FRIENDSHIP AMONG PASTORAL FULBE IN NORTHWEST CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT This article discusses perceptions and practices of friendship among the Mbororo (pastoral Fulbe) in northwest Cameroon. The concept of friendship is culturally and socially embedded, and the author highlights the flexible and multilayered character of friendship in Cameroon. While in Europe and the U.S. the voluntary and emotional connotations of friendship are stressed, for the Mbororo, it includes a significant economic component and may overlap with other relationships, such as kinship and patron-client relations. Furthermore, Mbororo women and men differ in their perspectives and practices of friendship. Finally, the author argues that interethnic friendships between Mbororo pastoralists and their farming neighbors are of an individual nature and that in the face of conflict, their integrative capacity is limited.

Key Words: Friendship; Interethnic relations; Gender; Mbororo/pastoral Fulbe; Northwest Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

While friendship is a classical subject of the social sciences, it has been somewhat neglected in anthropology which long privileged the study of kinship, patron-client relationships and social networks (Beer, 2001; Guichard, 2007; Grätz et al., 2004). Among the reasons accounting for this neglect is the widespread conceptualization of friendship as a dyadic, egalitarian, non-utilitarian and primarily emotional relationship, as well as the clear distinction made between friendship and kinship. Friendship has thus been perceived as characteristic of "modern" societies, and much research has centered on the Euro-American context (Bell & Coleman, 1999; Doyle & Smith, 2002). However, as outlined by Silver (1989) and Carrier (1999), this narrow understanding of friendship reflects but a Western ideal and does not necessarily correspond with actual practices in the West as well as in other parts of the world.

As classical and contemporary studies on Africa illustrate (Aguilar, 1999; Bollig, 1998; Brain, 1976; du Toit, 1978; Grätz, 2011; Hagberg, 2000; Jacobson, 1973; Kröger, 1980; Piot, 1999; Smith, 1965), friendship is not at all limited to Western societies. Its practices and conceptualizations, however, differ not only from the Euro-American model, but vary across time and space. Friendship relations are thus best analyzed as embedded in their respective social, cultural, political and economic contexts (Adams & Allan, 1998; Pahl, 2000).

Recent anthropological and interdisciplinary engagement with the subject of friendship has focused on its overlaps with related forms of social organization

such as biological and ritual kinship (Diallo & Guichard, forthc.; Guichard et al., 2003; Schmidt et al., 2007), joking relationships (Bellagamba, 2006; Diallo, 2006; Tamari, 2006), or patron-client relationships (Descharmes et al., 2011). Another body of literature has centered on friendship in an African migrant context, examining the types of sociality and social security it engenders (Grätz, 2004; Meier, 2004; Rohregger, 2006: 141–177).

This contribution builds on classical and contemporary themes in friendship studies. It evolved from a study of interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon in which interethnic friendships were conceived of as cross-cutting ties (Pelican, 2006). Thus, while providing insight into local concepts and practices of interethnic friendship, the article also investigates the significance of these relations for social integration in an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous environment.

The fieldwork on which this article is based was carried out over fourteen months between 2000 and 2002. The data I present here is of a qualitative nature, gained from participant observation, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews and e-mail exchange. In addition, the article will provide an overview of existent research on friendship among pastoral Fulbe in West Africa, and complement it with a gendered perspective.

I. Northwest Cameroon and Its Inhabitants

Cameroon's northwest belongs to a geographically and culturally distinct area, known as the Cameroon Grassfields. It is located on the Western Highlands at an altitude of 1,000 to 3,000 m. The landscape is varied and includes grass-covered plateaus, wooded valleys, volcanic lakes (e.g. Lake Nyos) and numerous rivers. Thanks to the high altitude, the Grassfields have a relatively pleasant climate with an annual rainfall of 2,000 mm and a moderate dry season period of four to five months from November to March. The soil is fertile, owing partly to its volcanic origins, and supports both agriculture and animal husbandry.

The Cameroon Grassfields is also an area characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity. Its population may roughly be divided into three groups, the Grassfielders, Mbororo, and Hausa who differ in terms of their history, economy and culture.

The largest and longest established population group is the Grassfields peoples, locally known by the Pidgin English term, *Garafi*.[1] They constitute approximately 85% of the overall population and have settled in this region for several centuries. While they comprise linguistically distinct communities that form separate political units, I group them into one ethnic category, as they share common features of socio-political, economic and religious organization (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967; Nkwi & Warnier, 1982).

Most Grassfielders are subsistence farmers who practice shifting cultivation. Their main agricultural products are maize, coco yams, sweet potatoes, beans, sugar cane and a variety of vegetables. While women are largely in charge of cultivating food for household consumption, men also cultivate permanent tree crops as well as cash crops, such as coffee and cacao. Politically, the Grassfields peoples are organized in centralized chiefdoms and confederations. Their chiefs,

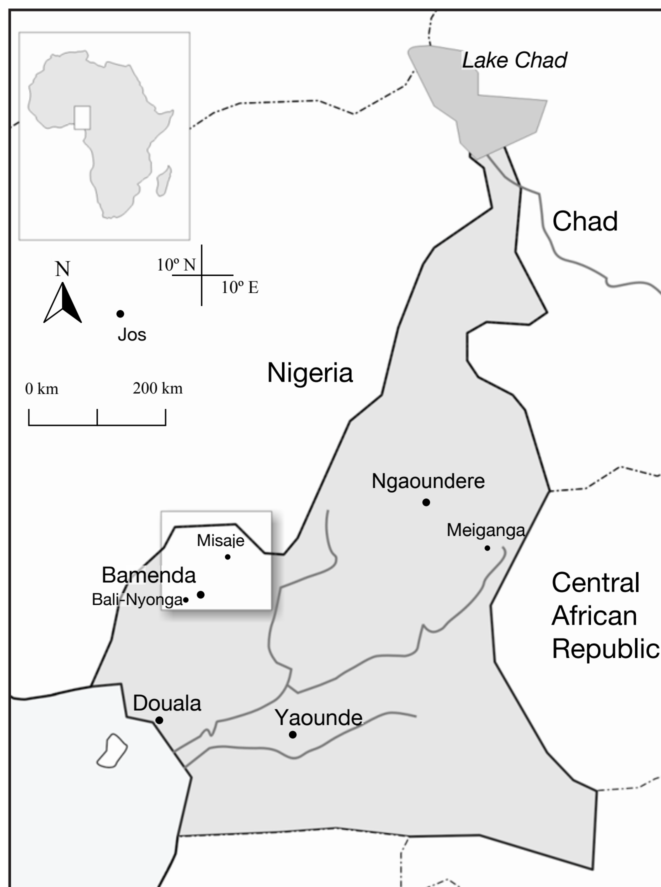

Fig. 1. Northwest Cameroon.
Source: *World Factbook 2002* (CIA, 2002). Cartography: A. Dafinger.

known by the title *fon*, are well respected and act as intermediary vis-à-vis other population groups as well as the regional and national administration. In terms of religious affiliation, most Grassfielders are Christians and/or adherents of African local religions. They entertain strong political, economic and religious bonds with their settlement area and consider themselves "natives" and "guardians of the land." Moreover, they claim political supremacy over population groups that joined them later, such as the Hausa and Mbororo.

