‘TRADING IN A TRAFFIC ISLAND’: THE CAMEROON-NIGERIA ‘BUSH TRADE’

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: SITUATING BUSH TRADE IN ITS THEORITICAL SETTING

African history indicates that, no matter how constraining circumstances can be in environmental, economic, political or socio-cultural terms, African societies have demonstrated time and again numerous ways in which such conditions are negotiated in often unexpected ways...such conditions never become so totalizing or hegemonic that all creativity in countering or coping with the circumstances African societies are subjected to is annihilated. (De Bruijn, van Dijk and Gewald, 2007:2)

It is generally agreed that official statistics significantly underestimate the full extent of trade within the West African sub region. This is nothing particularly new. Since colonial times, large quantities of goods have been channeled back and forth across international boundaries without regard for customs procedures. Such unrecognized trade is officially designated as smuggling although governments have been prepared to turn a blind eye when the flows have been favorable to themselves...two popular beliefs about the social meaning of smuggling [reveal] that it represents the survival of ‘ancient zones of regional trade’ in defiance of arbitrary lines. Secondly it represents a form of protest against the predatory post-colonial state itself (Nugent, 1996:55)

In his conceptualization of unregulated trade Nugent like MacGaffey (1992) have placed their emphasis to a large extent on the political dynamics
that help to explain the scale and expansion of parallel economies. Scant attention has been given to examining and understanding the different social processes in terms of perceptions and strategies that are constantly produced and reproduced leaving the actors involved in unregulated trade with a characteristic distinctiveness. The project entitled “Trading in a Traffic Island: The Cameroon-Nigeria Bush Trade” is an attempt to contribute in two reserve fields of study-border studies which have received some significant research attention but which still need to be quarried because of its hyper sensivity and complexity. It is also an attempt to render new insights into commercial historiography which has equally received extensive scholarly interest but which remains even more interesting as it keeps on opening new avenues of reflection. Even more thought-provoking is the combination of commercial historiography and border studies which has been part of the focus of trans-border relations. In this project, more attention has been accorded to trans-border ‘unregulated trade activities’ which for the purpose of reaching a suitable description and context, I have christened ‘bush trade’. The present study is an actor-oriented attempt to see what goes on in a ‘semi-autonomous social field’, which over time developed a system of its own disengaged from the state that claims unnegotiated sovereignty over its activities. My main objective will be to find out how individual and group agencies (of creativity and inventiveness) converge to create, manage and sustain a cultural field of minds in the midst of wider institutional shocks.

**The Problem**

For some time scholars researching on unrecorded trade have presented smugglers like people who are compelled into their activities by external
uncertainties. The range of these externally generated uncertainties differ from author to author. Experts on border studies like Asiwaju (1985) Asiwaju and Nugent (eds. 1996), Fanso (1982), Kopytoff (1987), Collins (1976) have all contended that the political margins of the state are so vast, permeable (Griffiths. 1996) and poorly controlled lending opportunities for people to create communities along that margins of the state that subsists on underground border transactions. This coupled with the camouflaged and at times overt corruption of state officials who for egocentric economic and social reasons fraternize with smugglers; go to give bush traders good support for their shady activities. Conditions have further been made favourable to smugglers by opportunistic events like the economic crisis and most especially the ghost town operation that hit the country in the 1990s and which had spillover effects up to present (Roitman, 1990, 1998 2004, 2005; Agbaw 2000). These external constrains have not left some affected people indifferent. They have been able to take advantage of the situation to establish a pattern of livelihood. Even more thought-provoking is the fact that some of the people have initiated a process of generating their own uncertainties or risks as alternatives to externally induced form of making their livelihoods. These two parallels of livelihood construction suggest that uncertainty or the risk economy is an inevitable aspect of meeting the endless demands of livelihood. The risk economy exposes the ambiguities and challenges that surrounds man’s quest to meet his social and economic goals. According to Mbembe (2000) like other pundits of agency especially Bruijn, de, Rijk, van, and Gewald, eds. (2007) everything can creatively be mastered and negotiated.

I seek therefore to find out in this study how externally motivated uncertainties and internally generated risks situations in the ‘bush trade’
between Cameroon and Nigeria creates people with shared objectives, values and activities that gives them a distinct identity.

Questions related to this central interest are:

Whether and how do external environmental and/or institutional constrains generate situations of uncertainties that bush traders exploit?

Why and how do bush traders create and exploit uncertainties?

**Defining Bush Trade**

‘Bush trade’ as a referent to a commercial activity has been scarcely used. The expression ‘bush trade’ in this context is used to represent the contemporary cross-border commercial exchange between Cameroon and Nigeria. In most colonial literature on Cameroon, (Annual and intelligence Reports) bush trade, was used (in opposition to the teeming coastal trade carried out by European traders from their coastal location), to describe trade that was organized in the enclaved hinterlands which demanded a strenuous middleman effort to connect and convey ‘bush products’ to the coast. This was usually done through long-distance caravan trade. This definition (though pejorative) had its basis more on geographical considerations than legal limitations. Roitman (1990, 1998, 2004), perhaps stands out as one of the main scholars who has given the expression its widest academic publicity. She uses the expression broadly to mean clandestine economic activities. Such a definition keeps her closest to the apologists of the trade being illegal or constituting what is generally perceived as smuggling or the ‘criminal economy’. It is strongly in my view that another definition circulates among a generation of traders who like their predecessors saw the borders as a historical mental space (which in the colonial period and the present is trapped in new legal restrictions). The bush therefore informs
different meanings to different sections of the society and suggests a hybrid meaning closer to the legal-illegal conjunction of the Beninese economy presented by Igue and Soule (1992).

In this study ‘bush trade’ is treated as a proxy economic activity (having as a general name-unregulated trade) operating at the borders of the state of Cameroon and Nigeria. The principal defining framework will be a self generating identity construction in the midst of external controls. The space and scope of the bush trade activity can not be easily circumscribed but I have taken the geographical enclaves at the political margin of the state to invent a methodological bracket. The manipulation of the borders by border communities for different reasons gives them mastery over the environmental and institutional constrains. The communitarian approach to deviate from what is officially the norm gives good reason to define the people as bush traders and their domain of intervention as bush trade. Dissociating their group solidarity from the wider world can only give them the description of a “traffic island” or a semi-autonomous social field.

**Bush trade, a semi-autonomous Social field?**

Discussions on trans-border commercial relations between people and communities have most often tended to describe situational processes within well defined geographical spaces. Even more important has been the conscious or unconscious attempt to identify the actors involved in trade and the role they play as individuals or groups in bringing about social changes. This suggests that bush trade as a locus of interaction is sustained in a system of its own. This system can aptly be situated within the context of a “semi-autonomous social field.” Perhaps the best known theorist of semi-autonomous social field is Sally Falk Moore (1978). Moore’s
conception and representation of a semi-autonomous social field is drawn out of an attempt to show the multi-angled perspective that legal bindings can produce in a society which is usually characterized by endless choices and opportunities. Drawing inspiration from Roscoe Pound (1965) who describes the law as a tool of social engineering, Moore argues that underlying the social engineering view is the assumption that social arrangements are susceptible to conscious human control, and that the instrument by means of which this control is to be achieved is law. To her the law is abstracted from a social context in which it exists, and it is spoken of as if it were an entity capable of controlling that context. A counter view to this argument is the argument by Cochrane(1971) which states that ‘it is society that controls law and not the reverse.’

