cameroon as Muslim Fulbe region is present in almost all of the secondary literature and popular literature. The tendency to subsume the ethnic and religious diversity of Northern Cameroon into what was essentially a Fulbe identity is reflective of the real power held by the Fulbe during this time period. Part of this association was due to national policies, probably because of Ahidjo’s personal affinity to the region, which highlighted Fulbe culture,
for example by using the *hiirde* (an introductory song for often sung by *griots* at Fulbe celebrations) at national events and on the radio.  

Additionally, the ideal of a culturally and political homogenous Northern Cameroon was in part an intentional strategy by Ahidjo’s administration to create the image of, and thus encourage the development of, a unified power basis. Non-Fulbe ethnic groups were ignored in national literature, as were non-Muslims. In fact, the face of Islam was itself limited, so as to preclude any challenges to the central government, or to the unity of the Fulbe political base. Ahidjo banned and discouraged the growth of sectarian Muslim groups.

Fulbe control of the region, in reality and in general perception, was based in the historic power of the group. The Fulbe continued to control economic structures of the region. Many former slaves remained “voluntarily” to work on their master’s farms and there was no real change in land ownership in the region. Those groups who had been subjects within the Fulbe state continued to be disadvantaged even as the kings themselves lost their power. The continued preeminence of cattle ownership as a primary economic resource in North Cameroon helped in the continuation of Fulbe control, as did the growth of Fulbe involvement in agriculture, commerce and trucking.

The pre-eminence of the Fulbe in the political and cultural sphere was reflected in the pressure on other Northern populations to “Fulbeize.”

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81 Aissatou, August 3.
82 Burnham, *Politics of Cultural Difference*, 38. See also Eyoh, "Contesting Local Citizenship."
85 This pressure was mentioned by authors such as Jose C. M. van Santen, "Women, and the Spread of Islam in West Africa: Their Changing Position in a North Cameroonian Town," in *State and Islam*, ed. C. van Dijk and A. H. de Groot (Leiden, The Netherlands: Research school CNWS, 1995).
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Ahidjo’s regime it was only through this social and religious conversion that non-Fulbe individuals were able to become part of the regional system of power. Access to government jobs and even the ability to get a permit to open a stand in the market was contingent on one’s identity as Fulbe Muslim.\[^{86}\] Non-Fulbe chiefs faced pressure to convert to Islam and take on markers of Fulbe identity, even as this put them at odds with their position as leaders of separate ethnic communities. Conversion led to nearly immediate political rewards: anthropologist Phillip Burnham describes a case in which Niga Abraham Songo, a Gbaya, was promoted to the presidency of Adamaua Section of UNC almost immediately after his conversion to convert to Islam.\[^{87}\]

The continuing process of “Fulbeization” occurred in part because of the breakdown of the system of slavery, and the ability of former slaves to leave their homes and migrate into the cities. Several residents of Ngaoundéré noted that slavery ended decisively in 1960.\[^{88}\] Slavery was an institution which was closely linked to the Fulbe state, so as the kingdoms declined in political importance after the 1950s, so did the ability of the Fulbe to maintain a (perhaps informal) right to maintain slaves. But the change in the legal definition and response to slavery did not undermine the social structure of Northern Cameroon because Fulbe power was shored up by a new system of patronage from the center. “Fulbeization” continued at a strong pace throughout the period of Ahidjo’s rule. In a survey conducted by anthropologist Philip Burnham during his field-work in 1973 in the Mbere department (east of Ngaoundéré) 55 percent of the population claimed Fulbe heritage, out of which only

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\[^{86}\] Abba Saidou, Interview, August 14, 2007; van Santen, "Islam, Gender and Urbanisation ": 413.
\[^{87}\] Burnham, *Politics of Cultural Difference*, 94.
\[^{88}\] Bobbo, August 9; Dikku, August 4; Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20; Mairné, August 11.
two-thirds were judged by several third-parties as being authentically and biologically Fulbe. 89 Indeed it was really in the 1960s and 1970s that scholars even began to notice the process of “Fulbeization” in Northern Cameroon.

There were variations in the pressure to convert. Schilder has suggested that “Fulbeizing” pressure was limited to upper echelons of the territorial government—at the village and sub-regional level one could be Christian as long as one accepted Muslim rule. 90 But the pressure to convert was widely discussed—there was a persistent rumor that one functionary, Dakolé Daissala, was fired from his role of Secretary General of the Northern Cameroon Provincial Government for refusing to convert to Islam and for highlighting his Tapuri ethnic identity. 91 Even if this was not in fact true, the presence of such rumor suggests that non-Muslim populations strongly believed that their religious-ethnic identity, be they Christian or practitioners of an indigenous religion, was a detriment to material progress. Saïdou Abba, a Christian Fulbe who converted in the 1990s, even stated that in the 1970s and 1980s it was virtually impossible for a non-Muslim to get a job in Northern Cameroon, and that individuals were “forced” to become Muslim. 92 Saïdou used the word “forced” in the sense that one had to convert in order to receive a job and this statement presumes that the need for employment is such a strong pressure that it will override other considerations. While Saidou perhaps overstates his argument, so does Schilder, who implies that economic and social advancement was not a legitimate or strong desire for many residents of Northern Cameroon. While “being forced” to do something is

89 Of course these third-party judges were likely biased themselves, but this does suggest that “Fulbeization” was occurring. Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 60-61.
90 Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem, 217-221.
91 Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, 198.
92 Saïdou, August 14.
not the same as not seeing another choice, the pressure to “become” Fulbe was overwhelming, not only to advance politically, but also to ensure one’s social status and even physical safety. Indeed, churches were often burned or otherwise desecrated.93

The pressure to convert and “Fulbeize” was also due to social pressures, which were exercised through the refusal to marry, to eat with or to bury non-Muslims. Such pressures largely affected intergenerational conversion.94 Perhaps more importantly, non-Muslim cultures and communities were not given any recognition at the regional level. The Cameroonian government even tried to prevent public celebrations of indigenous cultures and religions.95 Towns were identified as Muslim areas even if the population was Christian through the naming of new neighborhoods with Muslim names, and through prohibitions on selling pork and alcohol in markets.96 Christian missionaries were obstructed in certain ways (building and land permits and visas for external visitors were denied). When violence occurred against Christian communities, such as when churches were harmed or desecrated, state officials would most often turn a blind eye.97

The Cameroonian government had a vested interest in creating a homogenous Northern community to serve their political needs. They deliberately and exclusively promoted Fulbe culture over the many other indigenous cultures of Northern Cameroon. The mistreatment of Christians, practitioners of indigenous religions and individuals of other ethnicities was due to the prejudice of Fulbe individuals. But it

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94 Gausset, "Islam or Christianity?,” 269.
95 Schilder, *Quest for Self-esteem*, 221-223.
96 Schilder, "Local Rulers in North Cameroon," 59.
97 Monga, *Cameroun: Quel avenir?*, 100; Saïdou, August 14.
was also encoded in government practices which limited the visibility and autonomy of other populations and which continued to promote “Fulbeized” Muslims to the highest positions in the regional and national government. While the Fulbe were the largest single group in North Cameroon, they never constituted a majority. Their relative numerical strength aided, but did not legitimate the ways in which the Cameroonian state divested other groups of their voice and place in the community. Throughout Ahidjo’s presidency individuals coalesced around a Fulbe identity due to social and political pressures; the state itself deliberately fostered the image of a unified Muslim North, and then worked to create such a community through political and social pressures against individuals of other religions and ethnic backgrounds.

Nostalgic Pride: Remembrances of Ahidjo’s Regime and Fulbe Power

The residents of Ngaoundéré remember Ahidjo’s regime in overwhelmingly positive terms. Few people mentioned the extensive state repression under Ahidjo, and those who did simultaneously praised the “order” of society (as opposed to the “chaos” of the modern democratic world). Individuals most often described his presidency as a time of peace and prosperity. 98 Certainly these comments reflect the economic and social crises which rocked the country in the 1980s and 1990s. The decline of economic prosperity and social stability in the present likely placed

98 One exception to this general pattern was Mohamadou Adamou, a businessman living in Douala who grew up in Ngaoundéré and was back on a family visit this summer. He characterized the 1970s as a time when Cameroon was not united, and when there was little financial support for health care, education or communication between regions; by contrast he described the 1980s however as a time when the number and variety of products sold in Cameroon increased, as did the number of roads, the level of agriculture, the communication systems and so on. Mohamadou’s comments are interesting because even those individuals currently or formerly employed by the Cameroonian state were very positive in their descriptions of the 1970s. Perhaps the difference is due to regional location or class status. Adamou Mohamadou, Interview, August 15, 2007.
Ahidjo’s era in a more romanticized light. And while none of the people I interviewed explicitly mentioned the place of ethnicity in his regime, there was an overriding sense of loss, which speaks to a conception of the loss of communal (and in some cases, personal) power at the end of Ahidjo’s regime.

The conception of change between Ahidjo’s presidency and later periods was likely pushed my own phrasing of the question; “Did anything change when President Biya came into power?” My question did suggest a narrative of change, or discontinuity, and assumed that each presidency, both of which lasted for over 20 years, was a static period. But individuals could and did contradict these assumptions when my question conflicted with their lived reality. Most individuals accepted the broad divisions between Ahidjo and Biya’s regimes and highlighted the stability, safety and prosperity of the Northern region under Ahidjo’s rule. The juxtaposition of this era to that of Paul Biya merely puts the positive memories of Ahidjo’s presidency in context, but it does not negate such opinions. People recalled both the material gains and more ephemeral qualities of the Ahidjo era, such as the strength of the law and the moral character of Cameroonians at that time.

