Democratisation and Political Participation of Mbororo in Western Cameroon

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Abstract: Over the last two decades, the Mbororo – a "marginal" ethnic group – have experienced some unexpected rewards due to a new policy in Cameroon's West Region. Among the changes that affected the Mbororo were the following: a new legal-institutional framework (the 1996 Constitution), the consequences of the multi-party competition since 1990, and the mobilisation outside of political parties in the framework of an association for the promotion of ethnic interests (the MBOSCUDA, founded 1992). The combination of these factors has led to a Mbororo political awakening. This contribution aims to better understand the determinants and key players in this development.

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Over the past two decades, the Mbororo, a "marginal" ethnic group, according to the official terminology,[1] experienced unexpected recognition due to political factors in the West Region of Cameroon. The causes and consequences of this profound change are largely unknown. The on-going debate (sometimes accompanied by violence) on the link between citizenship and autochthony first appears rather disadvantageous for a group as unstable as the Mbororo. But the state-sponsored policy of settlement, initially viewed with suspicion, has affected the Mbororo favourably, especially since it was associated with better schooling, producing a critical mass of "elites". There was a Mbororo "political awakening" in the context of changes in areas including but not limited to the following: the effects of a new legal-institutional framework (the 1996 Constitution), the consequences of competition between political parties since 1990 (even in a system that is far from being a democracy), and mobilisation outside of political parties by the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association of Cameroon (MBOSCUDA), since 1992.

This matter merits reflection when one considers that under the single-party system (1966–1990/91), the Mbororo, semi-settled Fulani herdsmen, had always maintained a distance vis-à-vis the Cameroonian state: Their contact with the administration was for a long time limited to simply paying tax on livestock. Apart from this, the Cameroonian government did not need the Mbororo. In turn, the Mbororo did not need the state (Davis 1995:

1 The term "marginal" refers to the people who are distinguished by their way of life, characterised mainly by the physical instability (nomadic, semi-nomadism or transhumance) and the extreme precariousness of their material condition, which reduces them to a situation of extreme dependence on their natural environment (forests, pastures, etc.). They generally live by hunting, fishing, gathering, or barter, and sometimes engage in subsistence farming using the most rudimentary techniques (Donfack Sokeng 2001: 113, see Barbier 1981: 239-260). The Mbororo and the Pygmies have been identified by the United Nations and by themselves as "indigenous peoples", i.e., communities who have in common, in principle, historical continuity with a specific region before colonisation and a close relationship with their land; they maintain at least in part, separate social, economic and political systems. They have different languages, cultures, beliefs and knowledge systems and are determined to preserve and develop their identity and separate institutions. They also form a non-dominant, marginalised and discriminated sector within society (Shulte-Tenckhof 1997). But in Cameroon, as elsewhere in Africa, the situation is complicated by the fact that the United Nations and its Working Group on Indigenous Peoples adopted the concept of "autochtone" as the official translation of "indigenous" (indigène). However, it has a very different meaning than the word "autochtone" has in Francophone countries, where autochthones are rarely marginal groups but rather dominant groups that control the state (see Geschiere 2009).

220). But since the return to multi-party politics in 1990, the masquerade of electoral competition and the pursuit of electoral votes made the Mbororo attractive to candidates, in contrast to the situation during to the single-party period, when the Mbororo hardly ever voted.

How deep does this political participation run? What are the key criteria for success? These are the main framing questions of this analysis, which originated from the work I have been carrying out for quite some time in the West Region on the dominant groups, the Bamun and Bamileke. I realised recently that research on dominant groups is incomplete without looking at the dominated groups, the ethnic minorities, on a sub-national level. This shift of attention has required a degree of openness regarding the interaction between Mbororo and "native" farmers, be they dominant or in a minority position. In this way, my approach was exploratory. To achieve these goals, I used three research techniques: I examined written sources and conducted both interviews and focus group discussions.

First, I consulted written sources, which consisted of literature (books, newspapers, magazine articles, Internet sources, etc.) on the Mbororo and the surrounding farming groups: the Bamun, the Bamileke, the Tikar, and others. While consulting Internet sources, I found that the assumed marginality of the Mbororo clashed with the high public exposure of their problems in these various media. Primary sources consisted of papers issued by the Mbororo themselves, essentially MBOSCUDA documents, which I accessed through administrative and municipal archives. The research, carried out by way of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, led me to several other localities in the West, and more broadly in Noun Division, where the concentration of Mbororo is highest. I also conducted interviews with Mbororo residents and many elites in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, and in the city of Jakiri in the Northwest Region, with the aim of obtaining data for comparison. The focus group discussions were conducted with Mbororo "elites" (administrative, political and traditional) and many ordinary citizens among the farmer groups.

In the following, I will first describe the socio-political context, then successively analyse the degree of political participation of the Mbororo in the West Region, the determinants of participation and, finally, their political awakening, from a comparative perspective.[2]

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2 As a fellow at the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and having been a guest scholar at the GIGA Institute of African Affairs in Hamburg, I took advantage of the infrastructure and logistics available to me to rewrite and complete this paper. I want to thank the Humboldt Foundation and GIGA Hamburg for their financial and logistical support, as well as the editors and reviewers of *Africa Spectrum* for

A Favourable Pastoral Environment, a "Marginal" People

Western Cameroon is an area dominated by two ethnic groups: the Bamileke and Bamun. The Bamileke are grouped into seven divisions (Bamboutos, Upper Nkam, the Upper Plateau, Kung-Khi, Menoua, Mifi, and Nde) and one hundred chiefdoms. In those divisions, the density reaches more than 200 inhabitants per square kilometre. The Bamun kingdom itself keeps the same boundaries as Noun Division, covering an area of 7,687 square kilometres, or 55.35 per cent of the West Region (see Mouiche 2005: chap. 2). Apart from these two dominant groups, the region's population is made up of eight sizeable ethnic minorities that can be grouped into two categories: The first is made up of ethnic groups previously established and residing in the Bamileke-dominated area: the Mbo, the Banen, the Bakua, the Dibum (or Yabassi); in the Bamun land we find the Tikar. The second group is formed out of "late-comers", groups that arrived even after the Europeans: the Poakam in the Bamun land,[3] and the Mbororo, found in both the Bamun and Bamileke highlands.