It is largely in this context that Moore(1978) thinks in the light of Poppisil (1971) who intimates that formal legal institutions may enjoy a near monopoly on the legitimate use of force, they cannot be said to have a monopoly of any kind on the other various forms of effective coercion or effective inducement. Poppisil (Ibid) further asserts that:

It is well established that the body politic and the individual, there are interposed several smaller organized social fields to which the individual belongs. These social fields have their own customs and rules and the means of coercing or inducing compliance.

It is on this basis that Moore defines a semi-autonomous\(^1\) social field as boundaries identified not by its organization but by a processual

\(^1\) The social-field is semi-autonomous not only because it can be affected by the direction of outside forces impinging upon it but because persons inside the social field can mobilize those outside forces or threaten
characteristic, the fact that it can generate rules and coerce or induce compliance to them. Bush trade is a typical example of a system that operates largely on trust and compliance. Compliance according to Moore (1978:64) is induced by the desire to stay in the game and prosper. In the bush trade ‘world’ traders, porters and guides interact at different levels of the transaction with one focus-achieving their objective. To do this they contain themselves within their social field but leave room for negotiation with the wider environmental structures, an important one of which is the state structures\(^2\) of Cameroon and Nigeria that cushions the space (borders) that has been used as units of observation. Bush trade is therefore examined as a commercial unrecorded activity operating to a large extent on its own right around the borders of Cameroon and Nigeria. It shall be appreciated as a system with internalized social and economic perceptions and motives which negotiates with external structures in a bid to sustain the system.

Moore’s legalistic position of what a social field incarnates is perhaps old (a reflection of the 1970 decade). It looks at all the conscious human efforts of controlling and mastering constrains from the prism of law. Although a relevant assumption, her conclusion does not fully express one of the key aspects that build up in man’s efforts to live within the confines of or manipulate the grip of legal sanctions. People far from her estimation have different ways by which they deviate from the law and create their own identity. In this context people with shared and associated interests form their own worlds which are not only socially defined but culturally construed. ‘Bush trade’, is a good example of a socially-turned-cultural field

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as it strongly exhibits an order of shared beliefs, values and practices that identifies and characterizes the lives of a group of people in place over time. The fact that such values are appropriated, managed and safeguarded for posterity gives the system the character of a ‘cultural island’ in historical continuity.

**The Context of Research**

Trade from time immemorial has been a key activity which animates political, social and most especially economic relations between people within local communities and different ecological spheres.(Takor 2007;1). Long before the independence of Cameroon and Nigeria in 1960, communities living on both regions were in daily commercial communion with one another. This was expressed especially through long-distance trade (Warnier 1985; Chilver 1960; Takor 2007) where scarce and ostentatious goods like cloth, salt, cam wood, iron implements, Dane guns and slaves were exchanged between both sides of what later became the national borders separating Cameroon and Nigeria. Overland movements were relatively fluid and the borders separating communities were more imagined than fixed as they were mapped mentally rather than cartographically (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996:36-41). This trade appeared to have declined with the independence of the country when stiff state economic regulations were placed around the historic trade windows to divert trade from the borders towards the center of the state of Cameroon. This center-periphery control enabled the state through its customs posts established at the borders to check and impose excise duties on goods that came from Nigeria through that direction. Success in this project only went/goes as far as possibilities of access to the traders could expose. This is usually along the major motor-
transport or river transport openings and or exists where customs, gendarme and police posts are established. Faced with this barrier, a traffic in goods\(^3\) through overland bush paths and un-navigable water ways between Nigeria reconfigured as a good number of the traders have skillfully devised new strategies to by-pass the economic barricades placed by the state of Cameroon. The extensive, undeveloped and permeable nature of the borders between Cameroon and Nigeria has exposed opportunities and made the trade more expedient and more flexible to succumb to state policing. Even routine customs’ police and gendarmerie patrols in the bush to track down this ‘underground’ commercial network has yielded very little dividends.

The continuous trans-border commercial relations between Cameroon and Nigeria through what used to be the major long-distance trade routes therefore become a research interest. I have chosen as case study to examine the major trade axis from the north-central part of the Bamenda region of Cameroon (around the Nkambe plateau) that opens up to Nigeria through several channels along the borders. Different authors have tagged different names to this type of trading activity. Some say it is smuggling (Ashok, 1973; Collins 1976, Akindele 1983, MacGaffey et al., 1991; Agbaw 2000), black marketing (Mclean 1998) MacGaffey et al.,(1991) have buttressed these with a wide range of appellations which include underground, parallel, unrecorded, hidden, shadow, endogenous, irregular, alternative and unofficial trade or simply, the ‘black economy’ others have branded it illegal, illicit or unlawful trade. Still some politely refer to it as an informal economy (Hanseen and Vaa, 2004). Even more controversial has been the

\(^3\) The goods ranged from building materials, electronics, motor spare parts, medications, clothes, kitchen utensils to cosmetics. The interest in these new types of goods suggest a shift in the traditional goods of ostentation that dominated the pre-colonial trade to a more capitalist oriented economy where business for economic more than social gains stood behind the minds of the actors in the trade.
dual definition given by Igue and Soule (1992: 15) who on a study on informal trade in Benin show the legal-illegal link of the trade when they intimate that most often informal[commercial] fluxes get integrated into the formal circuits once they have traversed the borders. This to them expose the limits of illegality as a definition for unregulated trade.

The language different authors have used to describe the trade, informs to some extent, the position they hold concerning its character and the importance it generates to the actors or communities involved on the one hand and to the state on the other hand. The differences in what unregulated trade (in my context bush trade) mean to people equally rest in divergent views they hold about the borders of the state generally perceived as theatres of opportunities (Nugent, 1996:11) These differences in my perception harbour the crux of the matter which constitutes the major problem of the work.

**Theorizing on Bush trade**

To insert Bush trade as a theme of study in contemporary scholarship, I delimited my analytical scope within a theoretical framework. This is more so because (trans-border) trade as a research agenda has received significant intervention from different perspectives. The perception that scholars have advanced concerning international borders is very vital to a study of this nature. Borders have stood to mean different things to different scholars. Asiwaju (ed. 1985:12) suggests that border regions in Africa have always evolved as special areas of socio-political ambivalence. Drawing from different case studies he (like Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996) argues that they are more or less conduits or zones of opportunities rather than barriers. Fanso, further holds that African borders were artificially designed creating
space for mosaic ethnic ties which can hardly be separated by different political control. This definition suggests the right for people to freely move across frontiers. Fanso, seen in this light shares much in common with Nugent and Asiwaju who perceive borders as zones of opportunities rather than constrains. He also thinks closer to Das and Poole (2004:8) who although using a more encompassing terminology—‘the margins of the state’—opines that borders are the extra-territorial confines where state practices are colonized by other forms of populations to secure political and economic survival. The views of these authorities, technically veils the role the state has to play in binding its citizenship within its legal geo-political space. Nugent and Asiwaju recognize this worry when they say: “the boundaries are clearly represented on maps and they carry all the legitimacy of international law, even if particular contours are disputed.” They however, contend that borders are policed only lightly because of the weakness of central authority, their considerable length, the inaccessibility of the terrain and the reality of official corruption. Such a description fits in Griffiths’ (1996) definition and depiction of African borders as permeable boundaries. This permeability became inevitable at independence when there was an inherent tension between the new ideology of ‘nationalism’, which assumed that people belonged to one nation or another, and the reality of borderlands where communities merged into each other in spite of official lines of demarcation (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996:9).