The Hausa and Mbororo are Muslim minorities who arrived in the Grassfields in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Hausa are a heterogeneous group that comprise all Muslim village dwellers, including the offspring of early Hausa traders from northern Nigeria, sedentary ("town") Fulbe from northern Cameroon, and Grassfields individuals who converted to Islam. They are a tiny minority, accounting for less than one percent of the region's population and are found in most urban and rural centers (Awasom, 1984; Pelican, 2006: 249–351). They mainly engage in trade with cattle or consumer goods often imported from

Nigeria, or occupy service jobs, for example, drover, butcher, tailor, Koranic teacher or barber-surgeon. While these occupations are largely reserved to men, Hausa women focus on activities within the household, including the sales of processed food, e.g. snacks, maize flour, and processed cassava. Both economically and socially, the Hausa are closely intertwined with the Mbororo who are their main customers and with whom they share religious and cultural similarities.

The Mbororo belong to the ethnic category of Fulbe and have classically been associated with cattle pastoralism. In the Cameroon Grassfields, they account for ten to fifteen percent of the population. They comprise two sub-ethnic groups, Jaafun and Aku, who differ in their migration histories, and speak slightly different variants of Fulfulde. They first entered the Cameroon Grassfields in the 1910s in search of good pastures for their cattle herds. They were welcomed by local Grassfields chiefs, and established themselves on the highland pastures. As grazing conditions were very good, many families settled down and, with time, constructed permanent homes in their grazing area (Boutrais, 1995/96). Most Mbororo compounds are located on hilltops, at a distance to Hausa homesteads and Grassfielders' villages which they frequent on market days. Due to their shared religion, the Mbororo tend to socialize with the Hausa, for example, before Friday prayers or when attending the market. In most locations the two groups join efforts to run mosques, informal Koranic studies and occasionally Islamic schools. Moreover, they share common festivities and invite each other to social occasions, such as marriage, child naming, graduation from Koranic studies or the feast of the ram.

The Mbororo in the Cameroon Grassfields are agro-pastoralists. While most families complement cattle husbandry with subsistence agriculture, they first and foremost understand themselves as cattle pastoralists.

Jaafun and Aku have different breeds of zebu that have become emblematic

Fig. 2. Grassfields village in the valley and Mbororo grazing area on the hills. (Photo by Author, 2002).

of their owners' sub-ethnic identity. Jaafun preferably rear red zebu (*bodeeji*) which are accustomed to a transhumant lifestyle and the ecological conditions of the highlands. The Aku, on the other hand, prefer white zebu (*daneeji*) which are more resistant to hunger, thirst and trypanosomiasis and adapt better to grazing conditions in the lowlands. Both groups also rear cross-breeds (Boutrais, 1995/96; Pelican, forthc.a).

The Mbororo generally do not raise cattle for the market, but use their herds for subsistence. Many have relatively small herds, on average thirty to fifty animals for a household of five to ten persons. However, there are also very wealthy herders with many hundreds of cattle who entrust their animals to hired herdsmen. As we know from several ethnographies (Buhl & Homewood, 2000; Dupire, 1962a; Hopen, 1958; Stenning, 1959), pastoral Fulbe sustain their livelihood largely by barter or the sale of animal products. Women, in particular, contribute significantly to the household economy through the sale of milk and milk products such as sour milk and butter. However, among the Mbororo in northwest Cameroon the situation is somewhat different. Here, a complex set of circumstances, including the Grassfielders' unfamiliarity with milk products as well as the Mbororo's gradual adoption of Islamic gender ideals, have resulted in a general neglect of milk sales (Pelican, 1999; 2004). In consequence, the household economy has shifted from the sales of milk to the sales of animals; thus placing economic responsibility on the men, while women concentrate on household chores. At the same time, many Mbororo families have adopted farming as a complementary economic activity. Particularly the Jaafun have a strong aversion to physical labor and employ workers, namely local Grassfields farmers, for labor-intensive tasks. Thus, farmwork is one of the domains where Mbororo and Grassfielders come in close contact. The seasonal transhumance of Mbororo herdsmen and cattle is another.

At the beginning of the dry season, it is common for Mbororo herders to drive part of their cattle to administratively defined transhumance zones where they put up camp for several months. This is also the period when conflicts over crop damage accumulate, as animals frequently venture into Grassfielders' dry season farms. Thus the relationship between Mbororo herders and Grassfields farmers is somewhat wrought with tension, as the issue of farmer-herder conflict has a long history in this region. Its occurrence was already noticed by the British colonial administration,(2) and has since been met with a variety of administrative measures, none of which has produced enduring solutions (Harshbarger, 1995; Njeuma & Awasom, 1988).

In this multiethnic setting, social and economic relations between the three population groups play a significant role in facilitating their coexistence. Interethnic friendship is part of such cross-cutting ties.

THE MBORORO AND THEIR NEIGHBORS: SOCIAL RELATIONS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

The focus of this article is on the Mbororo and their notions and practices of friendship. To start with, I will look at Mbororo support networks which include

both members of their own ethnic group as well as non-Mbororo. I will engage with various social relations that in one way or another are associated with friendship. My elaborations are largely based on participant observation and conversations, and include comparisons with similar practices in other parts of Africa.

I. Solidarity Networks of Pastoral Fulbe: Between Kinship and Friendship

Most Mbororo count among their friends Grassfields and Hausa individuals as well as fellow Mbororo. They refer to them by the terms *soobaajo* in Fulfulde, or *kombi* in Pidgin English, meaning "friend" or "comrade." In general, these are individual relationships, different from, for example, interethnic joking relationships that relate categories of people (Griaule, 1948; Tamari, 2006). Other terms loosely related to friendship are *bandiraawo* (relative), *dendiraawo* (cross-cousin, joking partner), *higgo* (age-mate) and *koddo* (guest, stranger).