The Hegemony of the "Native Farmers"

In Cameroon, the relationship between the government and pastoralists is almost always characterised by – mostly failing – settlement policies. Among the exceptions is the case of the Mbororo who inhabit the West Region. The high plateaus and wet vegetation dominated by grasslands are quite suitable for pastoral activities. Nomadism was abandoned when the population anchored itself at its wintering site and adopted a transhumance practice, the cattle breeders delegating more and more of their flocks to third parties. How did the Mbororo become sedentary? Among the geographical features that made the lifestyle transition at all possible, the altitude seems to play the most important role: The wintering sites are frequently above 1,500 meters, an altitudinal threshold that changes the cultural conditions. The settlement was also the result of an authoritative policy of the administration associated with improved pastures.[4]

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their comments. This article, including the quotations from French-language sources, was translated from French into English for *Africa Spectrum*.

3 The Pouakam arrived in the late 1960s in the Bamun kingdom, well after the Mbororo (and post-colonially), but they have acquired the status of native.

4 On the process and impact of settlement on the Western Mbororo, see John Boutrais (1984: 225-256).

Though the natural features of the West Region are very suitable for cattle breeding, the socio-political context is disadvantageous for the Mbororo. Indeed, farmers exert an unchallenged supremacy over breeders. This is first of all due to a numerical supremacy but also a political supremacy in the broadest sense. Most of the West, particularly the Bamileke Plateau, is more or less reserved for farmers whose settlements have population densities of 200 to 300 inhabitants (or more) per square kilometre. The result is that land for cattle grazing comprises less than 10 per cent of the area of the country. Land saturation and the increase of cultivated areas have prevented the expansion of livestock. There are few areas left for breeding in Bana, the Bamboutos Mountains and the Galim area. Pastures in the Bamboutos Mountains are considered the largest and richest in Bamileke country, one reason the colonial authorities reserved their exclusive use for European cattle breeders (see Champaud 1983: 321; Fark-Grüninger 1995: 111). The population density in rural Bamun is much lower, ranging between 20 to 40 people per square kilometre. However, this occupancy rate is hardly suitable for extensive livestock farming. But as the cultivation areas are not equally distributed, some open lands remain available to pastoralists. It is due to the advantages of this region of Bamun that the Mbororo have established many colonies there.

The difficulties of the Mbororo are related not only to their minority status but also to the recentness of their settling, to which the "native" farmers have reacted negatively. Here it may be useful to pose a few simple questions: Are the Mbororo regarded in the West (by the Bamileke, Bamun, Mbo, Tikar, farmers, etc.) as autochthons? Do they enjoy full citizenship rights? What about their official recognition as "indigenous people" in Cameroon? Let us start with a related reflection: The situation in the West Region is broadly comparable to that of the neighbouring English-speaking Northwest Region, which is better studied (see Duni et al. 2009; Pelican 2008: 540-560; Boutrais 1984: 225-256). Indeed, there is no documented, historical, pre-colonial continuity of the Mbororo in any part of today's West and Northwest Regions of Cameroon. As pastoralists, they have never considered buying and thus owning their grazing lands, so in the absence of territoriality they are considered "migrants" – and in a more negative sense they are considered "strangers" by neighbouring farmers, who see themselves as "landowners" and the Mbororo as their "guests" (see Pelican 2008: 540-560). To put it simply, the contrasts between the two groups are strong: The farmers are subsumed under the broader Bantu culture, while the Mbororo relate to the Fulani cultures that are scattered across the Sahel lands of West Africa. The divergence of economic interests between the two populations always manifests itself in a latent (though at times open) con-

flict. The most common causes of confrontations are the extension of settlements at the expense of pastureland, and the damage caused to land and property by herds.

The Mbororo: A People on the Margins of Socio-political Development

By observing the extent of the Mbororo ethno-cultural area, one quickly detects a lack of social infrastructure, especially in health and education (see Salé 1991; Burnham 1996; Duni et al. 2009). All children (girls and boys) have a Quranic education, and almost all acquire a good command of the Quran before the age of fourteen, a feat that is due to the inexpensive nature of this education and how well suited it is to the kind of life the Mbororo lead. However, there is a problem in terms of "modern" basic education: According to a study conducted by Abouamé Salé on the Mbororo in Noun Division, only 2 out of 100 Mbororo children attend school today. Only 3 of every 1,000 students in the Noun are Mbororo, and girls make up a mere 16 per cent of registered Mbororo schoolchildren; by high school, this percentage drops to just 12 (Salé 1991: 40). The Mbororo generally have very little access to higher education, with few going beyond Form 4. Pastoralism requires a lot of constant work by a large number of people; even school-age children are often needed.

Administratively, the relations between the Mbororo and the Cameroonian state remain remote. This verbal attack made by the senior divisional officer of Bui, Northwest Region, in a meeting with the Mbororo sums up their complex and ambiguous relationship:

> You Mbororo people are tearing yourselves apart instead of coming together like the rest of Cameroon. You call yourselves an abandoned people? Who abandoned you? You abandoned yourselves! Keeping away from others, keeping away from me! How do you expect me to understand you when you keep away from me, keep away from others when we are all here in the towns and you remain away from us, away from everything, away from me – up in the hills out there in the Bush!5

Moreover, taking advantage of the low level of education of many Mbororo, some officials are harming Mbororo interests. In the interviews, the Mbororo voiced a whole string of complaints against the administration. A female Mbororo informant enumerated some of the most frequently occurring issues they have to deal with: intimidation; harassment; extortion of

5 Davis 1995: 213; see also Burnham 1996: 129; Frantz 1993: 33-34.

money; abusive corporal punishment by gendarmes; and unfair trials of agro-pastoral conflicts (the farmer systematically winning against the disarmed and helpless Mbororo), etc. "These greedy and heartless people consider the Mbororo their breastfeeders, or merely plantations from which they can draw their pensions!" said our female informant. "To satisfy their predatory instinct, they sometimes do not hesitate to ask for non-existing official documents, or to invoke unknown provisions in Cameroonian law."[6]