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4 Das and Poole (2004:9-11) argue that the margins of the state are not only territorial. They present three competing, if not complementary avenues of reflection. The first approach gives priority to the idea of margins as peripheries seen to form natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law. The second hinges on the issue of legibility and illegibility where emphasis is laid on the politics of identification paper controls at border check points to fulfill security of identity and rights. Thirdly, they propose that the concept of margins can be told by the simple story of exclusion. Here the logic resides on how economic and political citizenship is claimed.
In general, African boundaries as Nugent and Asiwaju (1996:11) have carefully posited have not represented physical barriers, but have functioned as conduits for the circulation of people, animals and goods. Going further, they hold that borders represent theatres of opportunity.

Igor Kopytoff also commands a theoretical thinking which has not so much been echoed in recent border studies but which is an indispensable explanatory factor to the hypothetical imaginations of scholars like Asiwaju, Nugent and Fanso who look at borders as zones of opportunities, one of which is ‘bush trade’- the central interest of this work. Kopytoff (ed.1987) opines that the border [frontier] may also be a force for culture-historical continuity and conservatism. He vigorously intimates that the border is an institutional vacuum for the unfolding of social processes. This goes in consonance with Davidson’s (1992) argument about the social meaning of smuggling which he posits, represents the survival of ‘ancient zones of regional trade’ in defiance of arbitrary boundary lines and a form of protest (conservatism) against the predatory post colonial state itself. Fanso (1982:33-39; 300-339) corroborates this view when he argues that the near fluidity of political boundaries in the pre-colonial period gave room for a significant trans-border trade which the colonial placement of border restrictions metamorphosed into contraband trade. Nugent and Asiwaju’s(1996:55-56) do not resonate with this view as they contend that it is a ‘serious misrepresentation of the twentieth-century experience [that] gives room for a critical reflection of the importance of historical and socio-cultural factors to explain the present trans-border trade (unrecorded bush trade between Cameroon and Nigeria). Their emphasis on old trading systems withering away and giving space for new modern cross-border trade might be a convincing generalization but a misrepresentation of the ‘bush
between Cameroon and Nigeria that can hardly be dissociated from historical and anthropological explanations. In my opinion it largely suggests a rupture with the past and dismembers bush trade from its very foundational origin and structure.

Far from conjecture, bush trade as a pattern of trans-border trade cannot steer clear from the processes of social inter-twinning which nest people together giving a picture of Fanzo’s mosaic ethnic emersion describing the ethnic spread across the Cameroon-Nigeria borders. Such a relation besides family and historical ties can be theoretically described as social network. The use of the word network in social science has to do with social relations. The concept was raised but tangentially appreciated by Barnes, Bott and Befu who thought it was limited to the links of kinship, friendship and neighborliness (Mitchel, 1973:22). Mitchel argues that these are only specific types of linkages among individuals which may be abstracted from the amalgam of all linkages in which pairs of individuals may be involved. These relationships are multifarious in nature. Concretely speaking they are ‘composite and multi-bonded’ (ibid;22). This led Barnes in his revised work to distinguish between a partial network and total network analysis where the partial network is taken to mean ‘an extract of the total network based on some criterion applicable throughout the whole network (1969a:57). It is perhaps this approach of abstraction that Quarles(1999) used to describe the organization of trade networks in the Benin Cattle economy when he limited his social network analysis to kinship, matrimonial alliances and patron-client relationships.

Theorists of social network like Barnes (1968, 1969a, 1969b), Boissevain and Mitchell (1973) are concerned with human interaction. They opine that any social relationship is an embodiment of nodes intertwined by
a complex array of linkages or ties. Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between them. There is no doubt that bush trade fits in this depiction of a connecting nodal society where people interact at different levels in different capacities to satisfy their purpose of business. However, the social network theory has been criticized for its exclusiveness. It has the tendency to invest emphasis on the interactor connectivity at the bias of individual actor agency. The ability of Individuals in the network to influence their actions is one of the greatest gaps left by this social theory. From the basis of this theoretical analysis, it is true that bush trade from time immemorial had to do with chains of social connectivity ranging from the entrepreneurs to porters, trade partners to consumer communities. However, to understand the dynamics of this trade from this social structure will demand looking at bush trade not only as a forum of social networking but also as a social sphere where individual agency is quite important.

The importance of agency as a theory of social analysis needs not to be overemphasized. It has already been shown by Nugent (2000:221) who extrapolating on smuggling argues that ‘the historian merely has to place himself in the position of the ‘smuggler’-to see from his/her standpoint-and the phenomenon of smuggling effectively evaporates’. Slater and Tonkiss (2001:32) buttress this view when they opine that ‘…the basic unit of social analysis is not ‘society’ but individuals, their desires and calculations’. De Brujin et. al. (2007) have provided some important contributions to the theory of agency. Though a fluid concept which translates differently in different contexts as exemplified by the twelve case studies in the collection ‘agency’ is seen as directing our quest for the understanding of the dynamics and social transformations of African societies to the domains of creativity,
inventiveness and reflexivity. It emphasizes the possibilities that individuals and social groups perceive when faced with constraints that tend to mark African social life.” Like de Bruijn, Banck in Boissevain and Mitchell (1973:3) apply agency, when he conceptualizes that “…networks have to do with (social) individuals, rather than groups.” The theory of agency thus stands out relevant to give an insight as to how individual perceptions and motivations to participate in the bush trade provide an explanatory framework for the larger character of the trade. The problem however, with agency like with social network is its exclusiveness. It gives less emphasis for the structure that interactively shapes the nature and pattern of individual actions (in the bush trade economy).

There is therefore the need to look for more encompassing scholarly debates that can bring comprehensive meaning to understanding the bush trade economy from its motivational and perceptional standpoint. Perhaps, the embittered academic quarrel between classical economics (formalism) versus substantivist thinking can be of help. Trade and market have been used interchangeably in commercial historiography although they are not necessarily synonymous in commercial jargon. However, they have as a point of convergence the fact that they all describe situations of exchange (of goods and services). The need for exchange has been argued to emanate from different motivational standpoints ranging from classical economic thinking or formalism to socially fabricated reasoning or substantivism. Formalist (like Bauer 1954; Gray and Birmingham, 1970 and Hopkins, 1973) presuppose that actors get into trade on the basis of self interest [where] they encounter each other as strangers, and the exchange relation lasts only as long as each transaction. (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001:38-39).
The formalist argument heavily hinges on Robins (1935:15) isolated definition of economics as “the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses”. This definition subjects individuals to the ‘Weberian instrumental rationality’ of calculated means to-ends-action. Formal economics in Standfield’s (1988) estimation tends to focus on efficiency as the important criterion for evaluating social arrangements while solidarity and social order are the important evaluative criteria in substantivist economics. The former argument rests on the liberal-utilitarian view exposed by Slater and Tonkiss where the individuals are presented as calculative agents ordered by the implacable forces of supply and demand, the rule of profit. The latter perspective has been the soul of business of Karl Polanyi and his think thank who illustrating on non market societies argue that exchange (like production) were embedded in social institutions based on principles of reciprocity or redistribution. Edel (1970) contributing to the formalist-substantivist debate, reduces Polanyi’s theorem to ‘logic ‘but argues that economic analysis can never be excluded from logic [as] there is always some allocation of limited means to desired ends. He however cautions that hypothesizing maximization alone can never provide a full theory of behavior. A theory of what values, drives, reinforcements or other influences determine the utility function is also needed. He concludes that to call everything maximization is to focus on the trivial aspects of a problem.