Those comments which focused on the quality of life under Ahidjo highlighted the order of society, the economic prosperity and government aid to individuals. Mohaman Toukour, a former member of the Presidential Guard, and a person who lost a great deal of personal power at the end of Ahidjo’s regime, spoke highly of the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s as a time when “primary school and secondary school was free, and there were scholarships for university students….Ahidjo

developed agriculture, and there was sufficient food for everyone…”  

Other residents of Ngaoundéré like Madame Dikku noted a dichotomy between the two presidential regimes: “Ahidjo was better than Biya; at that time it was easy to become rich…”  

Hadidjatou Bebbé also linked the idea of Ahidjo’s integrity to wealth of the population: “Ahidjo was a good person…He came to the Northern Province and offered them companies, money, cotton.” These speakers linked the personal power and qualities of the president to regional events—highlighting the perception that his individual power benefited the entire Northern community.

Some interviewees also described the morality of Cameroonians through comments such as, in Ahidjo’s era “…there were not bandits, no highway robbers [coupeur de route], there were no checkpoints along the road where the police demand a bribe to let you pass. …Cameroonians were honest in that time.” Such statements suggest that both the state and Cameroonians themselves have changed for the worse since Ahidjo left power. This quotes praises the Cameroonian state under Ahidjo for protecting its citizens both explicitly from violence and theft and more subtly from corruption.

It also suggest that Cameroonians were different in the past, that they would not have stolen, demanded bribes or defrauded companies—that in Ahidjo’s era, people were fundamentally better than they are in the present. A similar idea exists in Mairné’s discussion of Ahidjo’s presidency as a time when “there were no thieves….During Ahidjo’s time you could sleep anywhere, anywhere, and no one

100 Toukour, August 21.
101 Dikku, August 4.
102 Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20.
103 Toukour, August 21.
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would bother you." These comments, and others which mention the corruption of Biya’s state, imply that such corruption would not have occurred under Ahidjo because Cameroonians used to be good people.

The memory of Ahidjo’s presidency as a time of peace and prosperity is due in large part to the real power held by Northern Cameroonians during this time period. While Ahidjo undermined the “traditional” Fulbe hierarchy, the Fulbe as an ethnic group maintained their privileged position during his regime. They came to be associated with Northern Cameroon to the exclusion of other ethnic groups, because Ahidjo and his deputies were unwilling to recognize the ethnic and religious diversity of the region. The Fulbe monopolization of the power structures of the “Grand Nord” and of the central government was to be challenged in the 1980s however, due to political, social and economic changes.

104 Maimé, August 11.
105 Bobbo, August 9; Daouda, Interview, August 14, 2007; Garba, August 4.
The Decline of the “Muslim North”:

The Political and Social Causes of the Disintegration of Fulbe Power

In a surprising move, in November 1982 Ahmadou Ahidjo voluntarily stepped down as president of Cameroon and handed power over to his Prime Minister Paul Biya, a Southern Cameroonian Christian and loyal member of the *Union National du Cameroun* (UNC) since 1964. Ahidjo publicly promoted the acceptance of Paul Biya as the new leader, traveling around the country and making radio announcements “asking that people pray Paul Biya succeeds [réussit]”.1 During the first few months of his administration Biya retained close ties to Ahidjo and to the Northern-based power structure, even choosing a Northern politician, Bello Bouba Maïgari as the new prime minister at the recommendation of Ahidjo.2 Nonetheless citizens and commentators assumed that because there was no longer a Northerner in office, the political position of Northern Cameroonians would decline. Indeed, Northerners did lose a great deal of power in the national government— after a failed coup in 1984, they were effectively excluded from the Cameroonian government. The inability to access resources at the national level undercut the strength of the Fulbe ethnic group in their control of the political and social structures of Northern Cameroon. This loss was compounded by demographic changes, by breakdown of certain divisions between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups, and by the greater acceptance of alternative (that is non-Muslim) lifestyles. During the process of political liberalizations of the 1990s, several new political parties and cultural associations developed which specifically championed non-Fulbe cultures. Indeed in the 1990s,

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1 Garba, August 4; Monga, *Cameroun: Quel avenir?*, 15-20.
2 Monga, *Cameroun: Quel avenir?*, 23.
even the links between Fulbe identity and Islam began to decompose, although such a process is by no means complete. Northern communities splintered into new, finer ethnic groupings, in contrast to the consolidation around the Fulbe ethnic group which had occurred through the process of “Fulbeization” up through the 1970s. This shift did not fully undermine the Fulbe control of the region, but did indicate the possibility for a change in the power dynamics of Northern Cameroon.

Two Coups and the Reaction of the Biya Regime

After Paul Biya took over the presidency, Ahidjo remained the leader of the party—the limits of Biya’s power as president and the role of the party in the governance of the country remained in doubt. Threatened by Ahidjo’s continued presence, Biya took steps to consolidate his own position by changing the make-up of his cabinet and ejecting some of the important players of the Ahidjo era. In August 1983, in his most decisive bid for power, Biya publicized a plot against his life by certain Northern Cameroonians, which necessitated a drastic overhaul of the cabinet and changes to certain administrative structures. Biya removed prominent Northerners including the Prime Minister Maïgari from their posts, and divided the North Province back into the three former provinces (Adamaoua, North and Extreme North Provinces) and the Center Province into two new provinces. For many Cameroonians and outside observers, these actions suggested that Biya was

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attempting to divide and thus weaken the “monolithic north,” with the division of the Center Province as a decoy.4

In the official court documents of the 1984 military tribunal in Yaoundé, the government accused Ahidjo and two aides of treason. The three men were said to have met with all the Northern ministers including Bello Bouba Maïgari, in June 1983 to persuade them to resign. Such an act, the government stated, would have disrupted the function of the state [“de le mettre dans l’impossibilité d’exercer ses functions”] and “[enmeshed] the country in grave problems: civil war and the secession of North Cameroon.” The tribunal report stated that while this initial plan was prevented by a minister from the kingdom of Bamoun in Western Cameroon, a second plan, to incite an army revolt, was subsequently developed. The government prosecutors assumed that senior army personnel would be sympathetic to such a coup because they were from the North.5 In the end, the two aides were executed and Ahidjo was condemned to death in absentia; the other men implicated in the plot were variously sanctioned, many by their removal from their government posts

The official language of the Cameroonian government surrounding this plot depicted the motives and actors in regionalized terms. First, the court document conflated Muslims and Northerners: Njoya was from the Sultanate of Bamoun, which is not in Northern Cameroon but rather in the North-West Province, but is a Muslim sultanate and was thus considered “Northern.”6 Additionally Biya’s government

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4 Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 39. This is also the general interpretation in Cameroon Yousouffa, Personal Communication.
5 Ordonnance de revoir devant le tribunal militaire de Yaoundé, (15 February, 1984), 10 cited in Monga, Cameroun: Quel avenir?, 75-86.
6 This is perhaps logical, as Njoya was a member of the “Young Turks,” and had been associated with Northern politicians for most of his career—but the Cameroonian state specifically stated that the plot involved “Northern” ministers, still conflating regional and religious identities.
framed the event as caused by regional greed, rather than an attack on the faults of the state. Because the rhetoric of the state throughout the previous 20 years (if not the reality) had focused on the need to build a unified Cameroonian nation, Biya’s government was condemning the plotters as treasonous in the deepest sense—they had privileged their regional identity over their identity as Cameroonians.

In April 1984, shortly after the court case concluded, an actual coup was attempted by a section of the Republican Guard. The coup failed however, and the official government response again emphasized that it was Northerners in the Republican Guard who had rebelled against the power of the presidency and the state. In a pamphlet entitled, “The Failed Coup d’Etat of April 6, 1984” written by the Ministry of Information and Culture, the members of the coup (Northerners) were compared unfavorably to the loyal section of the army which was “composed of men of different Cameroonian provinces, of all ethnic origins and religious preferences mixed together.” The pamphlet assumed that the members of the coup had selfish motives, and that there was a continuity between the activities of 1983 and 1984. The government’s response to the coup thus continued to position Northerners as villains in the story of the Cameroonian quest for national unity. This take was parroted by the sole newspaper published in Cameroon at the time: a headline of the first issue of *The Cameroon Tribune* after the coup proclaimed “Nation Unity Triumphed” and condemned the “irresponsible and egotistical” actions of the coup participants. The

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paper also devoted an article to the distinction between “Northerners and Northerners”—that is those who remained loyal to Ahidjo and those who supported the Cameroonian state. Finally The Cameroon Tribune noted that this coup put to rest any doubts about the validity of the supposed plots of 1983.9

The government’s analysis, which was adopted and supported by many secondary authors and the international popular press, ignored differences between Northerners. Even within the Republican Guard and among Northern members of the government the coup was not universally supported. Aboubakar Garba, the son of Lamido Mohammadou Abba and a longtime member of the Republican Guard was an attaché to the Paris embassy at the time:

I didn’t know anything….Perhaps it was luck, because, as the President’s Secretary, who was a general, was my patron, and the men [planning the coup] did not want him involved they did not tell me anything. Perhaps they knew that if they told me [about the coup] I might also have told my patron…..10