Politically, the Mbororo are generally characterised by their apathy, acknowledged as much within the communities as outside of them. As one Mbororo informant said, "It is not fair to say that a man from the Mbororo is addicted to fighting [political rivals]. He talks about '*plotique*' to mean bribery, lying, plots and so on." This complements the view held by the non-Mbororo. A Mbo informant of Santchou describes the Mbororo stereotypes: "They are more interested in trade. [...] They do not take part in meetings and do not complain. They are not ambitious because of their lack of education." And finally, this Tikar of Magba said: "No Mbororo is included on our list [Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (RDPC) Magba].[7] They have little interest in politics but vote RDPC. [...] When putting together our lists of candidates, those who demand to be taken into account are the Yamba, Musgum, Arabs and Kotoko."[8] In addition, Mbororo society is not centralised but rather built on the basis of small clan units led by *ardos* (heads). These *ardos* appear nowhere in the organisational charts of the administration (which do, however, include other traditional authorities). In other words, they are not notable among the local chiefs, let alone "chiefs of the third degree", like all the village leaders. Even worse for the Mbororo, an *ardo*, no matter how important, remains under the authority of the "native" village chief of the respective territorial administrative unit.

Significant Progress Related to the Settlement

This analysis, however, should not obscure critical milestones in the process of national integration achieved through the Mbororo's settlement and especially the abandonment of some aspects of their previous lifestyle. Some of these milestones are in the field of education, in the establishment of technical services (see Salé 1991: 40 ff.), and in the quality of housing, the latter of which many observers consider to be the barometer of the development of this community, which has experienced within just a few decades

6 Interview with Fadimatou Dairou, Yaoundé 15 May 2008.

7 Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), better known in Cameroon under the French abbreviation RDPC.

8 Interviews in Magba, Santchou, Koutaba in April and May 2008.

significant changes in both its architecture and its architects. We should also not forget the not-too-distant past, when the construction of family housing was done exclusively by women while the men went about their pastoral occupations. In more concrete terms, one finds in today's Didango, the "capital of the Mbororo in Noun Division" and the only settlement where the Mbororo have left the bush to settle completely, the existence of "mixed" marriages between the Mbororo and the Bamun. Here, Mbororo are landowners, and this is recognised by their neighbours (the Bamun). In Didango, the Mbororo engage in agriculture alongside their pastoral activities. Furthermore, along with the presence of Mbororo intellectual elites, one also notes the emergence of a bourgeois capitalist elite that stands out from the group through its participation in the modern sectors of the economy (hardware, food, transportation) in nearby city centres such as Koutaba, Foumbot, Foumban and Bafoussam.

What is striking about these social dynamics is the emergence and the gradual establishment of private property. The nouveau riche gradually integrate themselves into the field of the modern capitalist economy and are vectors of change in their community, a fact observable in the possession of real assets and access to food, water and electricity. The nouveau riche are also factors of "social reproduction", as they initiate their children into this area and send them to schools and specialised training centres; under this lies a sense of class consciousness, a logic of conservation, capable of sustaining social relationships based on a vision of their integration into the capitalist market society. Citizens with low or precarious social and economic positions have a relatively low propensity to participate (Mayer and Perrineau 1992: 23, 29). Following the progressive effects of schooling, members of the Mbororo community have increasingly acquired positions in the administration of Cameroon (see Table 1). And in the context of the neopatrimonial Cameroon of today, to be a member of the administration is a good starting point for any strategy to occupy political space.

Table 1: Mbororo Agents and Administrative Staff Native to Noun Division

Names	Level of study and profession	Post occupied now	Village of origin
Sadou Daoudou	Degree in law; civil administrator	Sub-divisional officer	Koupa Menke
Fadimatou Dairou	Master's degree in law; treasury inspector	Member of the finance administrative staff in service at Yaoundé Nsimalen International Airport	Didango
Hassan Hamadou	GCE/A level; veterinary surgeon	Sub-divisional delegate for the Ministry of Livestock of Koutaba	Didango
Mohamadou Awolou	GCE/A level; telecommunications engineer	Member of the Telecommunication Regulating Board (ART) in Yaoundé	Didango
Ibrahim Sale	GCE/O level; state-trained nurse	Nurse at Tibati Hospital	Didango
Ibrahim Djobairou	GCE/A level	Foreman at AES SONEL (electricity provider) in Nkongsamba	Didango
Me Youssouf	Law degree; bailiff	Bailiff in Ngaoundere	Didango
Sanda Oumarou	Degree in economics; teacher at technical high school	Headmaster of Bankim Technical School	Didango
Amina Djamo	GCE/A level	Executive at SGBC Bank Yaoundé	Yolo
Lerah Amadou	GCE/A level; veterinary surgeon	Private veterinary surgeon in Bafoussam	Didango

Source: Author's compilation.

Criteria for and Depth of Mbororo Political Participation

We have explored the Western Mbororo's ethnographic and socio-political environment; we will now discuss their political participation in this new context of political liberalisation. We noted above how difficult it was for them to vote under the one-party system; however, we must not forget that despite their political apathy in the implementation of the government's policy of national integration, the Mbororo had for a long time been associated with the structures of the single party. This explains why, before 1990, two of their localities (Yolo and Didango) were provided with a local committee of the UNC,[9] then the RDPC, in the Bamun kingdom.[10] However, there was no Mbororo representation at the upper level (sub-section and section) despite the unsuccessful attempts, the first of their kind, of Yerima Dairou and Lerah Amadou of Didango, to win the respective sub-section presidencies of the RDPC (adult branch of the party) and the OJRDPC (youth organisation) in 1987. It is thus clear that this structural assimilation of the Mbororo by the UNC-RDPC was, after all, marginal since they were not vested with power in the higher echelons of the party hierarchy.

Lester W. Milbrath (1965: 18) has attempted to sketch out ranking indices of political participation in which the holder of an electoral mandate is supposed to have covered all the other steps. But keeping in mind this problem of "political participation" – which, in describing the hierarchy of forms of political intervention, posits the existence of a continuum from voting to the exercise of state power – it is important to note fragmentation imposed by the division of political labour between the agents of the political sphere and other social agents. Thus, reading the political sections of newspapers, listening to political broadcasts on television and the radio, and engaging in political discussions does not involve any participation in the struggle for leadership positions in the state apparatus. These are in fact signs of the attention paid to political events by people who can only be considered spectators. The same logic can be applied to the case of a person whose vote expresses a desire for social conformity. In contrast, actually being a candidate for election, exercising political responsibility, and taking

9 The UNC is the party of Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Fulani from Northern Cameroon; in 1985, under the leadership of President Biya, who has been in power since 1982, the UNC became the RDPC.