Slater and Tonkiss (2001), ‘Weberian approach’ (of instrumental versus substantive rationality) to give a model to the exchange economy is perhaps the best synergy that dilutes the tension between formalism and substantivism and makes it the best alternative in giving an explanatory framework to the perceptions and motives of bush traders in the bush trade
economy. In drawing this conclusion Slater and Tonkiss make allusion of ‘communitarianism’ which they opine that the radical dislocation of the individual promoted by neoliberalism can produce only personal anomie and social disorder. Social life to them requires shared collective values and responsibilities as well as rationally self-interested individuals. This partly suggests the reason why Martinussen (ed, 1993:6) like other Neo institutional economists, have expanded on the neoclassical economistic thinking where institutions played a docile role. He reconciles formalism and substantivist thinking when he says the market is not the only institution which shapes economic behaviour. The market, to him, is only one aspect of the more comprehensive structure in a society.

From the basis of this theoretical framework, bush trade as an issue of study can be hardly explained by a single theory. Each theory commands a certain degree of strengths and weaknesses which makes it incumbent to be flexible enough to embrace tradeoffs. However, as a study that has to do principally with examining trader motivations, perceptions and strategies, appeal has been made to a large extent to the theory of agency which emphasizes the power of dominance that man and group of people have over environmental, social and economic constrains.

**Objective**

The objective of the work is to establish and examine the dynamics of a trading activity (bush trade) across the Cameroon-Nigeria border that has received different interpretations from scholars characteristically from an etic point of view. This attempt sets out to closely examine bush trade (from an emic stand point) as a West African post colonial unrecorded cross border commercial activity that exhibits a characteristic distinctiveness in its mode,
nature and pattern. The central objective of the work is to show how people (bush traders) display creativity, inventiveness and reflexibility in overcoming, shaping and mastering uncertainties. Generally the study establishes the intersection between instrumental rationality and substantive rationality in explaining commercial preferences. More importantly it shows how strategies of livelihood combine to create a cultural field (‘traffic island’) distinct from but somehow connected to the wider social environment that cushions it.

Research Methodology
Data for the research was collected through three main methods—exploitation of secondary evidence, informal surveying and formal interviews.

Exploitation of Secondary Evidence
Although bush trade is a camouflaged economy with little recorded (if not doubtful) recorded evidence, probing into archival and published documented sources was a good step towards unraveling the scale, mode and pattern of the trade. It was particularly helpful in framing the historical setting which stood invaluable in the description of the long term processes, which in my opinion shaped the trade. This approach equally was particularly helpful as it showed the continuities and contrasts that knits history with the contemporary. The main resource centers I visited to glean these sources included public libraries in the Netherlands like the Social Science and Faculty of Arts libraries of the University of Leiden and most especially the ASC library (an indispensable asset because of its context - content specific information on Africa). In Cameroon, the libraries of the Universities of Yaoundé was consulted. Of equal importance was the
National archival repositories in Buea (NAB) which I consulted to confirm some of the reports I got from informants about the colonial trade.

**Informal Surveying**

This is perhaps where the greatest stringency was given considering the sensitivity of the research theme. This is because people involved in unrecorded exchange do not easily give out information about their business for some reasons, one of which Ellis and MacGaffey (1996:24) suggest is the reaction of the authorities to their activities. The other might be to keep business secrets and strategies away from other traders or new entrants. I began the entire research by creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence in the study area. Familiarization with actors as Quarles (1996:32) notes establishes a situation of confidence and is crucial in obtaining reliable information. The first few weeks or so, of the field encounter was devoted to explaining my research goals to the traders and other important field associates (customs officers, professional porters and guides, frontier policemen, other local authorities-village head men etc) in the bush trade activity. Ellis and Macgaffey (1996:24) had, cautioned that the difficulty of this process depended in part on the degree of illegality of the commodities being exchanged, on local politics, on state policies and on the extent of involvement of state officials and the degree to which they enforce the law. I bought the advice that ‘the political context of the forms of exchange being studied should be investigated simultaneously with efforts to gain acceptance’ (Ibid).

From this premise one of the methodological approach I employed was participant observation where I lived with the people, interacted with them at various social levels like in cars, drinking spots, international borders, etc.
Some local markets (like in Misaje, Ndop in Cameroon and Abong in Nigeria) were visited and a survey made of the provenance of goods in the markets on both sides of the border. This as Herrera (1992a) posits will enable us to compare prices, estimate volume of goods, investigate networks and organization of market traders and gather information on whether goods are actually smuggled or are in some way fraudulently taken across the borders. With knowledge of the commercial nature and the trust gained I tried to create time to formally discuss with some actors of the bush trade economy. Out of this interaction a few reliable informants were singled out for in-depth formal interviews.

**Choice of informants**

The criteria I used to select my informant ranged from the degree of involvement to the period of entry into business. Concerning the frequency of involvement in the trade, focus was laid on the main traders who are full time participants. By so doing I was able to evaluate their perceptions and motivations over time. Closely linked to this group are the occasional or seasonal traders whose interruptive practice might have another range of perceptions and motivations related to bush trade. Attention will be given to traders who started their careers at different historical moments so as to examine their entry perceptions and motivations with respect to time specific circumstances. Such an approach will help to answer the main research question which hinges on the perceptions and motives of bush traders.

Age cohort will equally be taken into consideration. Traders between the cohorts of 16-25, 26-45 and 45 and above will be examined independently to evaluate the variance in their perceptions and motivations in bush trade. Some attention would also be given to the different groups participating in
the trade. This as Quarles Ufford (1996) has suggested in his work will help us to investigate the role of ethnicity and identity in the trade.

### Formal Interviews

Ellis and MacGaffey (Ibid: 25), suggests that anthropological methods are particularly suited to such research because of their reliance on establishing trust and rapport, they are particularly useful for investigating activities that may be clandestine. They are adapted to studying societies lacking statistics in which economic exchange commonly takes place in the context of personal relationships. Informants will be intuited to give their life histories which Becker (1970:64) intimates is “the interpretivist quest-to understand behavior from the actor’s point of view—and it is an enlightening quest wherever the actor’s point of view does not correspond with common sense”. Through life histories, which Ellis and MacGaffey (1996) also call case histories, a great deal of information is extracted on, traders motivations, how they enter and organize their trade, the decisions they make and the reasons for them, how they cope with the vicissitudes of changing political and economic circumstances, their histories of profits or losses and how they invest, what the networks are based on and how they are activated and operate. (Ibid: 27).

### The case Studies

Interviews in this study were mostly conducted with the people that partially or wholly constituted the case studies. There are altogether six main case studies in the work. The first two case studies found in chapter two focuses on two retired long-distance traders-Ngu Peter and Alhaji Issa. They illustrate how the colonial attempt to create political international frontiers in
regions that were previously noted for relatively fluid movements, created social and economic resistance in the traders. Moreover, the new form of territorial mapping and regulation of movements exposed the colonial shocks of uncertainties which was manipulated and exploited by the traders to guarantee their livelihoods. The cases, in situating the historical context of bush trade, show to an appreciable extent how external risks are exposed leading traders to exploit opportunities as well as creating their own risks as complementary strategies of ensuring livelihood. The third chapter on masculinity and identity hinges on the case study of Eddy whose exploits and struggle to gain the social recognition of manhood in his local Bi community, demonstrates how people use their mental prowess and braveness to overcome ambiguities and challenges (Mbembe 2000). Eddy’s life episode like those that precedes and follow his, show the place of external uncertainties in orienting strategies of guaranteeing livelihood. It also shows how agency is invested by individuals to overcome constrains. The fourth chapter for its part profiles two main individuals, Elias Paye an entrepreneur and Jackson alias achaba boy, a motor taxi rider. It shows how entrepreneurial ingenuity relies on a chain of linkages out of which individual agency can hardly produce reflected results. The illustrations vividly express the complementary role between agency and the social network analysis in the construction of social reality. They also show the limit to the theoretical attempt to define bush trade as semi autonomous social fields. Extrapolating from the case studies I have concluded that in as much as brackets of social or cultural worlds (traffic islands) exists, there are always room for external linkages with other social fields. However, in this process of interlacing (which is reciprocal) cultural worlds are only ‘irrigated’ and not ‘inundated’. Hence giving them the possibility of
maintaining their characteristic distinctiveness. The last case study in chapter five traces the life of Gilbert. It shows how the risk-laden-nature of Cameroon especially after the turbulent nineties sends the young boy into bush trade. Another element of external origin that sends Gilbert into bush trade is extrapolated from his family state which was of low income earning. These difficulties were quickly translated as opportunities by Gilbert. Besides, as he became entangled in the constrains of the trade, he developed unparallel ingenuity to master his environment. In the course of doing that he became very creative as he generated his own risk situations which became a normal way of meeting with anticipated social and economic ends.