When asked about their friends, interlocutors listed primarily those persons whom they may ask for assistance in situations of need. They mentioned family members as well as befriended Mbororo and members of other ethnic groups. Thus, unlike in the Euro-American context where friendship and kinship are commonly perceived as mutually exclusive, this dichotomy here proves inapplicable. The Mbororo understanding of kinship and friendship is rather flexible and multilayered, allowing for people to be identified at the same time as kin and friend. This is also reflected in their variable use of kinship and friendship terminology. For example, the term *dendiraawo* generally refers to the person with whom you entertain a joking relationship. This may be your relative (cross-cousin) or a member of another ethnic group with whom the Mbororo are in a collective joking relationship; yet in the Grassfields the latter is very rare. We may thus apply a model of overlapping and complementary networks of kin and friends, as proposed by Grätz (2011) and Guichard (2007) for other parts of Africa.

Similarly, we need to account for a multilayered understanding of friendship that includes both economic and emotional dimensions. The friendship relations observed during my fieldwork entailed various forms of support, such as material assistance in cases of mishap, religiously motivated support, the loan of livestock between friends, the granting of monetary loans or credit as well as paid hersdmanship. From a Euro-American perspective it may seem strange to associate relationships of a primarily economic character with friendship. However, from a Mbororo perspective, business, solidarity and friendship are not perceived as mutually exclusive but may easily blend into each other.(3)

Let me begin by describing some contexts in which solidarity and friendship relations often emerge. Thunderstorms and fire accidents are relatively frequent incidents that often result in the loss of livestock and material belongings. Mbororo interlocutors who experienced such mishap reported how relatives, friends and neighbors sympathized with them and provided material or financial assistance. In general, the moral obligation and extent of support depends on the quality of the relationship as well as on the economic capacity of the party who provides assistance. However, each small contribution, even the vegetables offered by the Grassfields neighbor, are valued as a gesture of sympathy and friendship.

Membership in religious networks, in this case the Muslim community, implies obligations of mutual support complementary to assistance provided by kin and friends. For example, *zakat* (Islamic tithe) and *sadaqa* (alms) are religiously motivated forms of material support which are rooted in Islamic teachings (de Bruijn, 2000). As frequently indicated by Hausa interlocutors, it was common practice among Mbororo to distribute their *zakat* and *sadaqa* to poorer Hausa households. In the meantime, however, the economic situation of the Mbororo has worsened. Many families either no longer possess the minimum number of animals that requires the payment of a yearly tithe, or they prefer supporting their impoverished relatives rather than their Hausa neighbors.

Another source of solidarity widely reported in the literature on pastoral societies is stock-friendships (Almagor, 1971; Bollig, 1998; 2006: 283–310; Schneider, 1979; Scott & Gormley, 1980). In West Africa, this practice is most common among the nomadic Fulbe in arid zones, such as the Wodaabe in Niger (Bonfiglioli, 1985; Boutrais, 2008; Dupire, 1962b). As a general rule, a female calf is loaned to a relative or friend who is entitled to its milk as well as the first two or three off-springs.(4) Popular interpretations focus on the economic and ecological dimension of the relationship; they see it as a support mechanism for impoverished households, enabling them to restock their herds, as well as an adaptation to the risks of livestock keeping in arid and semi-arid regions (van Dijk, 2000; White, 1990). However, as Moritz (2003: 358–371) has argued with regard to livestock loans among the nomadic Fulbe in the extreme north of Cameroon, these functionalist interpretations do not take into consideration possible moral connotations, i.e. livestock loans may as well be read as consolidating friendship and demonstrating group solidarity. This interpretation is shared by Boutrais (2008) in his analysis of livestock loans in Niger and Central Africa where he emphasizes the sense of obligation and social prestige attached to the loan animal. While this applies particularly to the Wodaabe in Niger, Boutrais notes a growing rejection of livestock loans among the Mbororo in Central Africa where pastoralist conditions are rather insecure. When inquiring about stock-friendship among the Mbororo in the Grassfields, interlocutors only mentioned it with reference to the past, and as a practice that never gained ground in northwest Cameroon. Its absence may on the one hand be explained by the fact that there are no Wodaabe in this area who may be best acquainted with the practice of stock-friendship. On the other, the Mbororo population in the northwest is composed of two subgroups, Jaafun and Aku, whose relationship is characterized by veiled rivalry rather than solidarity (Boutrais, 1995/96: 557–629). However, these factors alone cannot account for the absence of stock-friendship among relatives settled in different parts of the Grassfields. Here, the argument of the ecological and economic utilities of stock-friendship may be useful. Due to favorable ecological conditions, many families have experienced herd growth. Moreover, the availability of relatively efficient veterinary services has reduced the risk of animal loss due to epidemics and drought. As a result, the Mbororo in the Grassfields have little incentive to engage in stock-friendship. Moreover, as suggested by Boutrais (2008), the practice of animal loans has been replaced by paid herdsmanship.

Several Mbororo interlocutors named those individuals as "true friends," who

lent them money or granted credit.[5] These are often individuals from other ethnic groups. Money loans are a vital aspect of Mbororo pastoral economy, as their property is tied up in livestock. The sale of animals is limited to occasions when a considerable amount of cash is needed, for example for children's school fees, farm worker salaries, Islamic festivities, marriage payment, house renovation or health treatment. As several interlocutors argued, it is risky to keep cash at hand, as one may easily incur losses due to theft, mishap or uncontrolled spending. Therefore, most Mbororo prefer to invest left-over cash into buying young animals, or to pay back or give out money loans. While among Grassfielders and the Hausa, the practice of rotating credit associations (*njangi* in Pidgin English, *adashi* in Hausa) is well established (Ardener, 1964; Hill, 1972; Nomoto, 2004). The Mbororo lack such institutions. In a few instances, close relatives may coordinate their financial planning by taking turns in selling livestock and sharing the proceeds. However, in the case of minor expenditures, the Mbororo prefer to borrow small amounts of money and accumulate debts until the time reaches to sell another animal. Moneylenders are often friends rather than relatives, as discreetness and privacy is favored. Mostly they are businesspeople that regularly dispose of cash (e.g. Grassfields shop owners, Hausa traders) or the befriended Mbororo who have just sold an animal. Friends may thus be compared to a bank where one can redraw or deposit money. Mutual trust is a prerequisite in these relations and is established over continuous interaction. As village communities are rather small and stable, defectors are easily identified and reprimanded. However, a breach of trust may occur and, in the instances I have observed, the debtors moved away from the debt and the shame.