While the government’s contention, that the coup participants feared that Biya’s regime would diminish their own power, is logical, the members of the coup did not describe their motives in these terms. Mohaman Toukour, who was a member of the Presidential Guard and a minor level participant in the coup, mentioned nothing about the loss of power for Northern Cameroonians in his justification of the coup:

I participated…because things were not going well…because we could see what going to happen….We knew that things would go downhill…. Today, the president chooses who can be trained for certain posts. Under Ahidjo… if you were [a good worker] they

10 Garba, August 4. « Moi, je ne savais rien. ….Peut-être ma chance, parce que…. secrétaire de président là, il y avait un général là—c’était mon grand patron et comme les gens là ne voulait pas de lui, ils ne m’ont pas dit, peut-être ils savent que s’il me dise, je pouvais aussi dire ça, et que leur quoi jouer ou quelque chose…. »

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would choose you, you work...you had to earn it [il faut
meriter]….We could not have left the country to continue like that.
Now, it is clear that we were right. We [Cameroonian] suffer. But, if
the coup had succeeded....perhaps we would not have suffer like we
do today. ….11

Mohaman Toukour highlights corruption as justification for the attempted coup; this
one of the most common critiques of the government in the present and perhaps
Toukour is legitimating the actions of the coup through the modern discourse of the
failure of the state. Ironically, his fear that merit would no longer count (“you had to
earn it”) ignores the many instances in which Ahidjo appeared to promote Northern
interests over others, for example, by setting different standards of education for
access to government jobs. Toukour’s fears are framed as national, not regional
concerns. His statement parallels the radio announcement given by the rebels and
reprinted in The Cameroon Tribune which highlighted Biya’s mis-rule and the loss of
rights for all Cameroonians.12 The government’s focus on the sectional nature of the
complaints against Biya’s regime contrasts with the rebels’ statements that they were
acting for the good of the nation, and that the flaws in Biya’s government affected all
Cameroonian.13

Most secondary sources which discuss the coup argue that the established
political elite of Northern Cameroon feared that their role in the national government

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11 Hamatoukor’s less important role in the coup is evidenced in the fact that he was imprisoned, rather
than executed. Toukour, August 21. « Moi, j’ai participé….Parce que ca n’allait pas. …. parce
qu’on voyait ce qu’il a faisait….Et puis on savait que a cet nuera d’aurait tombé comme aujourd’hui.
….On savait ce que serai. On choisi maintient les gens qui former dans les postes. Or Ahidjo, lui, il
n’avait pas ces choix ; Tu es bon, on tu mets on est la, tu travaille….il faut mériter….parce qu’on ne
pouvoir pas laisser le pays aller, maintient, nous avons donné raison. On souffre. Alors que, si le
coup d’état a succédé… peut-être comme ca on n’aura pas souffris comme aujourd’hui…. »
12 “Le putsch avorté du week-end dernier.”
13 Toukour, August 21.
would be compromised with a Christian and Beti as the head of state. This interpretation assumes that because access to power had been mediated through regionalized identities under Ahidjo, the attempted coup was fundamentally about access of resources. Thus the focus on a return to “Northern” control can be seen at its core as a statement on the ways in which ethnicity is a means access the resources of the state. While I do not disagree, it is important to note that this reading comes from the Cameroonian government’s interpretation of the events, and from the immediate analyses which focused on ethnicity as the basis of the conflict. These analyses may even read events backwards—the failure of the coup did lead to serious and negative repercussions for Northern Cameroon.

The participants of the attempted coup were executed and imprisoned. Many individuals who were not directly implicated in the coup but who were from Northern Cameroon, such as Aboubakar Garba, were also negatively affected:

They called me [home] and nominated someone else in my place….I was removed from the presidential guard and demoted [renversé] back to the police force and sent to work in Garoua. Other Northerners were forced to resign from the upper echelons of the armed forces, the UNC (which was renamed the Rassamblenment Democratique des Peuples Camerounais, RDPC), certain state-run companies, and ministries. For the next ten

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15 This interpretation did not represent real and essential differences between Muslim and Christians, but rather the conception that (as had been the case under Ahidjo’s regime) that ethnicity and religious differences marked and limited a political unit, and that it was easiest to access national and regional power through these ties. Again, see "The Little Coup That Couldn't."; "Tribal Rivalries Behind Coup Bid."
16 *Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference*, 93; *Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem*, Appendix 3; *Toukour*, August 21.
17 Garba, August 4. « On m’a donc appelé, on a nommé quelqu’un à ma place là bas….On m’a donc enlevé de la présidence, on m’a reversé à la gendarmerie, on m’a affecté à Garoua. »
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years, Northern Cameroonians were essentially excluded from the central government and the lack of accesses to the resources of the placed the Northern region at a disadvantage. This change affected not only Fulbe bureaucrats, but those “Fulbeized” individuals who had entered into the army and the state apparatus. Because the Fulbe had been the representatives and power brokers of the Northern region at the national level, and in the upper levels of the regional administration, the loss of national power undercut their local role. This shift was reflected in and compounded by Biya’s increased reliance on elites from other Northern groups and Southern Cameroonians for bureaucratic posts in Northern Cameroon. The removal of Fulbe from positions of power within the central state thus undercut the Fulbe position on a local level.

The New North: Migration, Social Change and Fragmenting Identities

Throughout the 1980s, the demographics of Ngaoundéré changed dramatically as the population swelled with migrants from Southern Cameroon, other regions of Northern Cameroon and neighboring countries such as Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic. In the 1987 census the population of the Adamaoua region was listed as 457,991 with 167,665 urban residents (although this number includes several

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19 There is some debate over whether Southern Cameroonians or Northerners received more posts but the general consensus appears to be that posts in Northern Cameroon went most often to Southern Cameroonian bureaucrats. Burnham, *Politics of Cultural Difference*, 40,93; Eyoh, "Contesting Local Citizenship," 102.
other cities, Ngaoundéré is the largest city in the province). Of these urban residents, 13,000 came from the two other Northern Provinces and another 23,000 from other Cameroonian provinces. Although the census numbers do not look at specific cities, there is some evidence about the growth of Ngaoundéré. One source placed the population of the city at 153,803 inhabitants in 1993, a growth of 90,000 from 1987. Other residents commented anecdotally that in the 1980s, the town created a second mayor’s office and motorcycle-taxi (moto-taxi) drivers noted that their profession first developed in the mid-1980s, as the town grew large enough to necessitate taxi travel between neighborhoods. The demographic changes in the city occurred as a result of the political effects of the coup and because of economic changes in Cameroon. These changes affected the ways in which the Fulbe were connected to and seen as distinct from other ethnic groups in Northern Cameroon. Fulbe power was undercut by their loss of political power, but the duality of Fulbe/“non-Fulbe” was also undermined through the presence of new peoples and the acceptance of other religions and cultures in Northern Cameroon on the part of the national government.

In 1983 Biya when had divided the North Province into three Ngaoundéré had become the regional capital of the re-created Adamaoua province and provincial and

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22 Ibid., 17-20.
23 There is no clear and totally trustworthy source for specific numbers on the size of the city, nevertheless, there was a trend in the growth of the city over the 1980s and 1990s. See various data from Pascal Bekolo Bekolo, "La modernité culturelle de l’Adamaoua," in Peuples et cultures de l’Adamaoua (Cameroun), ed. Jean Boutrais and Hermenegildo Adala (Paris: ORSTOM, 1993), 307; Hino, "Towns and Villages in the Adamawa," 169; Holtendahl, "Education, économie et ‘idéal de vie’," 277; Ndame, "Commerce informel et structuration de l'espace urbain," 34.
24 Bobbo, August 9; Adamadi Mohamadou et al., Group Interview, August 8, 2007.
administrative services came to the city. This led to a growth in the number of middle level functionaries in the city. Because of the disparities in education across the country, most of the middle level bureaucrats in the Cameroonian government were from Southern Cameroon. Other functionaries moved from other regions of Northern Cameroon as well. The growth of the Southern population in particular is evidenced in the growing number of churches in Ngaoundéré, as many of these individuals were Christian.

Likewise, because of the train line between Yaoundé and Ngaoundéré, which had opened in 1974, travel between Ngaoundéré and other towns accelerated. The train line allowed Southern Cameroonianians to travel with ease to Ngaoundéré and broadened the experiences of Northern Cameroonians, especially as the price of a ticket was relatively affordable. Awalou, an employee of a public health NGO in Ngaoundéré, was born in the city and raised in a village with his grandparents (Mbam-Mboum). He lived for a time in Yaoundé as a child, an experience which was rare in his parents’ generation. As the terminus of the train line, the city became a center of trade, and thus a hub of migration. Anthropologist Lisbet Holtendal notes that that the train increased of sales of beef and industrial activities in the city led to the migration of Bamiléké and Bamoun populations from Western Cameroon to participate in this growing economic center; one Widikum man from the North-West province noted that he began to import kola nuts to Ngaoundéré around this time due

25 Aminatou, August 21.
29 Awalou, August 8.
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to the growth of the population and the proliferation of transportation. Ngaoundéré became the epicenter of truck routes across Central Africa, and products from central areas of the continent (especially Chad and the Central African Republic) were brought by train to the port city of Douala, one of the largest ports in Africa. Truck drivers and other merchants would bring their products into Ngaoundéré, and sometimes stay.