The mode of interview was quite flexible where open-ended questions (guided by a memory aid instead of a rigidly framed questionnaire was used) were posed to informants giving them room to journey down memory-lane and recount their life’s experiences in and around the bush trade activity.

Originality and Social Relevance of the Work

Originality

Ever since the seminal works of Asiwaju (ed. 1985), Kopytoff (1987), Nugent and Asiwaju (eds.1996), Dubois, Michel and Soumille (eds.2000) and most especially Bennafala (2002) on trans-border ethnographies, a wave of interest sprouted amongst scholars who wanted to join in the major discussions concerning what borders stood for and most especially what trans-border activities were. Authors who attempted contributing in this domain have emphatically projected the borders as zones of barriers, conduits and opportunities (insight of Nugent and Asiwaju, eds,
Complementing this is the thesis of Kopytoff (1987:1-85) who intimates that the frontier may also be a force for culture-historical continuity and conservatism. He further adds that a frontier in an African setting is ‘constructed’ out of the bits and pieces-human and cultural-of existing societies. Its characteristic to him is an institutional vacuum best described as ‘no mans land’.

It is in this wider context of imagination that an appreciable number of authors got into looking at trans-frontier trade. Trying to go out of what was typically the norm, ie, research on official trade fluxes across the border of the states, they caught interest in what was generally called unrecorded trade. This became the major contributions of scholars like MacGaffey, et al (1991), Igue and Soule (1996) and a good number of scholarly articles and contributions like those of Balami (1997) Agbaw (2002) and Nugent (2000). Most of the authors who tried to visit the theme of unregulated trade have had reflections similar to the classical( and later neo-liberal) economic thinking of formalism where the causal variables linking the outcome of peoples involvement in unrecorded trade were mostly economic-oriented. Inter-community exchange was reduced to a system operating on the dictates of demand and supply or a system conditioned by the siege mentality of economic calculations (Hopkins: 1973).

In Cameroon few scholars who have worked on unrecorded trade economy were partly spurred by the government cries that the parallel economy controlled revenue unknown to the state that could “run two or more other governments”. Studies like that of Roitman (1990, 1998, 2004) in the Chad basin borders; Balami in the north-eastern borders with Nigeria and most especially Herrera, et al, (1992) along the borders with Nigeria around the North West Province of Cameroon where my research is also focused.)
have been associated with the period of economic crisis in the 1990s. They all repose on the fact that the crisis, that had as cogent political instability made people vulnerable and sent them to proxy economies (beyond the ‘lens of the state’) one of which was underground trade. The studies important and informative as they were leave much to be desired in giving an actor-oriented model of explanation to the bush trade economy. The trade is much too complex to be captured by their heavy reliance on formalist analytical variable. Beyond this mental school of reasoning are those who saw trade as embedded in social values distinct from economic calculations. This was the controversial college of reasoning led by Karl Polanyi. Contemporary thinkers like new institutional economists have been trying to reconcile by linking economics to institutional structures.

By looking at the perception and motives of actors in bush trade away from the preceding debates, the present study will go a long way to answer a research plea evoked by Ellis and MacGaffey (1996) who state in their suggestions for new directions in research on unrecorded trade a research question that: “how do people themselves conceptualize what they are doing? What are their models? What are their perceptions of the controls they are evading?” Answering these questions will go beyond any other study to give a comprehensive insight of what the bush trade economy really represents. It avoids the bias created by the division between formalist and substantivist reasoning and hinges on their trade-offs to explain a complex social reality-the building blocks that makes the bush trade economy a ‘cultural field’ operating in a ‘traffic island’. Bush trade as a term of reference to understand the complexity and dynamics of unrecorded trans-border trade, from the above evidence, is a novelty that in my humble opinion will generate curiosity.
**Social Relevance**

Being a contribution in the academic domain of development and social change, the present intention will go a long way to show how the bush trade economy contributes to alleviating the social and economic plights of communities living at the fringes of the state and those at the urban and peri-urban settlements of Cameroon who gravitate towards the borders to take advantage of the wide range of opportunities that the permeable borders of the state offers. The study will also be an opportunity to transmit the voices of the actors of the bush trade economy which are not usually taken into consideration when actions are taken to force the trade to follow official channels. This insight will help to develop a new conceptual model in the manner in which interpretations are given to unrecorded trade activities. This new competences will help the state of Cameroon in its policy framing agenda towards trans-border trade. The study will also go to reduce trans-border tensions in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular since it suggests that borders should not be viewed as “iron curtains” but as transitional zones of interactions.

The nexus the study intends to establish between history and anthropology let alone other intervening disciplines like social economics and sociology is certainly an important contribution in the current attempt in scholarship to employ interdisciplinary techniques of constructing social reality.

**Thesis Structure**

The study has been presented in six chapters. The first chapter handles the general introduction. It presents such central issues as the research problem
and context. It also defines some of the key concepts of the study which are bush trade and questions whether the activity can rightly be situated within the definitional scope of Moore (1971) as a semi-autonomous social field. The chapter also exposes inter alia the objectives, theoretical debates and research methodology used for the study. The general introduction summarily introduces and orientates the central interest, thesis and methodological approach of the study. The second chapter for its part looks at the historical antecedents of bush trade. The chapter interrogates the disputation; whether or not is the present ‘bush trade’ a stimulus-response invention to certain contemporary economic and socio-cultural exigencies or is it a re-invention of the past to justify an endless process of culture-historical intersection. Chapter three shows the mode and nature of organizational hierarchies that in synergy produce the system metaphorically described as a “traffic island”. Central in this somehow analytical part of the chapter will be an identification of the different actors involved directly or indirectly in the trade. More importantly, the chapter examines the different patterns of power relations that exist in the system. It demonstrates how power relations stay in congruence to exploit and create risk opportunities as strategies of livelihood. Closely linked to this chapter is chapter four that treats the theme of masculinity and identity. The chapter projects and examines the importance of masculinity as a search for specific identities. As an expression of masculinity the chapter exposes how pseudo-names are used in characterizing and distinguishing bush traders and bush trade from the wider socio-cultural communities. The chapter looks at the role of masculinity and pseudo names in the circumscription of bush traders as actors operating in a ‘traffic island’. It argues that the construction of pseudo names, like the appropriation of vitality in the form of masculinity runs
consonance to the multiple ways by which bush traders lace their motives, share their ordeals, and quarantine-to-guarantee their future.

Chapter five carries the central theme of the work which is based on risk exploitation and risk creation in the context of trade. It shows how risk and uncertain economies send people into the parallel economy of bush trade. More importantly it gives analytical clues concerning how people deliberately look for risk as a strategy of guaranteeing their present exigencies and ‘buying the future’. The chapter shows to a large extent how uncertainties are interpreted from an emic point of view. It gives good reason for pundits of disaster studies to reduce their incidence on the concept of ‘vulnerability’ or disaster-stricken-population. The construction of this research position is inferred from the life story of Gilbert.