10 The RDPC is organised into four tiers at the local level: the cell (at the bottom), the local committee, the sub-section, and the section (at the top). Each organ has three branches: the main branch for adults (RDPC), the female branch (OFRDPC), and the youth branch (OJRDPC).

part in activism within a party are different from the aforementioned activities not only because they are believed to be time-consuming; these are activities that belong to other fields of social practice, usually performed by professionals or social agents whose lives revolve around politics (Gaxie 1978: 42).

Some questions emerge regarding the political participation of the Mbororo: Unlike in the period of the single party, do multi-partyism and political liberalisation now allow for the emergence of Mbororo candidates in the national representative institutions? If so, what will the results be? From the perspective of leadership, do the Mbororo have leaders and political entrepreneurs likely to mobilise them? To what extent do they exercise responsibility within political parties, both ruling and oppositional? Since the first pluralist municipal elections, in 1996, more and more Mbororo have competed for council positions and some have even managed to get elected. Based on our field surveys, this political participation manifested itself, for example, by the presence of 14 Mbororo candidates in the 2007 municipal elections in the West, related to three political parties. Seven of those 14 were elected: one from the RDPC, the ruling party, two from the Social Democratic Front (SDF), and four from the Union Démocratique du Cameroun (UDC). Even more important, a Mbororo, Lerah Adamou of Didango, became town councillor in Bafoussam, the regional metropolis, under the aegis of the SDF. A closer inspection of the political participation of the Mbororo in Noun Division is needed as they constitute here the largest component of Mbororo in the West Region. Of particular importance is the political career of Yerima Dairou, an elite Mbororo from Didango, who has since died. In his day, he succeeded in mobilising his fellow Mbororo so that they could play their part in the new political context.

Yerima Dairou and the Political Mobilisation of Mbororo

Upon the restoration of multi-partyism, the Mbororo of the Noun under the leadership of Yerima Dairou, then a member of the Central Committee of the UNDP (National Union for Democracy and Progress), were first involved in the ranks of this party – the party of their "brother", Bouba Bello Maigari, a Fulani from the North and former prime minister of Cameroon. Having been able to unite and mobilise the electorate around him, Yerima Dairou became the undisputed political leader of the Mbororo in the Noun and even in the West. In the legislative elections of 1992, he led the UNDP list in the Noun, and the Mbororo voted overwhelmingly for this party. With this allegiance, which combines ethnicity (Fulani) and political coalition with the UNDP in a division controlled by the UDC party, the Mbororo face off with the Bamun, most of whom are part of the UDC and the ad-

ministration allied with the ruling party, the RDPC. One Mbororo informant claimed that for the Bamun, the Mbororo are only "strangers and enemies to kill" and thus that it is necessary for the Bamun "to burn down [the Mbororo's] settlements, to destroy their pastures and to expel them from the Noun". As a result, the agro-pastoral conflicts are politicised and sometimes result in the deaths of Mbororo men and the destruction of pastures. In some other places, they are simply prohibited access to waterways, the aim being to prevent their use by livestock. The administration, in turn, has raised the price for pasture access and even threatened to expel the Mbororo to elicit their allegiance to the RDPC.

In 1995, the administration was also making use of its cunning. In the hopes of getting Yerima Dairou to return to the ruling party, the administration agreed to appoint him village chief of Didango, a position his followers believed for quite some time he should have already held. The timing was not fortuitous. Because as village chief he would become an auxiliary of the territorial administration and could not continue to alienate the administration by remaining in the opposition (the UNDP), he had to return to his previous benefactor and support the RDPC. Moreover, almost all traditional leaders in this division are committed to the cause of the RDPC, starting with the most prominent of them, the sultan of the Bamun. In fact, Yerima Dairou henceforth called himself "lamido" (like the Fulani chiefs in Northern Cameroon) and joined the ruling party. But as the Bamun majority are committed to the UDC and fiercely oppose the RDPC, the Mbororo are still caught between a rock and a hard place: the UDC and the RDPC.

Anxious to protect their interests, of which the most important is access to pastureland, the Mbororo in Noun organised themselves strategically between allegiance to the UDC and the RDPC. In the 1996 municipal elections, there were Mbororo candidates in the ruling party and the opposition party. Seeing as how the UDC enjoy majority support in the Noun, the Mbororo had believed that their support of the UDC would benefit them in the fight against poverty, but that turned out to be an illusion.

Confronted with this misfortune, the Mbororo – while keeping a small reserve of opposition in order to keep on good terms with their farming Bamun neighbours – became a source of votes mainly for the RDPC, the party they perceived as being more responsive to their needs and requirements. "The Mbororo support the ruling party because its supporters deal in achievements and not promises," says one Mbororo interviewee. According to another interviewee, the UDC does not go deep enough in its diagnosis to address the problems of the Mbororo in the Noun; this party is not aware of the specific problems of this community. Yet, according to the same interviewee, "There is a Mbororo problem in this *terroir*." As for the RDPC,

it is popularly associated with the intervention of the state apparatus. "The administration opens schools, as they did in Yolo and Mbororo-Koutaba. We have three schools with teachers and at least one headmaster."[11] In the health field, the creation of health centres has facilitated access to health care. The opposition criticises, opposes and proposes but is powerless to put their policies into practice. The same interviewee from above says that "it is better to [join] the ruling party, which deals in achievements". The administrative authority recognises this marriage of convenience between the ruling party and the Mbororo:

> The Mbororo vote for the RDPC because in their eyes the regime is seen as a liberator – with the [new] constitution [promoted by the ruling party] that recognises their rights as a minority. In addition, they have to safeguard their interests well protected by the regime. [...] When one is carrying a tray of eggs, one doesn't look for a fight! They play an important part in the economy, which is in their interest to safeguard.