While trans-regional and trans-national interactions had occurred in earlier eras, they grew substantially in this period (as opposed to the 1960s and 1970s) and thus had a greater impact on the city. Indeed, the most important effect of the train line was not that it brought new products or ideas to Ngaoundéré, but that it made the city a more attractive place for people to live, which led in turn to a population expansion. Aminatou, the regional school inspector, described the profound effect of the train:

Since the establishment of the train line, people arrive from everywhere. Before there were trucks and people would often travel to Garoua and Maroua. Then the train came, bringing people from Douala, Yaoundé, everywhere! Life is open, people see that life is good [in Ngaoundéré], the climate is good...they stay and they build, and like that, the town grew.

Aminatou distinguishes the post-train era from an earlier period when road travel and communication were (more) limited to Northern towns. The train opened links between Ngaoundéré and southern cities, which were culturally different from those

31 For example, in a survey of the town in 1999, Jean-Pierre Ndame noted that 90% of hardware and construction stores were owned by Nigerians. Ndame, "Commerce informel et structuration de l'espace urbain," 39.
32 Aminatou, August 21. « Les gens viennent de partout avec l’arrivé de traine. C’est avant c’était des camions, les gens partaient souvent de Ngaoundéré pour Garoua, Maroua et le traine est venu amener les gens de Douala, Yaoundé, partout ! La vie c’est ouvert, les gens voyent que la vie est bonne, le climat est bon...ils restent, ils construisent et comme ca la ville c’était grandi. »
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of Northern Cameroon. While Northern Cameroon had shared a political culture (derived from the Sokoto Caliphate), Southern Cameroon was composed of many smaller ethnic communities, was predominately Christian, more educated and more linked to the exterior of the country through trade and industry—the influx of Southern Cameroonians thus disrupted the relative consistency of social and political structures, customs and ethnic relations across Northern Cameroon, which had existed since the pre-colonial period.

In 1986 Cameroon suffered from a severe economic crisis after a worldwide crash in the price of both oil and the primary exports products, coffee and cocoa. The growth of the Gross National Product declined steeply and in consequence government revenues fell, private investment declined and the banking sector faced a liquidity crisis. The economic crisis destabilized the economic prosperity of many Cameroonians. In Northern Cameroon, the price of cattle and cotton both fell dramatically and hurt the many individuals who relied on these export-oriented products. Bureaucrats and state employees such as teachers also suffered from pay-cuts and layoffs, and the decrease in oil revenues forced the government to reduce already limited social services.

33 Interestingly enough, this is exactly how Ahidjo promoted the train line in his speech at the inauguration of the train line in 1976, a link between the culturally diverse populations of the North and South. Ahmadou Ahidjo, Inauguration of the Trans-Cameroon railway and Ngaoundéré-Garoua Road, (10 December 1974) cited in Ahidjo, Compilation of Speeches by Ahmadou Ahidjo, 1973-1978, 197-200.

34 I do not mean that the populations of Northern Cameroon were homogenous but that the structures of power, in which the Fulbe lamidats controlled and incorporated indigenous populations, were common across the region.


36 Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 63; Subramanian, "Vulnerability to Price Shocks under Alternative Policies in Cameroon," 95.
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In order to remain financially stable the Cameroonian government borrowed heavily from certain donor countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These organizations mandated certain structural changes as a condition of receiving loans and aid. The structural adjustment program (SAP) required that the Cameroonian state privatize government industries, implement free-market principals, devalue the currency, and put limits on government spending, which translated into cuts in social services especially education and health care.37

Regardless of the stated “good intentions” of the structural adjustment program, in the short-term it increased the level of unemployment, led to inflation and generally compounded the negative effects of the economic crisis itself.38

Awalou, who was a teenager living in a predominately agricultural region during the economic crisis, described the reasons for and the effects of the economic crisis:

Everyone said that the price of our products would no longer be enough: cocoa, cotton, sugar, coffee, the things through which our parents had money. Now [during the economic crisis], if you took these things to the market, they wouldn’t sell… This didn’t affect my family, because my parents were not farmers. But my [friends], their parents lived on cotton. Now they would take the cotton [to the market] and they would tell them that it is maybe 100 franc CFA per kilogram, my friend’s father would not have the money necessary to send him to school, to take him to the hospital, to buy clothes. These were the consequences of the economic crisis….it stagnated the level of education…There were perhaps positive consequences because parents abandoned the cultivation of cotton. Now people grow corn, peanuts, and in doing so, everyone is able to eat, there is no more famine. ….But the negative consequences….I saw, when I was a kid, people who had left their villages, where they had been growing cotton—they left their homes to come to my town (Mbam-Mboum) to

37Townson University The Public Politics Project of the Department of Political Science, "What are SAPs," (Spring 1997).
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buy corn, to buy even the juice [sang, to make beer] of corn because they did not have anything to eat, they didn’t have the money to buy corn.\(^{39}\)

Just as Mbam-Mboum became a center for those unemployed and displaced by the economic crisis, so did Ngaoundéré, but on a much larger scale. Several motorcycle-taxi drivers who I spoke with explained that as young men they had first come to Ngaoundéré from rural areas to find work during or shortly after the economic crisis. Because moto-taxis were illegal at the time, and faced severe harassment from the police, this was a job which was taken only when other opportunities were exhausted. As Ngaoundéré was a regional hub, it was assumed that there would be jobs available in the city even when work was limited in smaller towns or villages.\(^{40}\)

The population changes throughout the 1980s altered the dynamic between the Fulbe, the Mboum, the Dii and other groups by challenging the old simplistic division between Muslim and “non-Muslim,” free and “not-free.” Instead of a simple dichotomy, Fulbe identity, Mboum identity and other ethnic identities specific to Northern Cameroon were compared to and understood in relation to the identities and

\(^{39}\) Awalou, August 8. « Mais on a toujours dit que les prix des nos produits ne passait plus au banc mondiale : le cacao, le coton, le cane au sucre, c'est-à-dire le café, les trucs sur laqueux nos parents avaient de l'argent, Maintient tu amènes au marché, ça ne passe pas…. Mais par rapport a sa, sa nous a touché parce que, même si moi et mes parents n'étaient pas cultivateurs, il y a mes frères, les gars, les parents qui vivaient du coton. Maintient tu amène le coton, il te dit que c'est peut-être 100 franc le kilogramme, son père n'aura plus l'argent nécessaire pour l'envoyer à l'école, pour l'amener à l'hôpital, c'est-à-dire pour acheter les beaux habilles. C'est ca les conséquences de la crise économique. …. Ca a freiné l’éducation ! Et non seulement ca, je poser dire qu’il y a les conséquences positive parce que il y a les parents qui a abandonné l’agriculture du coton. Maintiennent ils ne font que le maïs, l’arachide, et en faisant ca, tout le monde mange bien, il n’y a plus la famine, ….Mais les conséquences négatives c'est ca : …j’ai vu, quand j’étais petit, les gens qui quittent les autres villages-là qu’on cultive beaucoup du coton—il quitte là-bas pour venaient chez moi, achetaient le maïs, achetaient même le sang de maïs pour manger parce qu’ils n’avaient pas de quoi manger. Il n’avait pas suffisamment l’argent pour achetaient le maïs. »

\(^{40}\) Mohamadou et al., August 8. This information is supported by Ndame, "Commerce informel et structuration de l'espace urbain." Manning also writes that the growth of cities was a result of economic crisis and decline of agriculture across francophone Africa. Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa*, 184.
cultures of Southern Cameroonians, Chadians and Nigerians. Aminatou’s comments on the changes in marriage practices since her childhood illustrates what she sees as the effects of such interactions:

Because of those people who come from other places… the knowledge of the culture changes. Perhaps some Nigerians come live nearby, and when they celebrates the marriage of their daughter as they would do in Nigeria, perhaps these practices interest me, their Cameroonian neighbor and I start to do the same things…and this changes the culture.\textsuperscript{41}

Aminatou’s hypothetical neighbors have different customs and traditions and offer an alternative source cultural legitimacy compared to the “Islamic culture” of Northern Cameroon.

In pre-colonial Ngaoundéré, only Muslim culture was seen to be “civilized” and to have cultural worth; this single basis of social and political legitimacy was partially challenged in the colonial period as individuals could choose to enter into the Westernized, French world, and gain authority from French education (and perhaps conversion to Christianity). And yet in the colonial era, French interest in maintaining the power of the kings meant that this process was incomplete—the “Young Turks,” the political class which developed out of the colonial education system, still claimed legitimacy from their status as Muslims. Under Ahidjo, the necessity of claiming authority and legitimacy through Islam was further reinforced. During Paul Biya’s presidency, and in conjunction with the demographic changes, alternative sources of legitimacy such Christian and indigenous identities were finally allowed space and the possibility to flourish.