Finally, chapter six presents the general conclusion of the investigation. It revisits the central contention of the analysis by carefully recalling the subsidiary themes that have been raised and discussed in the study. It rounds off by nesting the different themes to provide an answer to the central thesis of the investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF BUSH TRADE
Introduction

In 1927, 68 persons were arrested and tried for smuggling offences and all but 6, were convicted and punished. In 1930 there were 258 arrests and 238 convicted. In 1931 all the 748 persons arrested were convicted. Fanso (1985:329).

The following statistical evidence of the scope and legal sanctions of the state of smuggling in the Cameroon Province of British Southern Cameroons in the 1920s and 1930s is an indication that ‘bush trade’ as an institution has a strong historical bearing which goes beyond the period described. ‘Bush trade’ appears to be a contemporary activity which can hardly be dismembered from the commercial historiography of Cameroon. It is therefore imperative to inaugurate a study of this nature by appreciating the historical strands upon which the pattern of trade was fashioned. This will help us to quickly discern the mode of adaptation and most importantly, the structural changes that accompanied the trade as it went through successive historical periods. The chapter shall attempt to interrogate the disputation; whether or not is the present ‘bush trade’ a stimulus-response invention to certain contemporary economic and socio-cultural exigencies or is it a re-invention of the past to justify an endless process of culture-historical intersection. As a methodological approach, the chapter teases the interdisciplinary conjunction between history and anthropology in constructing social reality. The chapter subsumes three major interlinking analytical plains-a pre-colonial ‘free trade’ period where inter-community commuting or trans-frontier movements were relatively fluid as the perception of ethnic borders was more tied to mentally construed zones of interaction than fixed lines of demarcation. (Fanso, 1985); a colonial ‘restricted trade’ where the colonial (German, British and French) attempt to map out political spheres
of influence meant the establishment of political borders. Some living testimonies of former long distance traders might give us a clue to the origin and evolution of ‘bush trade’ in Cameroon.

Living Testimonies of Some Traders
The case of Ngu Peter
Ngu Peter is a Bambili indigene. At the moment he is a petty trader selling different types of iron implements at the main entrance to the market at Bambili. He was born in the early part of the British colonial period. During his youth, he carried out petty trade in kola nuts and other local products with his father to complement his source of livelihood. Through the fathers influence and some peer pressure, Ngu later expanded his trading scope when he realized that fast gains could be made from the clandestine trade across the Anglo-French political boundary. Ngu’s anticipation ran in tandem with Hibou’s(1999:81) view that

*Customs evasion or smuggling cannot be considered in isolation as an activity which is simply illegal or criminal, but is better seen as one among a larger variety of techniques designed to exploit opportunities offered by the state and to gain access to the profits generated...*

The dire need to maximize the border opportunities and profits led Ngu to trade towards French Cameroon. To do this he needed a travelling visa which was locally known by its French rendition at the time as laissez passer. Ngu had to move from Bambili to Bamenda to get this border crossing visa before travelling to French Cameroun. To go to French Cameroon Ngu had to pass through the Bamukumbit border control unit that
regulated trans-border movements along the the international political divide between the Bamenda Division of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun. After crossing the preventive control posts mounted by the British in Bamukumbit, Ngu like most of the traders of his time entered French Cameroon via the border settlement of Baminyam. From there they continued their journey to either Mbouda, Dschang, Melong, Santchou and other localities in the region where trade was prospected. Ngu like most of the traders from British Cameroons at the time were attracted to French Cameroons by the trade in goods like liquor, beer, savon, cigerrates, kerosene and other assorted European goods that were in high demand in Bambili and its environs. As a young trader, Ngu Peter lived by making good use of his mental acumen in skillfully creating opportunities for himself out of the political border frailties. His possession of a travelling visa to cross the borders was a mere guise to his wide objectives of making adequate use of his French Cameroun connections. He feared being harassed in French Cameroun as had once happened when his travelling visa expired while he was still in the territory. He was very conscious of the fact that most of the goods (liquor, beer, kerosene and cigarettes) that could easily make him rich were just those that came under the strict scrutiny of the officials of the Preventive Control unit stationed in Bamumkumbit during the British colonial period. As a young man he understood that life was all about endearing risk. With this mental setting, he got connected to the world of international trade that made rebuff of import and export duties and that had no respect for restrictive laws. (Agbaw 2000:107). Ngu quickly adopted the strategy of navigating the borders by moving with goods at nocturnal hours. He joined the band of traders which organized caravans in the early hours of the day before dusk. By so doing, he was able to freight a
fair volume of trading commodities like liquor, cigarettes and beer, that were in high demand in the Bamenda region. Besides these heavily policed goods, he equally traded in salt and some European clothes. His determination to circumvent the official channel of trade regulation that had been positioned in Bamumkumbit was assisted and sustained by the unflinching collaboration he got from friends in localities around the border posts. A classical example in his estimation was in Balikumbat where he had a good number of trading partners who warehoused his smuggled goods and acted as brokers and spies by giving him information before hand about the market trends and the prospected locations of the routine Preventive control unit patrols. At times they accommodated him when custom officials suspected his movements and went after him. Such a level of collaboration suggests that smuggling, (bush trade) was not only governed by individual forms of appropriating agency as a coping mechanism but conjures that it was a way of life grafted into and sustained by a social network of direct and indirect actors who undoubtedly benefited from the fallouts of the activity.

Ngu accumulated much wealth from the trade with French Cameroun. The proceeds of the trade helped him to get into thrift and loan societies locally called *njangis* where he saved a fair amount of money which he used to pay the dowries of his two wives. The trade gave him the social security to run a large family and to send his 12 children to school. He was also able to construct his houses and buy his work equipments after training himself as a mason.
When the weight of age began to bear on Ngu, he reverted to a trade that he had done in his youth. This was the trade in some iron implements that he exchanged or sold to get capital for his smuggle trade. Could this be the end of a man who had toiled so much to make a good life? Perhaps, Ngu was just one of the many players who get into bush trade for different reasons top of which is to guarantee the uncertain future. A condition that must not necessarily be attained.

The Case of Alhaji Isa
Alhaji Isa was born in 1918 in Bamessing. He is the son of Yamuno, a blacksmith in Bamessing who also traded locally in and around the Ndop plain. He never ventured far from his local settlement of Bamessing because
he was afraid of slave raid\textsuperscript{5} common at the time. Although born in this atmosphere of social fright, Alhaji Isa did not embrace the cowardice of his father. At the age of about 25, he got into the trade in Irish potatoes towards Calabar in Nigeria and in return bought and came back to Bamessing Ndop with clothes. He started off as a porter carrying two to three buckets of irish potatoes from the Ndop plain to Calabar passing via Bamenda, Bali, Widikum and Mamfe. He was introduced and led to this trade by some of his friends and family relations. Isa’s movements to Nigeria were relatively fluid as there was no international barrier obstructing the movements of people and goods from British Southern Cameroons to Nigeria. This was more so because the British as early as 1916 had taken the administrative option to append their share of the war spoil of 1914-1916\textsuperscript{6} to the Southern region of Nigeria. This administrative arrangement came to re-define a period of border controls that had characterized the German colonial period (1884-1916). With the fluidity in movements there was much in terms of business flows.