Before his death, it was common to see Yerima Dairou at meetings of the South-Central Noun Section of the RDPC in Koutaba at the invitation of the elite in the Bamun RDPC. Each time he attended one of these meetings, he took the floor to denounce the UDC and its supporters, using provocative words such as: "In the past, the Bamun said Mbororo were bushmen; now under the banner of the RDPC, we have come out of the bush into the light. It is the Bamun who today remain in the shadows with the UDC." But the UDC supporters see the Mbororo who support the RDPC as "mercenaries", whose support stems only out of the hopes of receiving state resources (money, food, loincloths, T-shirts, gadgets, etc.). But Yerima Dairou died in 2004, leaving the Mbororo of Noun Division somewhat orphaned. Admittedly, the Mbororo have bureaucratic elites, but these are not political entrepreneurs in the West Region; the political field has been almost completely saturated with their farming neighbours for decades.

Routinisation of Voting and the Mbororo's Strategic Political Identification

From the perspective of party identification, Table 2 shows the distribution of votes between the RDPC and the UDC based on ethnic divisions between the Bamun and the Mbororo in the Noun.

11 Didango benefits from electricity supply, hydraulics and fixed phones with 24 rural subscribers today; it will soon offer the Internet, thanks to the work of its many dynamic elites.

Table 2: Distribution of Ethnic Votes in Three Polling Stations in the Noun, 2007 Municipal Elections

	Koumbam II (Mbororo settlement)	Bangambi-Somtain (Mbororo settlement)	Koumbam I (Bamun)
Registered voters	216	72	112
Number that voted	94	45	59
RDPC	76	35	18
UDC	17	10	41

Source: Commission communale de supervision, *The provisional results of the municipal elections of 22 July 2007*, Archives of the Sub-divisional Office of Bangourain.

These polling stations are mono-ethnic; we deliberately chose these because this fact could well account for the current sympathy for the two main parties held by the Mbororo. Today, with the routinisation of the multi-party system, the logic of confrontation has given way to that of adaptation and even mutual respect between the Mbororo and the Bamun. This extends to all their farming neighbours in the West, even though cultural stereotypes, the lack of leadership, and the educational deficit of the Mbororo continue to marginalise them. The strategic political alignment of previous years has been succeeded by the vote of convenience. Under these circumstances, the ruling party has ensured its supremacy in the West. This domination is illustrated by the existence of specific RDPC cells and certain local committees in some Mbororo encampments, at least in the Noun, where the low-level party structures are numerically important (Didango, Kourom, Yolo, Bagambi). Before 2007, the UDC had a few local committees in two or three Mbororo encampments in the Noun; now there is only one left (in Didango), which shares structural features with the RDPC. Our Mbororo informants from Didango have also commented on how multi-partyism contributed to the splitting up families and clans within the community, with bad blood evolving between supporters of opposing parties.

Where representation in the leadership of political parties is concerned, there is no Mbororo in the ruling authorities of the UDC or the SDF, whether at the sub-divisional, divisional or regional level. In the RDPC, (which has no regional representation), one single Mbororo, Mbounje Adamou, is a member of the sub-section board in Bagambi in Noun Division. This figure is astoundingly low considering that there are over one thousand party members in the whole division. At a higher level, in 2002 another

Mbororo, Ahmet Abdallah, was elected president of the OJRDPC (the youth branch of the ruling party) for the south-central section of the Noun, located in Koutaba, beating out a Bamun candidate. Abdallah was re-elected in 2007, this time by acclamation. He also remains the only Mbororo to appear on an executive board of an RDPC section in Noun Division, a division that has six sections and a total of 18 executive boards at the division level divided among three branches: adults, women and youth. One must also consider that each of the 18 executive boards has at least 17 members, so the Mbororo representation is insignificant compared to that of other ethnic communities, native and non-native, especially the Tikar, the Bamileke and the Northwestern nationals, even though the inclusion of these groups is based on the ethnic makeup of the districts. However, Ahmet Abdallah represents a qualitative step in the political representation of the Mbororo as compared to their representation in the single-party period when they were represented only at the lower levels of inferior governing bodies, the cell and the local committee. Even though the RDPC structures in the Mbororo encampments are mono-ethnic, this is not the case at the level of higher bodies such as the sub-section and the section. In addition to this, Ahmet Abdallah theoretically runs a multi-ethnic structure, although in reality it is controlled by the Bamun.

Determinants of Mbororo Political Participation

We will now explore the factors that ensured the socio-political mutation of the Western Mbororo. In this regard, three mutually inclusive factors seem to be essential: first, a favourable legal and institutional environment; second, from the perspective of resource mobilisation, MBOSCUDA activism – a new Mbororo social movement established in 1992 that works toward the socio-political integration of this community; and finally, the structural assimilation of ethnic groups into political parties.

Regarding the first factor, according to the legal-institutional framework, the socio-political integration of minorities goes through a number of institutional arrangements. From this perspective, respect for minority rights requires special measures that would create prospects for these groups that the absolute law of the majority tends to impair; with the principle of "equal treatment for all", some minorities always end up in the unfavourable position of having to defend their interests. This may consist of institutional engineering in the form of quotas, "affirmative action", or even special electoral divisions (see Safran 1994: 61-80). For example, electoral boundaries in the US have often served racial minorities such as African-Americans, enabling them to constitute on their own an electoral majority in one or

more constituencies. For this reason, after each US census, the courts must adjust the layout of districts based on demographic trends that have occurred over the past decade. Pascal Noblet sees in this political practice a true path to "substantive equality" (Noblet 1993: 133).

In Cameroon, the political liberalisation of the 1990s culminated in a constitutional reform on 18 January 1996, which establishes a decentralised unitary state, recognises indigenous rights, and protects minorities. The preamble of the Constitution explicitly states that the state shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations. Moreover, in Section X on regional and local authorities, Article 57 (2) provides that the Regional Council, the legislative body of the region, "shall reflect the various sociological components of the region". Before this constitutional reform, legislation on the organisation of municipal and legislative elections passed in the 1990s had already established the requirement of respect for "various sociological components" in the electoral districts: Article 5 (4) of Law 91/020 of 16 December 1991, which established the conditions for the election of MPs to the National Assembly, and Article 3 (2) of Law 92/002 of 14 August 1992, which set the conditions for the election of municipal councillors. This notion of "sociological components" essentially boils down to "various ethnic components of the population". This is also the meaning that litigants in Cameroon have given it as part of legal actions relating to municipal elections since 1996 (see Donfack Sokeng 2001: 30-31).