Finally, I will describe the social dimensions of paid herdsmanship and its perception by Mbororo interlocutors. In the Cameroon Grassfields there are two groups of livestock owners who employ paid herdsmen. On the one hand, these are the wealthy Mbororo either without sons of appropriate age to take care of their animals, or who prefer to send their children to school. On the other, there are members of different ethnic groups, mostly successful entrepreneurs or government employees, who invest in livestock as a business venture while lacking first-hand experience in cattle rearing. While the relationship between livestock owner and paid herdsman is primarily of an economic nature and may take on the characteristics of a patron-client relationship, it also involves social and moral dimensions. For example, a wealthy Mbororo man who employs an impoverished relative combines his economic interest with the moral obligation of kinship solidarity. Frequently, however, strangers or members of other ethnic groups are preferred as paid herdsmen. As interlocutors explained, in the likely case of crop damage or loss of animals, it is easier to hold liable a stranger than a relative. On the other hand, in the perspective of the herdsman the employer is occasionally portrayed as a beneficent figure or "a friend." Such an interpretation that emphasizes the relationship's social connotation is prevalent in arrangements where the herdsman is paid a set salary and can count on the employer's support in times of need. However, there are also examples of economic exploitation in the case of which the idiom of friendship is absent.

Another form of paid herdsmanship refers to the praxis of cattle entrustment.

Grassfields or Hausa individuals who own but a few animals often entrust them to a Mbororo acquaintance who then joins the animals with his own herd. Both parties tend to perceive this arrangement as a friendly turn, rather than a business relationship. Frequently, there is no formal agreement on the rate of payment, but it is in the cattle owner's discretion how to compensate the herdsman. The practice of cattle entrustment has also been documented for other parts of West Africa where farmers invest their moderate surpluses in the acquisition of animals (Breusers et al., 1998; Burnham, 1980; Dafinger, 2008). There the relationship seems to have a more formalized character, as reflected in the term, "herding contract" frequently used in the literature (Moritz et al., 2011). In Benin and Burkina Faso, however, both local farmers and Fulbe pastoralists tend to keep silent about their economic and friendly relationships (Boesen, 1997; Guichard, 1996; 2000). While from the farmers' perspective, wealth in cattle may arouse envy and acts of witchcraft, for the Fulbe, their association with neighboring farmers may entail political goals that they prefer to conceal. Dafinger (2008) thus speaks of "concealed economies." Yet here as well, economic relations are closely intertwined with interethnic friendship.

II. Socio-Political Relations of the Grassfielders and the Mbororo: Between Patronage and Friendship

As Mbororo conceptions of friendship are multilayered and flexible enough to include kinship and economic relations, they allow for the possibility of the inequality between the partners. As a result of their settlement history, the different population groups in the Grassfields form a political hierarchy. As the Grassfielders claim political supremacy over population groups that arrived later, relationships between Grassfields and Mbororo individuals are often perceived in terms of patron-client relations. For example, the Mbororo generally portray themselves as a marginalized minority, exposed to economic exploitation by civil servants and Grassfields chiefs. In the perspective of Grassfielders, the situation reads somewhat differently. They often employ the idiom of kinship or friendship when talking about relationships with Mbororo individuals, thus downplaying the element of political inequality while emphasizing shared locality and social responsibility. I will illustrate the Grassfielders' perspective with an example from Bali-Nyonga, a renowned chiefdom in the western part of the Grassfields.

Babila is a vivacious farmer with first-hand experience in cattle husbandry, and belongs to the royal family in Bali-Nyonga. He served as a police officer before retiring to the village, when he was nominated by the current chief or *fon* as a royal representative in charge of farmer-herder issues. He is an active member of the farmer-herder commission, the administrative organ entrusted with the resolution of conflicts between farmers and herders. In his interaction with the Mbororo, Babila emphasizes his influential position at the palace, and offers his services as consultant and middleman in their confrontations with farming neighbors and the administration. Babila describes his relationship with the Mbororo as follows:

> My father was a nurse. He was used to treating Mbororo patients. Some

> of them stayed in our compound. I grew up with them, and we got used to each other. We became friends. For example, Duna and Manu; we have been friends for the past 25 years. During transhumance their cattle stay on my land. This has made our relationship become more intense. We understand each other. Not everybody is friendly with the Mbororo. But they are like part of my family. I help them with their problems, the same as I help my relatives…The Bali people came from Chamba, the same like the Mbororo. We are brothers. That is why the *fon* [chief] of Bali considers the Muslims as part of his people. We have nearly the same traditions, for example during the baptism of children and at marriage…When I retired, the *fon* [chief] of Bali asked me if I want to represent him in the farmer-herder commission. That is how I came even closer to the Mbororo. I try my best to resolve farmer-herder conflicts peacefully. Last year, the *gainaako* [paid herdsman] of Manu injured a farmer who had to seek treatment in the hospital. I mediated in this issue, and Manu paid the costs for medical treatment. I love peace and I don't accept discrimination. I want farmers and herders to live together peacefully, because they both belong here. (Babila, Bali-Nyonga, 17/9/2001; original interview in Pidgin English)

From this passage we may derive a number of insights. Firstly, Babila elaborates on the background of his friendly relations with the Mbororo, including shared childhood experiences, economic cooperation as well as cultural similarities. He explains how the profession of his father engendered his interaction with Mbororo people, and how already in his youth he had Mbororo friends. He mentions transhumance arrangements with Mbororo acquaintances, whereby at night their cattle are kept in enclosures on his farm, thus reducing the risk of crop damage as well as fertilizing his fields. He also refers to cultural similarities between Bali people and the Mbororo, thus suggesting a shared identity. Secondly, Babila elaborates on the content of his friendship with Mbororo individuals. He highlights mutual understanding, sympathy and assistance, and compares them to family members. Thirdly, the passage also illustrates links between patronage and friendship: Babila describes his mediation in farmer-herder conflict as an act of friendship rather than an economically oriented transaction.