The youthful exuberance that characterized Isa found expression in his great mobility. Not only did he manage the fort-nightly to and fro-missions to Calabar and Ndop, but he complemented it with some occasional trips to Nkongsamba. Alhadji Isa equally traded intensively towards Nkongsamba. Before making his maiden trip, he went to Bamenda on three occasions to get a laisser passer (travelling pass) to move to French

\textsuperscript{5} Prior to the colonial period (1884-1961), in Cameroon, slave trade and slavery were common practices in many communities. Communities and people lived in constant fear and movements of people was somehow limited.

\textsuperscript{6} Between 1914 and 1916, the First World War was fought in Cameroon. The war was fought between the Germans who wanted to maintain their authority in Cameroon and the Allied powers led by Britain and France who stood determined to oust the Germans from Cameroon as part of a global strategy to paralyze the source of recuperation for the German war efforts in Europe. Circumstances arising out of the war culminated in the Anglo-French defeat and expulsion of the Germans from Cameroon in February 1916 after the belated battle of Mora in the northern part of Cameroon.
Cameroon. After getting the visa, to move across the Anglo – French borders, he returned to Bamessing where he joined an organized trip that was going to Nkongsamba. They left Bamessing, meandered through bush paths along the Bali Kumbat village to Bamumkumbit and reached Baminyam, the gate way to French Cameroon. From Baminyam, they moved to Mbouda, Dschang, Melong and other settlements before getting to Nkongsamba. The border preventive officials rigorously controlled the goods that they carried. They were very strict on commodities like liquor, cigarettes and kerosene. They usually circumvented border controls by adopting nocturnal travelling hours and also by exploiting the permeability of the borders separating British and French Cameroons. Isa went to Nkongsamba about seven times a year and to Calabar, uncountable number of times. He like other traders went to Calabar through Bamenda, Bali, Widikum and Mamfe.

Alhaji Isa on a relaxed mode on his sofa
Alhaji Isa like Ngu is of age today and lives a quiet life with his three wives in Bamunka –Ndop. He has got little regret for his past life for it gave him what he is enjoying today. However, he holds a lot of nostalgia of his days as a long-distance trader and smuggler. He had created risk opportunities and overcome them. Manipulating risk was therefore a condition sine-quanon in his ultimate quest to make earns meet for the present and the future.

“It began in the Pre-colonial Period”

The life stories of Ngu and Isa are mostly focused on a particular period of the history of Long distance Trade in the Bamenda Grasslands. In the main it situates a fair part of the colonial (French and British) period. Little in their vision is related to the pre-colonial past which had a strong bearing in shaping the colonial phase of trade that they experienced as actors. It is therefore in incumbent to, look at the pre-colonial link of bush trade. Most of the literature on unrecorded trade usually handle smuggling as if it were an activity that has been generated by some contemporary institutional lapses(Agbaw,2000), (MacGaffey,1991), (Igue and Soule, 1992). In this direction much attention has been invested on the issue of territorial ‘surgery’ and the imposition of international boundaries (Asiwaju, ed. 1985), Asiwaju and Nugent (1996), Benn afla(2002). In most, if not all if these seminal works on the exploitation of borders as zones of opportunities and constrains, very scant attention is usually given to tracing smuggling from its modest historical origin. It looks too quick, if not panoramic to build a deeply embedded culture like ‘bush trade’ on the political strands of colonialism. This lacuna perhaps demands redress which can be sought from the structural policies of the traditional (Pre-colonial) African societies
which produced opportunities for the unfolding of shady trade activities that could conveniently be situated within the confines of a “shadow economy”. The pre-colonial Cameroon was made up of a constellation of traditional states which in all respect had structures akin to the European form of modern states institutions. These traditional polities had a strong sense of power-centrism and fiercely stood to defend and preserve their territorial integrity from imperialists black and later white threats. At the same time they never minimized any such opportunistic gains that could be made as a result of their membership in the diplomatic web of political, social and commercial alliances (Nkwi, 1986). Warnier (1985) like Takor (2005) support this view when he contends that ‘communities living in geographical proximity were in daily communion with one another and were constantly in competition over accession to the rostrum of regional power hierarchy. Fowler and Zeitiyn (1996) add that the nature of competition for regional power had little to do with population size or military clout. The intense competition between chiefdoms on the whole was not warlike but centred on the competitive exchange of materials and objects. People also entered this arena of competitive exchange and recent research points up the highly composite nature of their populations. There were winners and losers in the ongoing game for regional power.

To say winners were always winning will mean losers never had any ingenuity to come out of their marginal positions. The winners in Fowler and

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7 Aletum (1988) like Nyamnjoh (1985) have attempted to give the institutional relations between the traditional African form of government and the European or Western form. They equate the fon or chief to the British monarch and other institutions like the Kwifo (regulatory society with powers to regulate the activities of the fon) as the house of commons. Nyamnjoh goes further to describe the Ntut,(an inner core decision making body of Bum which was mostly made up of the fon and his vassal chiefs) as the House of Lords or the Senate to go by the American perception of power-ordering.
Zeitiyn’s estimation could just be the chiefs whose political preponderance gave them command over the control of trade routes and the losers logically became those who had to succumb to the institutional pressure and structural barriers to free movements of persons and goods.

The desire to control trade routes was very central in the power-relation agenda of the groups that accommodated themselves in the pre-colonial Cameroon. This surge to control trade routes owed its justification to the fact that external trade (regional, distant and long-distance) was one of the major avenues on which the political prowess of the chiefdoms resided. Through trade, they could get some commodities (flintlocks, salt, brass and copper, cloth, beads and cowries) that were strategic for the security and wealth of the state. Fire-arms were bought and tolls collected from transit traders. There was therefore the need to closely control and monitor the usage of trade routes and markets. The traditional political bureaucracy was carefully fashioned to meet the strategic objectives of sustaining the administrative machinery of the state. The over bearing nature of the traditional bureaucracy on trade could only bring about deviant social creativity (in traders whose search for profits and relaxed political control was determinant) expressed in the form of a zero-sum game. The desire to manipulate traditional control units or out rightly avoid the institutions that stood like a barrier to trans-community commercial exchange could be said to have partly contributed to complex struggle to trace the origin of bush trade in Cameroon.

It is difficult, if not impossible to statistically represent the volume of contraband trade in the pre-colonial period. However, an indisputable given is that the scale was unprecedented (at least as of the standards of the time). The pre-colonial state of unregulated trade therefore calls for some revision
on the position held by some historians (like Fanso 1985) that, the period was characterized by free movements of persons and goods. In the average, it was so but the strict and at times unnegotiable control of trade routes by chieftains made the much heralded obvious position, absurd.

**Tracking the Colonial Origin of “Bush trade”**

A common aspect found in the living testimonies of Ngu Peter and Alhaji Isa is their great mobility across ethnic and most especially international boundaries. Implicit in their views has been the fact that they were located between two zones of opportunities-Nigeria on the one hand that had commercial products mostly of British origin and control and on the other hand was French Cameroun which had its own commercial lure animated by European commercial enterprises located at Nkongsamba. During, most parts of the British colonial rule in Cameroon, Nkongsamba grew in importance as one of the most teeming economic nexus linking the Bamenda Grasslands hinterlands with the coastal trading town of Douala. Evidence to this is found in the colonial reports on Bamenda Division which mentions that

*The bulk of the produce trade continues to go to Nkongsamba, but the other markets as Takum, Ibi and Katsina Allah are visited by Bamenda natives. All the native traders invariably take their produce to British factories in Nkongsamba, and buy goods with the money they receive, so they may be said to be supporting British trade.*

(Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924-1927:33)

Similar versions of the commercial grip of Nkongsamba were recounted by most of my informants. For Example Jato Tohsih (Interviewed 10 May) retraced several trips that he made as a young man carrying kernels and kola
nuts to Nkongsamba to exchange for salt, cloth and other European goods. The documented (Mbaso 1993:87-92; Takor forthcoming) and oral accounts unequivocally, give Nkongsamba a peculiarity in the British colonial phase of long distance trade.