\textsuperscript{41}Aminatou, August 21. « Parmi les gens qui sont venus d’ailleurs …le sage de culture change. Peut-être quelque communauté en Nigeria on va s’installer, et quand ils font ça, il veut célébrer le mariage de sa fille comme il fait chez lui en Nigeria, quand il se fait, peut-être moi, sa voisin camerounais, sa m’intéresse, je commence aussi a la faire…et ça change la culture. »
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In addition to the new forces of social legitimacy, key symbols of Fulbe identity, specifically the “boundary markers” (to use Barth’s term) of language and gender norms were challenged and became less relevant as markers of identity throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Because of the new administrative role of Ngaoundéré and the migration of Southern Cameroonians to the city French, rather than Fulfulde, increasingly became used as the lingua franca. Anthropologist Schilder noted that among Mundang, there had been a growth in the number of tri-lingual (French, Fulfulde, Mundang) people between the 1960s and the 1990s which points to the need for French and Fulfulde in a daily sphere; the use of Fulfulde hints at the primacy of Fulbe culture into the 1970s. The growing inclusion of French words in Fulfulde decreased the “purity” of the language and many young Cameroonians began to learn a hybrid of French and Fulfulde as their first language. Fulfulde has been used as a marker of Fulbe identity; in order to “Fulbeize,” one had to speak Fulfulde within the home. Fulfulde is also tied to “racial” purity; for example, the Fulbe of Ngaoundéré are said to have intermarried more with local population that the Fulbe of Garoua, for example, and thus to have a less pure Fulfulde. The growing use of French for everyday use and the hybridization of the two languages marks the decline usefulness of language as a marker of Fulbe identity. It also suggest that Fulbe political and cultural hegemony has diminished—although Fulbe power in Northern Cameroon existed in contact with French language and political structure since the colonial period, it appears that it was

42 Barth, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries."
43 Schilder, Quest for Self-esteem, 35.
44 Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 52-53.
45 Ibid.
46 Taxi driver, August, 2007; Yousouff, Personal Communication, August.
only in the 1980s that the role of the language as a *lingua franca* of Northern Cameroon was challenged, if perhaps not fully replaced. The growth of French marks a decline in the political power of the Fulbe to control their immediate social environment.47

Another shifting boundary marker, which may have reduced the distinction between ethnic groups, is the social norms for women. In earlier eras, the social presence of women was a means by which ethnic identity in Northern Cameroon was distinguished; while Fulbe women were secluded, while other women, both Muslim (Hausa and Kanuri) and non-Muslim were not.48 Since the 1980s Fulbe women began to enter into the public sphere in greater numbers than in previous decades.49 This transition continues to be the subject of discussion and negotiation within Fulbe families and has likely had some effect on ethnic relations. To some extent these changes are reflective of changing gender relations across the country towards a smaller average family size, greater numbers of women participating in the labor market, emphasis on Western education and new child-rearing strategies.50

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47 In 2007, when I conducted research for this project, Fulfulde was still commonly spoken in the markets—it is not that French has displaced Fulfulde, but that it has challenged the place of Fulfulde.

48 Indeed, one of the most interesting and challenging components of my research project was the fact that many women I spoke to claimed they could not answer questions about the political world, and indeed that these events had not affected them, as they had been secluded in the home since marriage. Aissatou, August 3; Asta Barka, Interview, August 3, 2007; Madeline Djoda, Interview, August 3, 2007; Gouddo Halima, Interview, August 3, 2007; Mairné, August 11; Mamma Ardo Kingui, Interview, August 3, 2007. For a scholarly take on this, see Holtendahl, "Education, économie et "idéal de vie"," 275-276.

49 Alterations in gender roles have not occurred exclusively among the Fulbe: Gbaya and Dii women have been attending French-language schools in large numbers for several generations but recently, high levels of education for girls has been disrupting “traditional” marriage patterns.Holtendahl, "Education, économie et “idéal de vie”," 293.

50 Mukum Mbaku, *Culture and Customs of Cameroon*, 167.
women of different ethnic groups has certainly altered the ways in which the limits between ethnic groups have to be distinguished and encoded.

There are several reasons why women may have entered the public sphere in greater numbers since the 1980s. The Cameroonian government has placed a great deal of pressure on Northern communities to increase the number of girls enrolled in school. Additionally some authors have argued that the economic crisis increased the number of women visibly participating in the economy of the city by making it necessary for both the husband and wife to work to support their family. Anthropologist Helen Regis also noted that the growing ease of transportation made travel easier, and women’s’ demands for money for trips to their natal homes became a sign of men’s “lack of control.” She believes that the concept of travel operated to undermine traditional gender roles by “placing mobile women in the symbolic space of modernity, money, cars, tarred roads, urban lifestyle, anonymity…” Even the introduction of television into the city beginning in the 1980s introduced new Western images of femininity and gender roles, especially among upper-class household, and has reduced the number of early marriages according to a dissertation on Fulbe life completed at the University of Ngaoundéré in 2004. Of course while these changes do not necessarily undermine gender roles, the growing visibility of Fulbe girls and women has most likely been influenced by these factors.

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51 Aminatou, August 21.  
52 Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 128.  
53 Regis, Fulbe Voices, 62-3.  
54 Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ", 61. This statement paralleled in a statement by Aboubakar Garba: “In Ahidjo’s time, there were not televisions. Now there are television and we see what happens in your country, in the West—we see” Also, anecdotally, many people of different economic classes live in the same compound, that is family members of different economic status and they congregate in a single household to watch TV together. It is unclear when TV first started becoming prominent in Ngaoundéré, currently most families own a TV (usually in the men’s common room) and many have cable. Garba, August 4.
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The rise in the level of girls’ education can be seen as evidence of a change in-process. Women have historically been less educated than men in Cameroon, and especially in the North. In 1970, less than a quarter of pupils in the Northern Province were girls.\textsuperscript{55} Aminatou, the Inspector of all secondary schools in the Adamaoua province, claims that the level of female education has climbed progressively, and that almost all girls in Ngaoundéré attend school in the present (2007).\textsuperscript{56} Perhaps more importantly, the idea of girl’s education has been accepted. When Aminatou was in school in the 1970s:

….I stayed up late [suivre le nuit] so that I would not make mistakes…I was good [j’ai marché droit], I did everything that was necessary of me as a girl in our town, and on top of that I went to school… I did everything to be better than the others, to show that a woman could do the same things as a man…\textsuperscript{57}

Implicit in Aminatou’s statement is the idea that her own actions paved the way for future generations to enter schools with less social and familial pressure against their presence. Although she is referencing the modern situation, she explained that the strength of girl’s education today is a product of a series of changes since she was a child.

The presence and acceptance of girl’s education, and the growing expectation on the part of Fulbe men that their wives would be educated, marks a shift in the expectations of Fulbe woman, and acceptance of the visible presence of these women

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56 Aminatou was only able to attend school the aid of certain relatives and teachers and sheer luck. Her father was reluctant to let her continue school after elementary school, fearing that it would reduce her chances of marriage, and it was only through the kindness of an uncle that she was able to continue. Aminatou, August 21. See also, Saliou, "Pouvoir et autorité des chefs dit traditionnels ", 61-62.
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57 Aminatou, August 21. « Quand j’allais a l’école je suivi le nuit pour ne pas faire l’erreur, … J’ai marché droit, je ne risquais rien, je faisais tout qu’on fait chez nous et plus qu’on fait a l’école…. je fais tout pour dépassées les autres montrer que la femme, elle peut. »
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outside of the home. Even though girl’s education was more about preparing women for wifehood and motherhood than about careers, the physical presence of girls and women outside of the home marked a dramatic shift in the mobility of Fulbe women in its own right.\textsuperscript{58} This shift was important because in Northern Cameroon, ethnic affiliation has been encoded by gender roles and specifically evidenced through the seclusion of Fulbe women. The increased visibility of women surely affected the negotiation of ethnic identity between groups in Northern Cameroon.

The alterations in the place of language and gender roles in defining ethnic affiliation which occurred in conjunction with the demographic and social changes of the 1980s challenged the conflation of Fulbe and Northern identities in several ways. The existing social structure of Northern Cameroon, which had relied on relatively stable ethnic populations, was affected by inter-regional and inter-national migration; in Ngaoundéré the dualism between the Fulbe and the other major ethnic groups of the region such as the Mboum, Dii and Gbaya was undermined by the influx of newcomers. Social changes, especially the shifts in what demarcated Fulbe womanhood, also contributed to an alteration to the identification and use of ethnicity, especially in reference to other ethnic groups. This is not to say that ethnic groupings, and the hierarchies between them, disappeared; only that the boundaries were blurred in new ways and that ethnic identity was complicated by the changes in the cultural make-up of the city and region. Indeed ethnicity continues to be distinguished through visual markers, such as clothing. But overall, these changes served to complicate and disrupt the continuity of the ethnic hierarchy which had

\textsuperscript{58} Holtendahl, "Women's Control--Control over Women: Women's condition in the Development of Urban Culture in Ngaoundéré, North-Cameroon," 346-347.
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continued from the pre-colonial era through the colonial period and the Ahidjo presidency.

“Everyone Has Their Own Party”\textsuperscript{59}: A Divisive Democracy in Northern Cameroon

The complication of the Fulbe/non-Fulbe and Muslim/non-Muslim dichotomy and the decline in Fulbe political power allowed other ethnic groups to claim space within the social world of Ngaoundéré. When Cameroon began to democratize in the 1990s, political parties and new community groups were created along ethnic lines and ethnic identification became fragmented in a new way. In the 1992 elections, ethnicity continued to mediate access to the state, but the exact role of ethnicity had changed—it became linked to political parties and communities rather than a regional identity.\textsuperscript{60} The Fulbe themselves used these elections as a means to regain access to the state which had been denied to them throughout the 1980s. The outcome of the 1992 elections suggest that the Fulbe still controlled the political structures of Northern Cameroon, but that this control was not secure.