"Democracy", a term often confused with political liberalisation, "protects minorities, [and tries] to integrate them. If there were no statutory and constitutional provisions in their favour, no Mbororo at all would be represented in City Hall," a local authority told us in an interview.[12] This sentiment was confirmed by our informant, a member of the Mbororo political elite: "Democracy strengthens the position of minorities, providing a way out of their disadvantaged positions. It at least offers them the opportunity to express themselves. With multi-partyism, we have some municipal councillors."[13]

Regarding the second factor (the new Mbororo social movement, MBOSCUDA), we refer to resource mobilisation theory, which "shows the process by which a dissatisfied group assembles and invests resources in pursuit of its own goals" (Oberschall 1973: 28). Mobilisation is an instrumental activity that is put into action once the goals are set – resources being defined as the object of this activity. From this perspective, society, as op-

12 Interview with Lukonga Hamajouda, 2nd deputy mayor of Jakiri (RDPC), Jakiri 27 April 2008.

13 Interview with Hassan Hamadou, a Mbororo and the government district delegate for cattle breeding, Koutaba District, Koutaba 3 May 2008.

posed to the field of action, is defined as the environment providing political agents and social movements the necessary resources for action. "Society provides the infrastructure used by industries of social movements and other industries" (Zald and McCarthy 1977: 217).

In the case we are concerned with, and according to the Mbororo themselves, the MBOSCUDA has done much through its awareness-raising activities to further the population's appropriation of their civil and political rights (see Davis 1995: 225 ff.; Pelican 2008: 540-560). Reportedly, the MBOSCUDA was particularly helpful in assisting the Mbororo psychologically. The name "Mbororo" is now accepted and internalised by the Mbororo themselves whereas before, the term was a pejorative, a source of frustration, and therefore rejected. The Mbororo previously preferred to be called Fulani or Fula. The MBOSCUDA also helped to advance education among the Mbororo. During the phase of awareness-raising, the MBOSCUDA went everywhere: the hamlets, villages, neighbourhoods, etc. All occasions were good opportunities to revamp Mbororo self-esteem: a festive occasion anywhere, or a meeting in a cattle market – in short, wherever the Mbororo could come together. The MBOSCUDA also relied on the help and networks of the *ardos*. The MBOSCUDA urged the Mbororo to attend school, to be vaccinated, to apply for the national identity card, to obtain birth and marriage certificates – in short, they were taught their civil and political rights and all that is inherent in human rights. The MBOSCUDA has also provided the Mbororo with legal assistance. This assistance is very salutary; previously when threatened with a lawsuit, a Mbororo would be so alarmed that s/he would risk all her/his assets to avoid losing the trial and her/his honour, but now the way of thinking has changed. The MBOSCUDA also asked them to settle, to modernise stock farming and to acquire land deeds in order to avoid being at the mercy of the other farmers, who sometimes produce deeds issued after the settlement of the Mbororo. The MBOSCUDA provides teaching materials, desks and chairs in Mbororo schools, along with medical equipment and other necessary items. Finally, the MBOSCUDA promotes a better recognition of the Mbororo, in order that they achieve greater visibility and are able to actively participate in national politics (including by their representation in government).

The MBOSCUDA thus remains confined to an awareness-raising role and does not formally associate with political parties.[14] But by involving traditional and administrative authorities (divisional officers and senior divi-

14 However, the MBOSCUDA is still dominated by bureaucratic elites established in Yaoundé, the seat of the institutions. And these elites support the ruling party.

sional officers) as it does in its meetings, the MBOSCUDA's presence guarantees the political integration of the Mbororo. To cite one example, the Mbororo are included on the lists of candidates for election – with the help of the administrative authorities, who have the great responsibility of ensuring the compliance of political parties with the rights of minorities elaborated in the Constitution. The MBOSCUDA seems even more active internationally. According to Michaela Pelican,

> [The] MBOSCUDA has also been instrumental in redefining Mbororo national citizenship. Alongside collaborating with international development agencies, it has created links with transnational human and minority rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Survival International, Minority Rights Group International, and the World Intellectual Property Organization. This international backing proved vital in contesting human rights abuses committed by state agents against Mbororo individuals.
>
> Furthermore, in line with the proclamation of the decade of 'indigenous peoples' (1995–2004) by the United Nations, [the] MBOSCUDA promoted the Mbororo as an "indigenous minority" whose cultural survival had to be protected. [...] In 2005 [the] MBOSCUDA was granted special consultative status by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (Pelican, 2008: 550-551).

As we can see, the perspective of resource mobilisation not only affects partisan and formal political activity, but also helps us analyse the social movements by giving central importance to their organisational structures, the strategic interactions between organisations, and the relationship between organisations or social movements and their environment. It appeals to rationality and argues that participation in a movement must be considered rational behaviour just like any other institutional behaviour. In this regard, it adopts the opposite point of view to that of the classical model, which considers social movements the effects of failure or malfunction of the social system. The view adopted here is, on the contrary, based on the premise that resource mobilisation with the aim of collective action is problematic and, as such, involves a cost and a benefit for any group wishing to engage in political action (Arcand, 2003: 24).

Finally, the third factor is structuralism, seen here in terms of democratic culture within the parties based on Peter M. Leslie's "structural assimilation" – that is, the proportional distribution of ethnic groups in the structures of (the aforementioned) political parties (Leslie 1969: 422). It is in fact the political parties that put into practice the legislative and constitutional requirements regarding minority rights and "sociological components" of electoral districts, giving a few places to Mbororo community

members in their organisational structures and their lists of candidates during the nomination phase of elections. In most cases, it is less the integration of minorities and more the political parties' electoral interests that prevail, the latter being manifested in electoral votes that they either get or expect to get from the target population. The strategy of "proximity" (Stroh 2010) is obviously central here. On the one hand, the Mbororo are politically apathetic as we have outlined above. On the other hand, due to their demographically scattered population, the Mbororo are minorities wherever they are located in the West and cannot alone influence the outcome of an election in any locality. From what has been said, the political parties (here the RDPC, SDF, and UDC) seem to be at the vanguard of democratic development, as they have ensured the political representation of the Mbororo despite the latter's political apathy and demographic weakness.