Patron-client relationships and friendships are definitely not the same. Babila's elaborations may be read as an example of how the idiom of friendship can be used to legitimate inequality between partners. At the same time, I believe that in some situations Babila truly perceives those Mbororo individuals as his friends and treats them accordingly. Unfortunately, the ethnographic example lacks the views of Duna and Manu. Most likely, they would emphasize inequality and instrumentalization over the relationships' friendly nature.

GENDERED NOTIONS AND PRACTICES OF INTERETHNIC FRIENDSHIP

In the following, I will engage with gendered notions of friendship among the Mbororo in the Grassfields. By way of example, I will base my analysis

on conversations with a Mbororo couple whose views are widely shared, which illuminate the ways in which male and female perspectives differ even within the same household.

I. Male Perspective

Karboura is an elderly Mbororo man in his late fifties who migrated to the Cameroon Grassfields in the 1970s. He spent most of his youth on the Jos Plateau in Nigeria and worked for many years as a salaried herdsman. He married his wife Nyapendo some thirty years ago, and together they have eight children. They have lived in their current settlement area near Misaje, a small town in the northern part of the Grassfields, for about twenty years. Karboura and his family rely primarily on cattle herding. Like most Mbororo in the region, they also cultivate food crops for home consumption, often relying on the assistance of their Grassfields neighbors.

Karboura characterizes friendship as follows (original conversation in Fulfulde):

– You communicate without problems; you are honest to each other and do not hide anything.
– With a good friend you can discuss your problems. He gives advice, and he tries to help; for example, if a cow toppled or if you have to organize a feast. Somebody who only smiles at you but is not interested in your problems or willing to help, is not a friend.
– If someone agrees to lend you money, you know, he is a true friend. But someone who refuses, even if he has money, is not a friend.

The criteria emphasized by Karboura include mutual understanding, trust, honesty, moral and economic support. As discussed earlier, the practice of money-lending is crucial for Mbororo men's economic planning, and is here introduced as a condition for friendship. Economic assistance is a factor stressed mostly with regard to interethnic friendship. Moral support, on the other hand, is mainly associated with members of one's own ethnic group with whom one shares the same values as well as cultural and religious background. At the same time, Mbororo tend to doubt the credibility and solidarity of fellow Fulbe, as social norms of avoidance and restraint (*pulaaku* in Fulfulde) oblige them to hide their negative feelings and avoid open confrontation. Hence, in Karboura's view, a *soobaajo kaado* (non-Fulbe/Mbororo friend) may likely be more instrumental and reliable than a Fulbe friend. When asked about actual friends from other ethnic groups, Karboura mentioned two examples:

> Within the non-Mbororo (*haabe*) I have one friend in Nkanchi. I was a friend to his father who died. If I did not have money or oil, I could go to him; he would help me. Then, he felt that he was going to die. He called his children and told them to continue the friendship. His son John has taken over his father's fashion until now. I took corrugated iron sheets from him which I haven't paid for yet. When I asked him, he said I should

> just take them and pay him when I have the money. Among the Hausa in Misaje I have one friend, Genye. If I need money, we discuss it; he tries to help me find a way. Concerning my friendship with Genye and John I also have to support them. If someone is sick, I will try to help them with medicine if I know it. If they have problems I will also try to assist them. (Karboura, Misaje, 14/12/2001; original interview in Fulfulde)

As we learn from this quote, friendship is not necessarily understood as a personal, dyadic relationship, but ideally as a relationship of generational longevity. This may be inspired by the model of joking relationships which over generations link members of specific families or ethnic groups. It is noteworthy that while in many parts of western Africa Fulbe are known to entertain joking relations with a variety of ethnic groups (Diallo, 2006; Paulme, 1939), their only joking partners in the Grassfields are Kole'en (also known as Kanuri) who are numerically few and subsumed under the Hausa category.

Secondly, Karboura highlights the reciprocal character of friendship, emphasizing the obligation of mutual support on the basis of each party's strengths and capacities. In Karboura's case, his strength is his knowledge of medicinal plants which is highly valued. Reciprocity is often delayed and does not require requital in equal terms. More important is the giver's intention, the gift's symbolic meaning or its complementary value. This finding strongly corresponds with Piot's (1999: 62) argument that gift exchange among the Kabre in Togo is more about access to people than access to things, and thus about maintaining a relationship. A similar understanding is shared also by Mbororo women, to whose friendship we now will turn.

II. Female Perspective

Nyapendo is Karboura's only wife, and also in her fifties. As they have lived in the area for many years, she is a respected woman who generally likes to be on good terms with people, both Mbororo and non-Mbororo. Visitors frequently drop in their compound on their way to the village or when they seek work. Nyapendo tells us about the nature and background of her friendship with Mami Corinna, a Grassfields woman from a neighboring village:

> My best [Grassfields] friend is Mami Corinna. She has been coming to work on our farm for about seven years. She likes me a lot. Sometimes she sends me vegetables or other food stuffs. When she meets my son Unusa, she often gives him one or two hundred francs. Our friendship developed out of a liking for each other. If she comes to work in our compound, I usually keep milk for her. She has gastritis. If I serve her maize polenta with milk, she is very happy because it cools down her gastric problem. (Nyapendo, Misaje, 14/12/2001; original interview in Fulfulde)

While their friendship developed from an economic relationship, Nyapendo stresses mutual sympathy and care as basic criteria. Sympathy has frequently been men-

tioned by Mbororo interlocutors as one of the main incentives to engage in friendship, and confirms that emotional and instrumental motivations often go hand in hand. Moreover, the continuous exchange of small gifts and the concern for each other's well being are vital to maintaining the friendship.

It is noteworthy that friendships between Mbororo and Grassfields women seem hardly overshadowed by ideological differences. Both parties stress commonalities based on everyday life, while religious and cultural differences are taken for granted and accepted as such. This is in marked difference to Mbororo's friendship with Hausa women where divergent interpretations of Islamic gender roles emerge as a conflict potential. To illustrate this point, we will look at Nyapendo's account of her friendship with Gambo, a Hausa woman in Misaje:

> My best and only friend in Misaje is the wife of the Imam, Gambo … I always keep my maize flour or my things with her. I also perform my prayers in her compound. I came to know her through Hawa, my niece. They are about the same age. Through Hawa, who is like my own child, Gambo became not only my friend but like my child. The time I went to visit my mother in Ngaoundere, she bought soap to give to my mother. Gambo likes me to open her market [be the first customer to buy her home-made snacks]; even if I don't have the right money. Sometimes she also gives me *makara* [maize-banana snacks] just for free. I don't know any other Hausa compound. I am not used to selling milk to the Hausa. You know, sometimes they look at you like a dog. Maybe they think you are after their husband or what, I don't know. Really, it is as if they look past us [ignore us and so show their contempt]. (Nyapendo, Misaje, 14/8/2001; original interview in Fulfulde)

As Mbororo families live on the hilltops, far from village and town centers, they need a safe place to keep their belongings, perform their prayers, or make themselves up before entering the market. Frequently, they opt for the compound of a Hausa acquaintance, as the latter are more attuned to Mbororo religious and cultural needs. In Nyapendo's case, she frequents the house of Gambo, whom she considers not only a trustworthy friend but akin to a daughter. Women of different age groups tend to model their friendships similar to kinship relations; this applies to friendships with Hausa as well as Grassfielders.