In the late 1980s, French President Francois Mitterrand announced that financial aid to French-speaking African partners would be tied to their progress towards democracy.\textsuperscript{61} Cameroon was also pressured to democratize by the IMF and World Bank, as part of the structural adjustment program adopted in the wake of the

\textsuperscript{59} Awalou, August 8. « Chaqu’un c’est dans son parti pour défendre ses intérêts. »
\textsuperscript{60} Eyoh, “Contesting Local Citizenship,” 99.
\textsuperscript{61} Krieger, "Cameroon's Democratic Crossroads," 626; Monga, "Au Village!": 728. The French followed up on this threat in a variety of ways. For example, the French cut off aid to the government of the Central African Republic when the elections were deemed fraudulent, forcing the government to capitulate and the president to step down. Of course, they French were also willing renege on their preference for democracy when it suited them: in the 1992 elections the French supported Biya at the critical moment after the elections of 1992 to ensure that he remained president over the opposition candidate John Fru Ndi.
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economic crisis. Although Biya and his government were against political liberalization, arguing that these reforms would dismantle the nation and lead to ethnic cleavages, the pressure of these international groups pushed the Cameroonian government to liberalize. In 1990, the government freed some political prisoners (including members of the 1984 coup attempt) and passed law 90/056 allowing multiple political parties and a free press.

Subsequently, there was a spectacular growth in political parties—Cameroonian were frustrated with the Biya government because of the inability of the state to mitigate the negative effects of the economic crisis and the structural adjustment program. Many of these parties were based in identity groups. One of the strongest of opposition movement developed in Western Cameroon, the former British Colony. The Anglophone population felt themselves to be systematically disenfranchised by the central state and created a political party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), headed by John Fru Ndi. Several other political parties developed out of regional and/or ethnic identities including the Mouvement pour la Défense de la République, MDR, (a self-identified “Kirdi” party) and the Union National pour la Democratie et le Progrès or UNDP (a Northern Fulbe party). Other political parties were perceived to be affiliated with a certain ethnic group, for

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63 Vubo, "Levels of Historical Awareness," 597. The number of newspapers grew rapidly after the passage of this law, although freedom of the press was not complete. News organs had to be registered and prior censorship was permissible (which mainly operated through the deletion of negative reporting on the state). In fact, newspaper editors continued to be arrested for critiques of the state; in 1991 author Celestin Monga and the editor of the Douala-based Le Messager were arrested on charges of contempt against the government.
64 Joseph, "Democratization in Africa," 370.
65 Monga, "Au Village!". For more information of the Anglophone movement, see Konings and Nyamnjoh, "The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon."
example the ruling party, the RDPC, was seen as a Beti party (the ethnic group of Paul Biya). Political-ethnic divisions were not so much about loyalty to a given leader, but about the idea that connections to an individual of one’s ethnic group would mean receiving a greater share of the “national pie.”

The political parties in Northern Cameroon were centered around a Fulbe/“non-Fulbe” divide. The MDR, which was founded by Samuel Eboua after he left the (Fulbe) UNDP, was closely linked to the party in power, Biya’s RDPC. The MDR was even accused of being set up by the RDPC as a front to prevent the UNDP and the Fulbe from gaining power in Northern Cameroon. Officially the MDR rejected affiliation with any particular ethnic group but the party was known for their animosity towards the UNDP and they played up the fear that the Fulbe would take power again. The MDR worked to create a myth of common suffering of non-Muslims at the hands of the Fulbe and brought back the term “Kirdi” as a way to create a unified non-Fulbe group, a coalition based on their opposition to the Fulbe.

In spite of this attempt to build a “Kirdi” political movement, some people in Northern Cameroon saw the MDR as a Tapuri party because the leader, Dakolé Diassala was Tapuri and others rejected affiliation with the party because they did not see themselves as “Kirdi”.

The UNDP on the other hand, which was especially strong in Ngaoundéré, espoused a sometimes overt desire to return Fulbe power to the North, although the

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69 At this time there was a very strong upsurge of interest in traditional culture, which was especially strong among the Taupuri. Schilder, *Quest for Self-esteem*, 230-234; Takougang, "The 1992 Multiparty Elections," 55.
party was not composed only of Fulbe members. The UNDP was fronted by Bouba Bello Maïgari, an associate of Ahidjo and the former prime minister for Biya who was ousted in response to the suspected anti-Biya plot of 1983. Consistent references to Ahidjo and to the better days of Ahidjo’s regime suggest that the leaders of the UNDP and the majority-Muslim rank and file were interested in reinvigorating Fulbe hegemony in Northern Cameroon.\(^{70}\) Mohaman Toukour, who was an early member of the UNDP and won a 2007 mayoral election in Ngaoundéré under the banner of this party, explained the growth of the UNDP and his own interest in the party:

In prison, I had a friend, Issa Tchiroma\(^ {71}\) …I was in prison when we decided to create a political party…. [for] all of the people of the North…And when he left prison, [other people] had already created the UNDP… I went to meet Issa in Garoua, and it was there that we entered into the UNDPC…The North did not have a party, we wanted one, we thought to create one, for all of the Grand Nord, one single political party, the UNDP….\(^ {72}\)

Mohaman Toukour’s description suggests the desire to renew a sense of regional unity. He conceptualized the UNDP as a party for all Northerners, not for all Cameroonians, demonstrating how political parties came to be based on personal and group identity, rather than on ideas or ideology. For Toukour, the desire to create a new political party was intimately linked to the political disempowerment of Northern Cameroon in the aftermath of the 1984 coup; it is telling that he and Issa Tchiroma thought of developing a political party while in prison. The question is, should Toukour’s continued use of the term North and Northern be read as code for

\(^{70}\) Schilder, *Quest for Self-esteem*, 224.

\(^{71}\) Issa Tchairoma is currently a minister in Paul Biya’s government. He was ejected from the UNDP in 1993 after taking this post, when the UNDP was the only remaining opposition party in the legislature.

\(^{72}\) Toukour, August 21. « En prison, j’avais un ami. Issa Tchairoma…Je suis en prison quand on a décidé de faire un parti politique—« septentrional », le parti du nordiste… Et quand il a sorti de la prison, …. Déjà il y a l’UNDP. …Et la, on m’a envoyé les statue de parti ici en Ngaoundéré, je suis parti lui rencontré à Garoua, et c’est comme ça que nous sommes entre dans l’UNDPC…Le Nord n’avait pas le parti, on voulait, on a pensée faire un, tout le grand nord la, un seul parti l’UNDP… »
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Fulbe? Given the links between ethnic and regional identity under Ahidjo, and the development of anti-Fulbe, Northern based political parties such as the MDR, the answer should be yes. As was suggested above, the party referenced Ahidjo’s presidency as the basis of their existence taken with the historical conflation of Northern and Fulbe identities, indicates that Toukour’s use of the term “Northerner” also links these two identities.  

After the creation of these opposition parties, Biya’s government proved reluctant to hold elections and continued to imprison political opponents (including some members of the coup d’état). They were also unwilling to hold a “sovereign national conference,” a gathering of political and civil society group which had been very effective in ousting ruling parties in other Francophone African countries. Because of Biya’s reluctance to capitulate to these political demands, a group of political parties from across the country, notably the UNDP, SDF and the *Union des Populations Camerounais* (UPC), jointly developed a series of protests known as the “villes mortes” or Ghost Town operation. The Ghost Towns, which began in April 1991 and lasted until January 1992, immobilized the Cameroonian economy as residents refused to go to the market, to work, to pay taxes and bills, and even to go outside.  

People did not open their stores, we did not open anything, the stores, the market, everything was closed….People did not travel, everything ground to a halt for one or two days. Afterwards, the city would come back to life, for one, two, three days everything would start up again.

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73 In the present this is perhaps more complicated, as the RDPC is sometimes seen as the “Fulbe” party, and the UNDP as the “Muslim” party in Ngaoundéré. Boniface Noyogo, April 10, 2008.


75 Toukour, August 21. « Les gens d’ouvre pas… les boutiques. On n’ouvre rien, les boutiques, les marchés, tout était ferme. …Les gens ne voyaient pas, tout le monde étaient bloqué pour un, deux jours. Apres, la ville recommence. Pour un, deux, trois jours, il recommence. » See also Moussa Yaya, Interview, August 10, 2007.
Because the opposition forces saw a national conference as the most effective means of upsetting the government in power, these protests were intensified after President Biya stated, in June 1991, that “the national conference is pointless in Cameroon.”

In Ngaoundéré, the Ghost Towns operation was supported by the UNDP, and because this was the strongest party in the city, by the population in general. This was not the case in all of Northern Cameroon, as the UNDP was more active in the Adamaoua province than in either of the other two Northern provinces. In spite of the large measure of support (or coercion in support of) the Ghost Towns, there were many different experiences of and reactions to the Ghost Town operations in Ngaoundéré, as well as reasons for participating or not. Most of the individuals I spoke with remembered the Ghost Towns primarily in terms of violence and destruction. Aboubakar Garba remembered:

> There were many who were killed, many who were victims of violence. People burned cars, and so we [the police] tried to stop that…. the beginning was not easy, many people were killed needlessly. I saw [encordait] many people who were drugged…who would go into stores, military camps and break things.