However, the political parties in the opposition and the one in power employ different strategies to win Mbororo votes. We noted during some political meetings in the Noun that on the discursive level, the Mbororo do not side with the criticism against the regime voiced by the opposition, knowing that only the ruling party can find solutions to their most immediate and urgent problems. Taking the case of the Noun, a case that applies to many other Mbororo localities as well, the Mbororo have over decades of cohabitation learned the Bamun language, and some Bamun handle Fulani with the greatest of ease. In setting up lists of candidates, UDC leaders usually confine themselves to co-opting some Mbororo in their lists through their network of Bamun "beaters", especially as there is no primary election for the nomination of candidates in this party. During the electoral campaigns, everything takes place in the village market (Bamun market), and decisions are made in the Bamun language. Of course, care is taken to invite a Mbororo candidate, to whom of course little attention is paid. Nevertheless, the UDC does campaign in Didango.

Concerning the RDPC, the situation is somewhat variable taking into account the demographic data. Thus, in localities with high Mbororo concentrations (Bagambi, Didango, Kourom, Yolo, etc.), during electoral campaigns (legislative, presidential and municipal), officials from the ruling party generally do well by going to the encampments and communicating with the Mbororo and their *ardos*. On such occasions, they no longer speak Bamun, but rather Fulfulde, even if all the Bamun present do not understand this language. Latitude is given to the Mbororo to express themselves, to present their grievances – including their complaints – in the language of their choice. In turn, RDPC officials take the opportunity to emphasise the government's protection of minorities, to which the Mbororo belong, as being a

cornerstone. In areas with low concentrations of Mbororo, it is the same story as with the UDC: It all takes place in the village market square.

The Political Participation of Western Mbororo: A Political Awakening?

Unlike in the single-party period, when it was difficult for them even to vote, it is in terms of "political awakening" that the quantum leap made by the Mbororo in the West must be described in this new context of political liberalisation. Nevertheless, this awakening is not unique. Following the example of the West, the neighbouring Anglophone Northwest is also full of many Mbororo encampments, and one is struck by some parallels in terms of their political participation. Like the West, the Northwest is a region of high plateaus with wet grassland vegetation: ideal pastureland. The farmers here also hold an unchallenged demographic and political supremacy over the Mbororo. The West and the Northwest combined constitute the third-largest area for cattle breeding in Cameroon (see Boutrais 1984: 225). Upon the restoration of multi-partyism, Northwestern Mbororo supported the UNDP party of Bello Bouba Maigari, though the area was controlled by the opposition SDF. The crisis and development that followed were not unlike those experienced in the same period by the Mbororo in Noun. Only the amplitude of the conflict is different here: The Mbororo were called upon to defend themselves and they also resorted to violence against indigenous farmers, supporters of the SDF, as reported by Lucy Davis:

> During the recent changes in the direction of multi-party politics in Cameroon, many of the Northwest Province Mbororo switched allegiance from their traditional support of Biya's ruling CPDM party to support of the Northern, Muslim politician Bouba Bello, then head of the UNDP, the third-largest party. […]
>
> During the state of emergency in October 1992, a number of Mbororo compounds were attacked and burnt, large numbers of cattle are claimed to have been attacked with machetes. The Mbororo retaliated on horseback, attacking local villagers with their herding staffs. Mbororo were not permitted to enter certain market towns and had to buy their provisions through Hausa middlemen. These events may indeed have helped lead the Mbororo into a more genuine, growing movement towards Muslim unity in Northwest Province, albeit as yet independent from the North (Davis 1995: 221).

This tension highlights the ethnic dimension, especially the close relationship between a feeling of identity, territorial control and political competition. It raises the fundamental questions of right to the soil, not of a particular individual, but of a group (Pourtier 1998: 139). But, as has been rightly seen by Jean-François Bayart, Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, the political moment when the assertion of autochthony occurs "undoubtedly remains that of the democratisation of authoritarian regimes and of authoritarian restoration strategies", "two quasi-concomitant processes in the 1990s, which, however, should not be confused" (Bayart, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2001: 182-186). But what is remarkable here is that the opposition (the SDF in the Northwest and the UDC in Noun) participates in the same authoritarian prism, by compelling the Mbororo to enrol in those parties. With the routinisation of the electoral process, the Mbororo of the Northwest became a source of votes for the RDPC as did the Mbororo of the West. It is this RDPC–Mbororo alliance that the sub-divisional officer of Jakiri (division of Bui, Northwest) who we interviewed during the field surveys called "republican tradition".

In addition, we have shown above that Mbororo society is not welded or organised by a centralised political structure but rather built on the basis of small clan units. This in addition to their individualism weakens their position as a group capable of mobilising. Against this segmental trend, Yerima Dairou, who was appointed chief of the village of Didango in 1995, attempted to politically unify the Noun Mbororo and even the Western Mbororo – a unification modelled on the Fulani lamidates of Northern Cameroon – and he called himself lamido, thereby the paramount chief of the *ardos*. Even though the undertaking was received favourably in Didango, clan individualism still had too thick a skin among the *ardos* and the Mbororo of other camps for all to acknowledge him. Besides, for such a project to be truly successful, it would need the concomitant endorsement of the administration and the sultan of Bamum. However, Dairou, as a lamido – whose purpose is to rule over all the Mbororo in the Noun – competes with that of the sultan of Bamum, which in the socio-political context of the Bamun kingdom is unacceptable. Yerima Dairou's father initially attempted to get acknowledged by the colonial administration as lamido (1915–1962), but he gave that pursuit up following independence. Among other reasons, his decision was borne out of consideration, as no-one in the kingdom of Bamun should have a power similar to that of the sultan (see Salé 1991). In fact, the so-called "lamidate" of Didango confers only the status of village chief (third degree), and its sphere of influence is confined to Didango. Nevertheless, it represents an important reference point in the traditional local power structure and especially for the inclusion of the

Mbororo. In the Northwest, a similar structure was created in 2001 with varying degrees of success at Sabga near Bamenda.[15]

Like in Cameroon's West, multi-partyism and democratisation have opened new opportunities for the Mbororo of the Northwest. They are, more and more, running for positions as municipal councillors and even managing to win, drawing on the support of the new legal and institutional architecture in favour of minorities that the MBOSCUDA has long worked toward. It is not unimportant to note that the national president of the MBOSCUDA, El Hadj Jaji Manu Gidado, prince of Sagba, is a native of the Northwest and a high-ranking official (*chargé de mission*) at the presidency of the republic. It was in this region in 2007 (and nowhere else in Cameroon to date) that the Mbororo began to take decisive steps with regard to their political integration, by registering one of their own in the municipal executive, the position of third assistant of the mayor in the town of Jakiri, under the banner of the RDPC. Some Mbororo are also members of the CPDM sections in the region, youth and adult branches; and in Jakiri, the vice-president of the OJRDPC is a Mbororo.