Eventually, Nyapendo addresses the issue of conflicting morals and ethnic boundaries, resulting from different interpretations of the Islamic gender role model. Among Hausa in Misaje as well as within Hausa society in general, emphasis is laid on the Islamic ideal of limiting women's mobility to the domestic space (Schildkrout, 1983; Hill, 1972). Accordingly, Hausa spatial and economic organizations are structured in a way that allows married women to pursue most of their activities from within the compound. Conversely, the Mbororo pastoral lifestyle and economy requires both male and female mobility. As many Mbororo women and men contend, they appreciate the Islamic ideal of female seclusion, but consider it largely incompatible with Mbororo life (Pelican, 1999). Thus, Mbororo women regularly come to the village to do errands and occasionally to

sell milk. The practice of house-to-house milk sales is at the heart of the moral disagreement. As indicated in Nyapendo's account, Mbororo women often feel disregarded and despised by Hausa women on account of their practice of moving from compound to compound to sell their milk products. In recent years, this practice has also raised disagreement within Mbororo families, and in some parts of the Grassfields Mbororo women have resorted to selling their milk to cooperatives rather than frequenting individual compounds (Pelican, 2004). Finally, I would like to point out that Nyapendo's frank way of phrasing the issue is rather exceptional. The same subject, however, recurs in role-plays performed by Mbororo and Hausa women's groups; both parties acknowledge it as a negative element overshadowing social relations between women of the two groups (Pelican, 2002; forthc.b).

III. Comparing Men and Women's Friendships

As we have learned from Karboura and Nyapendo's accounts, men's and women's friendships entail instrumental as well as emotional components, but they differ in their emphases. While Mbororo men tend to evaluate friendship in terms of moral and financial assistance, women stress social aspects, such as mutual sympathy and care. In analyzing Mbororo interlocutors' views, however, we ought to be sensitive to social norms and gendered discourses that may limit, for example, the expression of emotions. Thus, the downplaying or concealment of some aspects may not necessarily attest for their absence or irrelevance.

In Nyapendo's view, men and women's friendship differ substantially:

> The friendship of *ndotti'en* (Mbororo elders) and of women is not the same. You see *ndotti'en* choose their friends according to the truthfulness of the person. A good friend is somebody who sticks to his promise and who speaks honestly with you. Women choose their friends according to who is smiling at you. If you see a person smiling at you all the time, you are happy. You too, you smile at her until you become friends. But later on, you see some of them have no truth, they smile at you and, at the same time, they hide things from you. Then they gossip about you. You keep her with one heart and she keeps you with two hearts, that isn't good. [You are faithful, but she applies double standards] So, you see, the friendship of men and women is different. (Nyapendo, Misaje, 14/12/2001; original interview in Fulfulde)

Nyapendo portrayed men's friendship as superior and exemplary for women's friendship. Her assessment is embedded in the socio-economic organization of pastoral Fulbe and reflects the Mbororo gender model. While men are assigned a leading role in the economic and political sphere, women's responsibilities are largely confined to the household. Similar notions of male supremacy and female subordination are entrenched in the Islamic gender ideology and have endorsed the Fulbe gender model (Pelican, 1999: 120–123; VerEecke, 1989; Walker, 1980).

The Mbororo's economic organization accounts also for men's and women's diverging exposure to contacts outside of their immediate social environment. In

their duty as household heads and herd managers, Mbororo men tend to frequent villages, markets, mosques and continually come in contact with members of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, they largely rely on their interethnic friends for credit or loans. Conversely, Mbororo women's realm of action and responsibility is concentrated on the household and the family. Their financial liabilities are much smaller and they primarily rely on their husbands rather than their friends. Hence women's exchange of gifts is more of a symbolic than economic nature. Furthermore, their trips to town to do errands are generally brief and focused. They include little time for socializing with acquaintances or making new contacts. Thus, Mbororo men are more exposed to outside contacts and rely more strongly on interethnic friendship and assistance networks than Mbororo women whose outside contacts are much more limited.

DISCUSSION

In the following I will situate my findings against the background of existing studies on Fulbe friendship. As a first step, I will review those authors who focus on interethnic friendship; in the second step, I will discuss the gendered character of Mbororo friendship with regard to farmer-herder relations.

I. Interethnic Friendship of Pastoral Fulbe

Burnham (1980: 197–201) has provided one of the most detailed analyses of interethnic friendships of pastoral Fulbe in his study of the Gbaya of Meiganga in Cameroon. Burnham looked at friendship in the context of exchange relations between Gbaya farmers and Fulbe pastoralists, and portrayed two distinct patterns of social interaction. In some parts of the Meiganga region, where the Mbororo constitute a minority, they invest in good relations with their Gbaya neighbors. The institution is generally referred to as *soobaajo*, the Fulfulde term for "friend," and links Gbaya and Mbororo individuals in long-term relations of economic reciprocity and trust. *Soobaajo* relations are initiated by the exchange of gifts and are sustained by balanced reciprocity. While a Gbaya farmer may present his Mbororo friend with agricultural products, services or salt, Mbororo pastoralists often reciprocate with gifts of animals or consumer goods (e.g. a bicycle or a radio). Money is hardly involved, which in the view of both parties distinguishes *soobaajo* relations from impersonal market transactions. Mutual trust is a basic requirement, as Mbororo herders are rather mobile and delayed reciprocity is the norm. Burnham explains that from a Mbororo perspective *soobaajo* relations reflect the historically hierarchical relationship of Fulbe rulers and Gbaya serfs, and may come closer to a patron-client relationship than a partnership between equals. While Gbaya farmers tend to derive larger economic gains from *soobaajo* relations, their Mbororo counterparts benefit from its political dimension. Good relationships with Gbaya farmers are highly useful in cases where Mbororo cattle damage Gbaya crops. This applies mainly to regions where the Mbororo are a minority. In contrast, in those regions where they are numerous and politically dominant, *soobaajo*

relations between the Mbororo and Gbaya are non-existent. Here, the exchange of goods and services is based on monetary transactions, and issues of crop damage are resolved via formal institutions. Gbaya are not viewed as "friends," but are derogatively termed *haabe* (pagans, non-Fulbe) or *sukaabe* (servants).

