

INTER-ETHNIC ENSLAVEMENT AMONG THE INDIGENES AND FULANI OF CAMEROON'S BAMENDA GRASSFIELDS

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ABSTRACT

Most communities of the Bamenda Grassfields occupied the area in the early 19th century and established socio-political cultures that were inter-related. In the 20th century, the Fulani whose culture differed with that obtained among the indigenes entered the area. In this cultural encounter both parties struggled for dominance. The “indigenous” people admitted the Fulani herders as aliens and did not resist seeing them as second class, whereas the latter saw their host as slaves (*harbe*) for their practice of crop cultivation. The failure of both parties to equitably admit each other attracted state authority intervention to ensure cognisance of the need for compatibility. These trends failed to attain objective understanding as officials were accused of bias. Consequently, both groups continued in the struggle to sustain cultural dominance on one another thereby entrenching intergroup enslavement. This paper is an attempt to examine the forms of slavery that resulted from the encounter between Fulani and indigenes in the Bamenda Grassfields. It posits that the struggle for dominance by both groups was a form of enslavement and argues that the Fulani just like the indigenous people were enslaved not by the mere existence of divergent cultural identities in a common geographical periphery. It concludes that the failure to attain goals of the solution-seeking process was a greater factor in the enslavement process as the weakness of the state machinery was exploited by the smart group leading to power tussling, victimization and bias attitudes that were a form of inter-identity enslavement.

Keywords: Conflict, Dominance, Enslavement, Exploitation, Identity and Struggle.