From the perspective of "indigenous peoples", one notes some homologies between the Mbororo and the Pygmies of the forest areas of central, eastern and southern Cameroon. But it is above all the contrasts that prevail. Like the Mbororo, a few Pygmies are now councillors in the municipalities of the East and the South even though this was not the case before 2007 (see Tchoumba, Guechou Bouopda and Messe 2006; Nke Ndih 2010). Obviously, the Pygmies should enjoy the same new legal-institutional framework as the Mbororo. But this is unfortunately not the case: Without any educational and intellectual background, Pygmies have no social movement following the example of the MBOSCUDA, not to mention leaders or bureaucratic elites. Unlike the Mbororo, who have some economic power through cattle breeding, the Pygmies rather remain poor "savages" constantly undermined and exploited by their Bantu neighbours. This exploitation even borders on slavery and fortunately is constantly denounced by NGOs. It is these NGOs and the state that are now trying to support the Pygmies' participation in several programmes.

15 See Issa Niania in *The Frontier Telegraph – A Bi-Monthly News Publication*, Bamenda, September 2007, online: <www.thefrontiertelegraph.com/content/saga_of_the_sabga_lamidad.html> (10 June 2011).

Conclusion

We have just seen that, as long as elections within the one-party system remained a simple ritual to legitimate rulers, those rulers did not need the Mbororo; with multi-partyism and democratisation, where balloting changed from a ritual vote to the process of actually electing rulers, the Mbororo of the West have become political subjects and actors. And from the vicious circle under the single party, this community is beginning its transition into the virtuous circle by exercising its political rights, which were in former times ignored or denied, and by assuming its citizenship completely as candidates in the municipal institutions, members of local hierarchies in political parties, etc. These are the milestones considered from the qualitative – not the quantitative – perspective that have led us to the conclusion about the Mbororo political awakening. This transformation, comparable to that of the Mbororo of the Northwest, is a result of three main factors: first, the new legal-institutional architecture, which confirms the rights of minorities and compels the different protagonists of the electoral process to respect the "various sociological components" of the electoral constituencies; second, the role of the MBOSCUDA, a new social movement of the Mbororo that works by raising awareness about how the Mbororo can appropriate their civil and political rights; and third, the structural assimilation of ethnic groups by the RDPC, UDC and SDF, which grant certain roles to the members of this community in the structures of their organisations and their lists of candidatures during nominations for the municipal elections. This study highlights the central role of political parties in the social and political integration of ethnic minorities as well as the role of social movements as strategic activities for the purpose of entry into the political system and as activities instrumental to the mobilisation of social groups or individuals (Lapeyronnie 1988: 593).

It remains a fact, however, that the Mbororo in the West – as in the rest of Cameroon – have not yet succeeded in transforming their political awakening into real political victory; they have not taken over control of local rule by becoming municipal executives in the region. There is only one Mbororo deputy mayor in a country comprised of 360 municipalities and therefore almost one thousand executive posts – this in addition to a "few representatives in municipal councils that are there to decorate the gallery and give the impression that they are taken into account" to use Fadimatou Dahirou's words. No Mbororo has ever been mayor and as of this moment the doors of parliament are still closed to the Mbororo, despite the late Yerima Dahirou of Didango having obtained in 1992 for the first time the endorsement as parliamentary candidate of the Noun constituency for the UNDP in the general elections. This experience is slow to repeat itself, and

therefore constitutional democracy is still struggling to truly penetrate the political field in Cameroon. That is why among their grievances, the Mbororo voice repeatedly that they want to have a member of their community appointed either a minister, or a representative in the National Assembly. The same would hold true for the senate and regional assemblies – both institutions are stipulated in the constitution but have yet to be created. The Mbororo are also advancing their demands to have local councillors and mayors, arguing that they have the necessary "qualifications". Finally, there is no space to discuss the role of the arena (regional or national) for the strategies and constraints of political participation by groups with a common sense of belonging. We must also consider the contentious question of whether all described acts of participation and contestation are in the interests of the group, or simply boil down to an individual's ambitions. This contribution has chosen to look at political participation from the perspective of groups with a sense of common origin to provide a counterweight to the (dominant) contributions that analyse the strategies of political parties and "big men"; but these perspectives are not necessarily incompatible.

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Demokratisierung und politische Partizipation bei den Mbororo in Westkamerun

Zusammenfassung: Während der letzten zwei Jahrzehnte profitierten die Mbororo – eine "marginalisierte" ethnische Gruppe – ganz unerwartet von einer neuen Politik in der Westregion Kameruns. Folgende politische Veränderungen hatten positive Auswirkungen für die Mbororo: die neuen gesetzlichen und institutionellen Rahmenbedingungen aufgrund der Verfassungsänderung von 1996, die Folgen des politischen Wettbewerbs innerhalb des Mehrparteiensystems seit 1990 und die Mobilisierung der Mbororo durch eine nicht parteigebundene Vereinigung zur Förderung ihrer Interessen als Ethnie, der 1992 gegründeten MBOSCUDA. Die Kombination dieser Faktoren führte zu einem politischen Erwachen der Mbororo. Der vorliegende Beitrag möchte zu einem besseren Verständnis der Bestimmungsfaktoren und der wesentlichen Beteiligten an dieser Entwicklung beitragen.

Schlagwörter: Kamerun, Demokratisierung, Politische Partizipation, Minderheit, Mbororo