Garba was a policeman at the time, and his unit was sent to Ngaoundéré to protect the city against the Ghost Towns participants. As such, his personal experiences placed him in conflict with the opposition parties, and he focused on the idea of maintaining order against chaos. Awalou also had a negative experience of the Ghost Towns because of the way it disrupted his education, and this led him to be a member of the

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78 Garba, August 4. « Ils ont beaucoup qui sont morts, beaucoup ont été victime de violence. On incendie les véhicules, et nous on a donc combattu ça ….ce n’était pas facile, le début la ce n’était pas facile, beaucoup de gens sont mort bêtement. Parce que moi j’encordais beaucoup qui ses drogué….qui aller même dans les magasins, les camps militaires, casser les machines. »
RDPC today. In his observations of the broader effects of the Ghost Towns, he likewise focused on arsons, murders and general disturbances [desordres].\textsuperscript{79} Other individuals, such as the former mayor of Ngaoundéré Bobbo Moussa, and the school inspector Aminatou, also emphasized the negative components of the Ghost Towns.\textsuperscript{80}

In spite of these rather pessimistic assessments, Mohaman Toukour viewed the Ghost Towns operation positively:

> It was a success. People came together. And it allowed the opposition parties to become part of the government...The state needed to beat the political parties, but as the government found that the parties were too strong, they gave in, they let us do as we wished, and it was because of that that the opposition parties were established.\textsuperscript{81}

Mohaman Toukour has an interest in protecting the image of the 1990s because of his continued role in the UNDP. Likewise, the leaders of the moto-taximen’s union, who were well-known participants of the Ghost Towns operation, highlighted the success of the protests, perhaps because of their own role in the protests.\textsuperscript{82} But it is interesting that most individuals I interviewed focused on the violence of the Ghost Towns campaign. Some may have implied that the violence of the Ghost Towns destroyed the legitimacy of the political opposition in Ngaoundéré as a way to legitimate their current political leanings towards the RDPC or because their current or past job was...

\textsuperscript{79} Awalou described himself as a victim of the Ghost Towns because at the time he was a border at a high school away from his home; the women who cooked for the boarders refused to come to the school, as the professors and he went hungry for several weeks and essentially lost a years worth of school. Awalou, August 8.

\textsuperscript{80} Aminatou, August 21; Bobbo, August 9.

\textsuperscript{81} Toukour, August 21. « Il a eu un succès. Les gens mieux adhérer. Et il a permis au partis d’opposition de assoir…. le gouvernement devra matcher les partis politiques. Mais comme le gouvernement a retrouvé que les partis étaient forts, le gouvernement accéder, ils on laissait faire, et c’est comme ca que les partis sont implantés. »

\textsuperscript{82} Mohamadou et al., August 8; Yaya, August 10.
with the state (even Aminatou, as a teacher, is employed by the Cameroonian state).\textsuperscript{83}

It is also possible that the residents of Ngaoundéré reacted negatively to the Fulbe-centric nature of the UNDP.

The Ghost Towns movement did lead to legislative and presidential elections in 1992. In the March 1 legislative elections the UNDP won all of the seats in the Adamaoua and the North Province, although the MDR and RDPC won seats in the Far-North.\textsuperscript{84} In the presidential election that fall, Biya won the contest between himself, John Fru Ndi and Bello Bouba Maïgari, although 60\% of the votes were cast for his various opponents: the opposition parties were unable to reach a consensus as to a candidate or a platform.\textsuperscript{85} In the post-election government, members of the opposition parties, including the MDR, joined a coalition government with the RDPC and the UNDP became the only active opposition party within the legislature.\textsuperscript{86}

The 1992 elections marked a moment in which ethnic identification became fragmented in new ways, although individuals still used ethnic groupings to access the resources of the state. Under Ahidjo, power was regionalized and ethnic identity was seen as a key to accessing the state only as a part of a regional identity. After 1990 there was a division of the electorate along ethnic lines, rather than the consolidation under the Fulbe identity as had occurred in under Ahidjo. Each small political party claimed to offer access to the state to a smaller constituency. Political choices were seen to be mediated more by ethnic affiliation than political affiliation;

\textsuperscript{83} Yaya, August 9.
\textsuperscript{84} Takougang, "The 1992 Multiparty Elections," 60-61.
\textsuperscript{85} There was contention over the results of the presidential election; Fru Ndi and Americans argued that he won, Biya and French argued the opposite, Nyamnjoh, "A Country United by Ethnic Ambition and Difference," 105.
\textsuperscript{86} The SDF had boycotted the legislative elections, so the UNDP was the only opposition party which did not accept a power-sharing deal. Krieger, "Cameroon's Democratic Crossroads," 614; Nyamnjoh, "A Country United by Ethnic Ambition and Difference," 103.
the Dii voted for the Dii minister of tourism of the MDR and the Gbaya voted for a Gbaya minister of from the RDPC, rather than for a specific party. In both population conception and academic writings, ethnic identity continued to be seen as supremely important in mediating political choices. The declining pre-eminence of the Fulbe in the 1980s, as detailed previously, allowed other ethnic groups to claim both social space and in some instances political power, although in other ways the Fulbe maintained control even through this period. While individuals continued to see ethnic identity as a means to access the resources of the state, more paths were now available—the consolidation of varied ethnic identities into a single Fulbe identity, as had occurred under Ahidjo, was replaced with a divided electorate.

In addition to the ethnically-linked political parties mentioned previously, other political and social groups developed in Northern Cameroon, the majority of which were couched as anti-Fulbe. These groups developed out of a re-acceptance of indigenous cultures on many levels. Several authors have commented on the process of “de-Fulbeization” in which “Fulbeized” individuals either revived indigenous

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customs in addition to their Muslim identities or left Islam altogether.\textsuperscript{89} This change affected the social character of some towns in northern Cameroon, and led to the development of cultural associations. For example, a Mboum movement, Saw Mboum, developed in Ngaoundéré in 1992 and a Gbaya ethnic association for all members of this ethnic group across Cameroon was founded in 1993.\textsuperscript{90} Such identity-based groups were complicated by the connections between ethnic groups: the leader of Saw Mboum movement had a Fulbe wife and mother.\textsuperscript{91} As suggested in the analysis of the MDR, there was also a renewal of the more-encompassing “Kirdi” identity. In 1993 the DCK (\textit{Dynamic Culturelle des Kirdi}) was founded to unite the “Kirdi” groups against the “cultural and political imperialism” of the Fulbe, and to gain greater economic and political voice.\textsuperscript{92} Because the term “Kirdi” has no meaning except in opposition to Fulbe/Muslim, this was essentially an anti-Fulbe movement, a reaction against the historical dominance of the Fulbe. Indeed one anthropologist working in Northern Cameroon in the early 1990s noted that the residents of her host community began to call for political change out of fear that “the Fulbe would once again become important political actors in a newly revitalized [democratic] political system.”\textsuperscript{93}

The Fulbe regard the growth of such groups as a threat. On the eve of the 1992 election, a rumor spread that the Mboum were planning to overthrow the Fulbe king and to attack the Fulbe citizens of Ngaoundéré during a Friday prayer at the mosque. This rumor was taken very seriously by the king, \textit{Lamido} Issa Maïgari, who

\textsuperscript{89} Schilder, "Local Rulers in North Cameroon,” 57-59; van Santen, "Islam, Gender and Urbanisation ".
\textsuperscript{90} Burnham, \textit{Politics of Cultural Difference}, 72.
\textsuperscript{91} Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 248.
\textsuperscript{92} Gausset, "Islam or Christianity?,” 271.
\textsuperscript{93} Regis, \textit{Fulbe Voices}, 142.
attempted to intimidate the would-be rioters through a display of force around his palace.\textsuperscript{94} The fear provoked by this rumor suggests that the Fulbe community felt legitimately threatened by the development pride and autonomy of other ethnic groups and their claims to political power. Though the uprising never materialized, its effect on the king indicates that the Fulbe believed that it was truly possible for other groups to take power in this new democratic world, especially because the Fulbe position in the community had been undermined by migration and political changes.

The Fulbe community was also divided in new ways in the 1990s. Politically, there was tension between sections of the Fulbe population because while Ahidjo’s old allies created the UNDP, the king remained part of RDPC (as the central government paid his salary and expenses) even though majority of his constituents and even the palace nobles supported the UNDP.\textsuperscript{95} The two sources of Fulbe power in Adamaua were thus placed in conflicting positions in the political spectrum. Likewise, there was a growth in Islamic movements which undermined the homogeneity of the Muslim religious community. Changing notions of Islam entered into Northern Cameroon through the reformist movements originating in Saudi Arabia and there was a growth in the number of and adherents to different sects of Islam (mainly Wahabism and Tijjaniya) which had been banned under Ahidjo.\textsuperscript{96} A Fulbe Christian community also began to develop, and while this group was still small and its members faced discrimination, the very presence of Christian Fulbe in Ngaoundéré speaks to a de-coupling of the links between religion and ethnic

\textsuperscript{94} Whyte, Jerstad, and Holtedahl, \textit{The Sultan's Burden}.
\textsuperscript{95} Burnham, \textit{Politics of Cultural Difference}, 135; Whyte, Jerstad, and Holtedahl, \textit{The Sultan's Burden}.
\textsuperscript{96} Burnham, \textit{Politics of Cultural Difference}, 149; Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 245.
identity.97 Other authors suggest that one could now convert to Islam without “Fulbeizing” and a new category of believers, including Muslims who claimed non-Fulbe ethnic identities, developed outside of the dichotomy of “pagan” and Fulbe—in Fulfulde these individuals are called _juulbe_, “those who pray.”98 Clearly in Northern Cameroon there was a growing ability to for individuals to “construct their own versions of ethnic identity.”99

While there was room for non-Fulbe ethnic groups to claim a position and a role in society through the formation of political and social movements based on their unique and specific identities, and to access the central state through these new associations and linkages, the Fulbe were still dominant within the Northern region. The UNDP, as mentioned above, won all of the legislative seats in the province in 1992 and Bello Bouba won 64% of the presidential vote in the three Northern provinces.100 In Ngaoundéré, the _Alkali, Imam_ and major Islamic teachers continue to be Fulbe (including the leaders of the two religious brotherhoods in the city).101 Overall, in the 1990s Northern Cameroon was still conceptualized as a Fulbe, Muslim region.