Social relations of Mbororo pastoralists and their farming neighbors in the Cameroon Grassfields are somewhat in-between the two models of institutionalized *soobaajo* relations on the one hand and monetized individual exchange relations on the other as described by Burnham for the Meiganga region. Relationships between Grassfields farmers and Mbororo herders are neither ritualized nor institutionalized, nor do they fulfill the same economic and political functions. This may be explained by the different historical and demographic setup of the Cameroon Grassfields. Here, the Mbororo are both numerically and politically marginal, whereas they wield considerable economic power. Of vital importance are also differences in the socio-political organization between the farming peoples in the two regions. While the Gbaya are a segmentary society in which conflicts tend to be resolved on the basis of interpersonal relations, the Grassfields is renowned for its hierarchical chiefdoms. Here, establishing good relations with the local chief, *fon*, and the palace hierarchy is crucial to securing individual and collective interests. Thus, interethnic friendships remain on an individual basis, and entail a political dimension only when involving a member of the royal family, such as in the example of Babila.

Another relevant body of work is Guichard's (2002; forthc.) engagement with intra- and interethnic friendships of pastoral Fulbe in Benin and northern Cameroon. She argues that the Fulfulde term commonly used for an interethnic friend (*soobaajo* in Cameroon, *pasijo* in Benin) has no affective meaning and tells little about the quality of the relationship. While it may be translated as "simple friend," or "companion," the term for "good friend" (*yiddo* in northern Cameroon, *beldijo* in Benin) is reserved for Fulbe friends. Inspired by Piot's (1991) elaborations on friendship and exchange among the Kabre in Togo, Guichard links the intensity of friendship to the degree of exchange. She notes that among the pastoral Fulbe in Benin exchange relations with neighboring farmers involve gifts of food and services, whereas the circulation of cattle and women is limited to the Fulbe community. Based on these different spheres of exchange, she argues for distinct concepts of inter- and intra-ethnic friendships.

While Guichard bases her analysis on an apparently static context, Mbororo society in the Cameroon Grassfields has undergone considerable changes over the past decades. As an educated Mbororo interlocutor outlined, in the olden days when the Mbororo were still mobile and encountered varying, sometimes hostile populations, they centered their trust and friendship relations on fellow Mbororo. There is still a saying "*kaado wala amaana*," meaning "non-Fulbe have no trustworthiness," or inversely, "only Mbororo can be trusted." *Amaana*, however, is an Islamic concept, derived from the Arabic expression *al amin* (the trustworthy). Accordingly, *amaana* refers to an act of trust or a commitment that is binding from an Islamic point of view and is inapplicable to non-Muslims, say non-Mbororo. Alternatively, a close friend may be called *sobaajo koldineedo* (trusted friend), derived from the Fulfulde noun *hoolaare* (faith, belief, trust), which may be used

indiscriminately of an individual's religious or ethnic background. Yet, for the Mbororo in the Grassfields, the days of pastoral nomadism are long gone. As a result of their sedentarization many have engaged in enduring interactions with their Grassfields and Hausa neighbors and have developed trust and friendship relations, as exemplified by Karboura and Nyapendo. Moreover, recent years have seen a growing rate of love affairs and marriages across ethnic boundaries. Thus, gradually, both the intensity of friendship and the degree of exchange between Mbororo and non-Mbororo have increased.

Interethnic friendship has also been at the heart of Breuser's (forthc.) study of Moose-Fulbe relations in Burkina Faso. Here, the Moose (also known as Mossi) and Fulbe share a long history of coexistence. They entertain complex social and economic relations, which include not only the exchange of food, but also cattle and women in contrast to Guichard's observations in Benin. In addition to moral and economic support, friendships between members of the two groups often entail a spiritual component. This is reflected in the practice of spiritual kinship: a Fulbe family-friend may become involved in solving Moose's fecundity problems by standing in as a fictive parent, thus deflecting the attention of bad spirits.

While Breuser's elaborations are extremely interesting, such spiritual dimensions of interethnic friendship seem rather specific to the Moose-Fulbe case. Friendships between Grassfielders and the Mbororo in northwest Cameroon do not entail any spiritual component, but are limited to the economic and social realm.

II. Gendered Friendship Practices and Their Impact on Farmer-Herder Relations

With the notable exception of Burnham's (1980) study, gender differences in interethnic friendships of pastoral Fulbe have largely been ignored. According to Burnham (1980: 198–199), *soobaajo* relations in northern Cameroon generally originate between men, then are often extended to their spouses. This is to say, they have a somewhat collective character relating not only individuals, but families. Conversely, interethnic friendships are more individualized in the Cameroon Grassfields. Men and women tend to choose their friends independently, although correlations may occur. Most commonly, friendships are confined to acquaintances of the same sex, but not necessarily the same age group, as illustrated in the case of Nyapendo and Karboura.

A second author I wish to consider in my discussion of gendered friendship practices is Riesman (1977) who studied the Jelgobe Fulbe in Burkina Faso. In his intricate analysis of Fulbe ethos and social practice, he shows that there is a gendered understanding of men's and women's *personae* coupled with their socio-economic organization. He contrasts men's sternness and authority to women's emotionality and compassion, and argues that by enacting different characters, men and women fulfill complementary roles (Riesman, 1977: 199–202). Similarly, when applying Riesman's analysis to the context of interethnic relations, their gendered characters generate different modes of interaction. Women tend to maintain mostly informal contacts, while men's relationships are more formalized and colored by socio-political hierarchy. This interpretation resonates with the findings presented

above and helps to understand the different emphases placed on men's and women's friendships.

Returning to my initial interest in the integrative propensity of interethnic friendship, we may ask if men's and women's modes of interaction with non-Mbororo function complementarily, similar to Riesman's interpretation. This hypothesis was put forward by Boutrais (1984) in his preliminary study of Mbororo settlement in the Grassfields. Boutrais attributed a significant role to interethnic friendships in the mediation of farmer-herder conflict. In his view, it is the informal character of women's friendships that help to defuse conflict over crop damage, as it gives women farmers the opportunity to express their grievances against the herders' cattle. Boutrais refers primarily to nomadic Fulbe whose social contacts with local farmers emerge from frequent economic transactions, such as sales or barter of milk for grain, which are the domain of women. He further suggested that among the relatively sedentary Mbororo in the Grassfields, women's social contacts with local farmers, as well as their integrative potential, are limited.

I follow Boutrais in his interpretation, and go a step further to argue that women's interethnic friendships in the Grassfields are disassociated from farmer-herder conflict. Since nomadic Fulbe women are highly involved in economic transactions, they have ample opportunity to meet women of other ethnic groups and engage in informal discussions. Yet as they continually move on, their social contacts may be less intense and enduring than the interethnic friendships of Mbororo women in the Grassfields. Furthermore, while the subject of crop damage may be closely discussed between women farmers and their nomadic Fulbe friends, this is not the case in the research area. Mbororo interlocutors never mentioned crop damage as a topic discussed with their Grassfields friends. In northwest Cameroon, farmer-herder disputes have developed into a long-standing issue with recurring confrontations and established discourses (Dafinger & Pelican, 2006; Harshbarger, 1995; Pelican, 2006: 201–248). Thus, rather than putting their friendship under strain, both Grassfields and Mbororo acquaintances prefer to downplay or ignore the matter of crop damage, and to focus on positive ties. Finally, a decisive factor limiting the integrative capacity of interethnic friendship is its individualized character, as outlined throughout this study. In the absence of institutionalized and collective friendship ties, the groups' relationship continues to be perceived in terms of potential conflict between farmers and herders.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I wish to draw together the main findings of this paper. Firstly, while African societies are renowned for their complex forms of kinship organization, this and earlier publications (Aguilar, 1999; Brain, 1976; Bollig, 1998; du Toit, 1978; Grätz, 2011; Hagberg, 2000; Jacobson, 1973; Kröger, 1980; Piot, 1999; Smith, 1965) have shown that friendship is also part and parcel of their social organization. As the example of the Mbororo illustrates, kinship and friendship often overlap and both concepts are used rather broadly. Moreover, it is important to pay attention to different interests and power relations, as friendship is

not automatically defined in the same way by all the parties involved. Accordingly, clear-cut distinctions of friendship versus kinship, and friendship versus patron-client relations have proven inapplicable. On the contrary, the ethnographic material suggests variable and multilayered conceptions of friendship.

Secondly, in many parts of Africa—and somewhat differently from the Euro-American model—friendship often entails economic connotations. Thus, several studies (Bollig, 1998; Breusers, forthc.; Burnham, 1980; Guichard, 2002; Piot, 1991) have looked at friendship in the context of exchange relations. This perspective also holds true for the Mbororo, as friendship is commonly associated with financial and moral support. While moral assistance is often sought from individuals who share the same cultural and religious background, the economic component is even more pronounced in the context of interethnic friendship. In particular, the practice of loaning money is instrumental to Mbororo pastoral economy and commonly associated with interethnic friends.

Thirdly, I have argued for a gender-sensitive analysis of friendship. While the above economic component of friendship is generally applicable, Mbororo women and men hold somewhat different but complementary perspectives. Male and female friendships entail instrumental as well as emotional components, yet they differ in their emphases. This variation has been explained against the background of Mbororo socio-economic organization, which exposes men and women to different realms of action and responsibility.

Finally, I have looked at the role of interethnic friendship with regard to social integration. Here a comparative perspective on pastoral Fulbe in different parts of Cameroon and West Africa has proven useful. While several authors (Boutrais, 1984; Breusers et al., 1998; Burnham, 1980; Dafinger, 2008) have argued that interethnic friendship, both in its institutionalized and individualized variants facilitates the mediation of farmer-herder conflict, this finding could not be confirmed for the Cameroon Grassfields. The reasons include a different political environment, where conflict mediation is achieved via hierarchical and administrative structures rather than individual friendships, which minimizes the impact of gendered social interaction.

Friendship is a matter of social relations that binds individuals through interactions of trust and support. There is still much to be learned about the role of friendship both in intra- and interethnic relations as well as about its hidden and unexpected sides. We are thus looking forward to further comprehensive studies on friendship in Africa and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS This article was realized during a visiting fellowship at the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University (April to September 2011) in the course of which I had many opportunities to present different aspects of my work at various institutions in Kyoto, Nagoya, Nara, Osaka and Tokyo. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Daiji Kimura and Prof. Junko Maruyama for inviting me to Japan as well as to all colleagues who contributed to stimulating discussions. Furthermore, I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. My appreciation also goes to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/S., Germany for pro-

viding a vibrant academic environment as well as generous funding for my Ph.D. (2000 to 2003). Furthermore, I thank my former colleagues Andreas Dafinger, Youssouf Diallo, Tilo Grätz and Martine Guichard with whom I engaged in collaborative and comparative work. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all friends and collaborators in Cameroon for welcoming me in their midst and sharing their thoughts with me. My special thanks also go to the members of the Kamerun-Connect mailing list for helping me to clarify Fulfulde notions of friendship.

NOTES

(1) Pidgin English is the lingua franca in Anglophone Cameroon which comprises two out of ten administrative units, namely the North West and South West Region.

(2) Cameroon has a triple colonial legacy. Initially administered by the Germans, it was split in 1919 and placed under the mandate of the French and British colonial powers. Northwest Cameroon was part of the British mandate area.

(3) Such experiences may equally apply to a Western context. For example, professional relationships between work colleagues may assume as well social and emotional dimensions. Clear-cut categorizations thus correspond with an analytical perspective rather than with lived reality.

(4) While there are different terms for the loan animal (*falalihe*, *habbanaaye*, *nannganaaye*), there is no specific expression for the "stock-friend" in Fulfulde. The person to whom a cow is loaned is still addressed according to his relationship to the giver as a relative, friend or age-mate.

(5) In their conversations with me, Mbororo interlocutors used the expression *soobaajo be goonga* (friend with truth) to denote a "true friend" as opposed to *soobaajo be fewre* (friend with lies), a friend just by appearance who keeps you company in good times but disappears in times of hardship.

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——— Accepted *June 13, 2012*

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