On the other hand, even though the Fulbe retained a great deal of political power, there was shift in the use of ethnicity and the real ability of individuals and groups to access the state through other means besides the Fulbe-dominated political structures. Many groups still felt the need to partner with the UNDP—but the

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97 Daouda, August 14; Djaboule, "« Sawtu Linjiila » voix de l'Evangile et « peuples et cultures » de l'Adamaoua."; Saïdou, August 14.
101 Djingui, "Le pouvoir, le savoir et la richesse", 181.
Chapter Four

difference was there were more options for political action. Under Ahidjo’s presidency, one could accept and be a part of the Fulbe-dominated state hierarchy, or one could not take part in the political world. Anthropologist Philip Burnham argues that in the 1990s the Gbaya had a different set of choices: to join with UNDP and remain subordinate to Fulbe but retain power on the local level; join the RDPC, although it was unpopular; or join within “Kirdi” party the MDR, even though many Gbaya do not see themselves as “Kirdi.”¹⁰² Many Gbaya choose to partner with the Fulbe UNDP, but they had more options, more viable options, for resistance to Fulbe cultural and political power. This same choice faced individuals of other ethnic groups such as the Dii and Mboum. A clear rejection of Fulbe control can be seen in inter-ethnic violence (such as Gbaya-Fulbe violence in Meiganga in 1991 and 1992 and the threatened violence between Mboum and Fulbe in Ngaoundéré), political challenges (from the MDR and others), the abandonment of the trappings of Fulbe identity and reclamation of indigenous identity (through dress, names, ceremonial activities) and even through the growing lack of respect towards the Fulbe on the part of young people from other ethnic groups.¹⁰³

The opportunities for a wider choice of ethnicity and the political uses of ethnicity existed alongside the continued Fulbe control of the major political and social structures of the town. The Fulbe actively sought to regain their political primacy through the new medium of democracy and their ability to do so was connected to their historical primacy. However, adopting a Fulbe identity was no

¹⁰² Burnham, Politics of Cultural Difference, 139. Perhaps disassociation of the Gbaya and other groups from the “Kirdi” comes from a continued conception of these groups as “pagan” whereas many Gbaya identify as Christian or Muslim.
¹⁰³ Daouda, August 14; Schilder, "Local Rulers in North Cameroon."
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longer the only option for individuals who wished to participate in the political world, or to access the central state. Individuals of other ethnicities had a much greater ability to create new and unique identities such as Christian Fulbe, or to reclaim indigenous identities as Dii, Mboum or even “Kirdi” individuals and still gain material and social benefits through these non-Fulbe identities.

In the 1990s it became possible to distinguish between Fulbe political control, that is the control of political offices, and Fulbe cultural hegemony, that is their place as representative of the normative “civilization.” These two were closely linked in earlier periods, but under Paul Biya’s regime these elements of Fulbe power appeared to separate from one another—this splintering can in and of itself be seen as a manifestation of the decline of Fulbe power. The Fulbe continued to hold political power in the Adamaoua, with the UNDP winning all of the seats in the province in 1992. But Fulbe cultural hegemony began to fracture, as other groups could claim their own unique identities as valid, and reject the “Fulbeized” mold. While many patterns of exclusion remained, the Fulbe hegemony over the community began to decline.
Conclusion

The False Problem of Ethnic Divisions?

A Conclusion and Some Questions

Today, people would like to create ethnic divisions, but it is a false problem. The Mboum, the Dii, the Fulbe, they all intermarried. So how can we have ethnic divisions? … People would like to create such divisions, but it is only so they can gain votes…It is the politicians who would like to raise these ghosts….it is members of the RDPC.¹

Mohamou Toukour, the winner of the July 2007 mayoral elections in N’gaoundéré responded thus when I asked him about the continued place of ethnicity in the city. His comments are of course as politically motivated as those of the “members of the RDPC.” Although Mohamou Toukour identified himself as Fulbe, he later indicated that his grandmother was Mboum, as evidence of the mixed identity of the residents of N’gaoundéré. Toukour’s comment raises an important question, does ethnicity even still matter? He suggests that the answer to that question is yes, even in his own statement. Ethnicity in N’gaoundéré is not based in “biological” distinctions or lineages, but on cultural identification. The intermarriage of populations does not stop individuals from identifying as a member of one (and sometimes more) of those groups. And ethnicity does play a role in the political world, even if it “created” in order to “gain votes.” In the 2007 election the links between political and ethnic affiliation still appeared to be present.²

¹ Toukour, August 21. « Aujourd’hui ici, c’est lui qui veut créer les divisions ethnique ! C’est un faux problème….Le Mboum, le Dourou, les Fulbe, les gens se sont mariée…entre eux. Comment on peut avoir une division ethnique maintenant ? C’est faux. C’est les gens qui voyaient qu’ils n’ont pas une voie…. Les gens veulent faire les divisions mais c’est n’est que avoir les voies électorales. ….C’est les politiciens qui veux réveillé les mortes….C’est les gens de RPDC…. »
² The links between certain ethnic groups and political parties was more complicated than in 1992 however: according to my former professor, the RDPC was seen as the “Fulbe” party and the UNDP was regarded as the “Muslim” party. This again indicates the un-linking of ethnic and religious
Conclusion

In many of my discussions with residents of Ngaoundéré, individuals saw ethnicity as the primary point of mediation between the individual, the community and the state, that is, ethnicity was regarded as a way to access the state and state resources. When an individual felt they had been excluded from such access, this process was framed negatively as corruption. And yet people continued to act on this idea in their pattern of voting and to suggest that this was the best way to benefit from the democratic system—the Dii are said to have voted for the Dii candidate in the 1992 elections, under the assumption that his election would allow them greater access to state resources.  

Cameroonian accept the idea that the state should distribute resources, and they even assume that such divisions will be based on links of patronage and ethnicity. But they also believe that the state should distribute these resources in an impartial manner. The most consistent critique of the Cameroonian state is that it relies on ethnic and regional divisions in the distribution of resources: Ahidjo is condemned for favoring Northern Cameroon, Biya for favoring the Beti. The lamentation over the corruption of the Cameroonian state is at its core a critique over the political uses of ethnicity and identity—in which the speaker has not received his or her fair share. Even though individuals condemn corruption, they see the ethnic community as an effective means to gain and maintain control of local politics and hierarchies. Because people understand ethnic divisions as the means to access the state, they act on this understanding and continue the use of ethnicity in accessing the state.

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identity, but it also suggests that the Fulbe still controlled two dominant political parties in the city—a testament to their continued political power. Noyogo.

Many people I spoke to lamented the problem of corruption: Bobbo, August 9; Daouda, August 14; Garba, August 4; Hadidjatou Bebbé, August 20; Toukour, August 21; Yaya, August 10.
In Ngaoundéré, the Fulbe remain in control of the local politics of the city and this control is indicative of the continuation of inequality in the modern city, based in historical processes subordination and hierarchy which began in the pre-colonial kingdom. The patterns of dependence rooted in the slave system continue to have repercussions for modern social relations; connections between the descendants of slave and salve owners continue through patronage and individuals are still defined and marked by their family history, thus their slave ancestry. Additionally, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the Fulbe Muslim community has continued into the present. Certain groups, such as the Laka, are more often than not laborers within the homes and businesses of the Fulbe community. In my own progressive host family, where my Fulbe host mother had finished college after getting married and worked outside of the home, the Laka servant Samuel did all of the work in the house. He washed the dishes and clothes, fetched water, went to the market for my host family. His presence suggests continued patterns of exploitation within the Ngaoundéré community, which have not yet disappeared.

The links between ethnic, economic, political, and social disenfranchisement cannot be separated from one another. In The Sultan’s Burden, a 1994 documentary on the Lamido of Ngaoundéré, the filmmakers chart the experience of king through the period of democratization. In the voiceover describing the rumors of the Mboum revolt, the narrator warns of the upcoming “peasant” rebellion and through the use of this term suggests a class-based, rather than ethnic-based, conflict. It is important to remember that ethnic divisions in Ngaoundéré are linked with broader systems of exploitation and that ethnic identity does not operate alone, but in tandem with other

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Conclusion

patterns of disenfranchisement based on class, level of education and gender. While 
*The Sultan’s Burden* reduced the social exclusion and distress of the Mboum to an 
issue of class, it was in fact based in the complicated and overlapping forms of 
exclusions which have only slowly been altered since the pre-colonial period.

In my thesis, I do not mean to suggest a simplistic narrative of progressive 
and positive change, from the pre-colonial slave state to a modern, democratic nation. 
The exclusion of the many indigenous populations of the region was reinforced under 
the colonial government, and even exacerbated through Ahidjo’s conscious 
privileging of the Fulbe community. It is only due to the social and political changes 
of the 1980s that these patterns have begun to fissure, even though the inheritance of 
unequal social structures is still evident in modern inter-ethnic interactions. But even 
the reclamation of indigenous cultures is seen by some as a challenge to the existing 
political and social structures of the city. One might hope that ethnic identity could be 
celebrated without being regarded as a political challenge to other groups or 
disentangled from the disenfranchisement of certain populations. But given the 
history of Ngaoundéré, it may not be possible for ethnicity to be disconnected from 
political uses nor from the repercussions of past inequalities. We can only hope to 
understand these historic processes to chart a more hopeful future.
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