The British like the French colonial trade after the partition of the territory in 1919 is very much anchored to this new entrepot-Nkongsamba, which developed as a result of the European design to give trade a capitalist taste. After World War I, many native traders from the Grasslands and the north maintained their trade with Nkongsamba where such European trading firms as John Holt, which established before the war, were still operating. John Holt at this time was doing an enormous trade in salt, for which the demand from up country was unlimited now that the roads were opened and the people traveling freely. Because of the enormous distance trade in Nkongsamba, Bare District was seen as an extremely valuable asset, and represented the “commercial artery of the whole of central Cameroons”.(Fanso 1985:304).

The Partition of Cameroon and Trade Diversion

When circumstances arising out of the Partition of German Kamerun (see map..), meant the institutionalization of the borders, traditional local and

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8 Nkongsamba had increasingly become famous not only because of its transit location linking the coastal harbours of Douala and Tiko but it shared an attraction unique at the time. It was the centre of the an important railway line (the Nordbahn) constructed by the Germans between 1907 and 1911 to link the port of Douala. The railway connections ran in consonance with the German strategic design to tap the trade of the Grasslands (Bamileke and Bamenda).

9 The boundary came as a barrier which created some opportunities for new profits, and attracted the unfavorable attention of the colonial authorities. But the attempt by the two colonial administrations to control the trade turned the once-legitimate transactions into smuggling. Indeed, it may be argued, smuggling originated and intensified between Cameroon and Nigeria only after the imposition of colonial boundaries and the enforcement of international rules and regulations restricting trade and normal interactions between African peoples. The imposition of boundaries was motivated in large part by the lack of opportunities for free trade and the desire by each colonial power to establish control over the areas...
distant markets became strictly ‘foreign’, and were not easily accessible to partners across the borders. The situation in Fango’s (1985) observation was such that many traders were cut off from their nearest markets across the border while the nearest commercial center for essential supplies open to them might be at several days working distance. Convenient distance markets for most groups in the Cameroons Province were in French Cameroun, across the international boundary, instead of within the Nigerian borders. J.C. Drummond-Ray, ADO, reports that Ndop traders who traveled afar seeking markets from Ibi in Nigeria to Nkongsamba in French Cameroun, traded mainly at Nkongsamba which was six to seven days’ walking distance, instead of at Ibi and Ikom which were respectively ten to twelve days journey within Nigeria. (See Assessment Report on Bandop, May 1925). In the same line of reasoning, W.E. Hunt, DO for Bamenda Division, expressed that the Bali traders of Bamenda Division traded more with Nkongsamba (during the period) which was about 176 Km (close to 100 miles) away instead of with Ikom which was or 240km (150 miles) within the country. (see Assessment Report on Bamenda Division, August 1925).

Distance advantage was not however, a major reason that gave impetus to the French Cameroun (Nkongsamba) flow of trade. Ballard (1965:449) opines that It was more or less because of the price differentials inherent in the two policies-British and French. While the British remained which, during the late nineteenth century, were the main centers of their economic and commercial activity. Such control enabled the power concerned not only to re-orient the mass of the Africans in the territory into the production of commodities needed by the home industry. At best effective control of smuggling which had built up into a trade of substantial proportions across hundreds of miles of the land border could be established only on roads and popular tracks. Inevitably, smuggling developed and became a lucrative business in Cameroun and Nigeria even for items in which only a meager rate of return could be expected.
rigid in avoiding to propose attractive prices to hinterland products, the French on their part were loyal to their tariff assimilation policy, extended to their colonies, the tariffs protecting French industry, thereby effectively forcing the colonies to buy French products and to sell their produce to France at world market prices.

The dissimilarity between the two systems equally found expression in the fact that the British had no strict policy preventing foreign firms from operating in British colonies, and so no strict measures were taken to divert colonial trade into British channels. The result was that while Nigerians could buy imported goods cheaper in Nigeria, they could not obtain high prices\textsuperscript{10} for their produce. Thus this price differential created opportunities for long distance traders to sell their products in French Cameroun and buy European goods in British territory. Pollock, ADO, assessed that kom traders bought palm produce from Mbembe markets and carried them all the way to Nkongsamba were the prices were higher. (see Assessment Report on the Bum Area in the Bamenda Division, 1927) Besides, indigenous traders in the British side were often more attracted to the fancy but highly priced French products than the not-so-bright ‘firm and cheap British imports. (Fanso 1985:320).

The diversion of trade towards French Cameroun should not only be looked as a situational process generated by the establishment of borders and price differentials. It is likely that the Nigerian trade, otherwise known as the kola trade axis had entered a period of stiff competition in which she was forced to bow out. This competition in Lovejoy’s (1978:126) view had

\textsuperscript{10} It is difficult to sustain this evidence of price differentials in British (Nigeria) and French Cameroons because of the paucity of statistics in reports and other documented sources. The diversion of trade flow to French Cameroun during the Mandate period could in some measure support the view that besides other surrounding commercial expectations, the formalist vision of profit maximization was strongest in French Cameroun than in Nigeria.
signaled as early as 1890 when attempts were made to begin cultivating *cola nitida* in the interior of Lagos where this variety of kola had not previously grown. There was a dramatic increase in cultivation by 1910. Thereafter, Yoruba production of *cola nitida* expanded to a level which surpassed the total production of the older areas of cultivation further west. By the 1930s, the markets of the Central Sudan were no longer supplied from the west, despite a great increase in consumption. Instead, the kola trade became a domestic industry within Nigeria, with commercial patterns therefore significantly altered over previous centuries. Although the Yoruba cultivation now supplied the large markets of Northern Nigeria, this did not curtail production further west. Improved transportation in the 20th century resulted in a relative price drop for kola nuts, so that kola consumption increased remarkably almost everywhere: once a luxury, kola now became an item of mass consumption.

**The post Independence Situation**

The post independence period has not been very different from the colonial period. The issue of colonial boundaries have turned to state boundaries. At best the state since independence has been trying to regulate trade with neighbouring countries through stringent border controls. But the emergence of new border communities with a strong sense of attachment to either of the states separated by the boundary, African border populations have at best evolved attitudes and characteristics suggesting a preference for some measure of binationality. (Asiwaju, ed.1985:12).moreover, the extensive and permeable nature of the borders has given space to alternative or parallel trade patterns.
From the basis of the presentation, the post colonial period of commercial traffic in Cameroon, it is worth noting that there were some structural changes as well as a certain level of cultural adaptation which made smuggling to survive as a commercial activity. In terms of structural changes, there was some sort of an abrupt switch in the domain of the actors who were directly involved in contraband trade. In the past it has been animated more or less by itinerant long distance traders who complemented their official trade activities with the parallel system of wealth accumulation. At present, the actors are not very discernible as they are made up of people of different social categories (see Bennafla 2000). It is equally glaring that as time went on there was an evolution in the types of commodities that were smuggled. The commodities have also been adapted to present consumer needs. Although stringent measures remained in force on the trade in some goods like cartridges, gun fire and powder, underground transactions across the borders have continued unabated. Smuggling or ‘bush trade’ seen in this way had become more or less a cultural institution that did not longer owe
its survival to the formalist quest for profits but to the substantivist vision of cultural continuity. It is apt to argue further that ‘bush trade’ by its very origin and nature of existence is one of the different ways by which people take and create opportunities out of which they can make their livelihood. This is not to say the least that bush trade should only be seen as a livelihood-carried activity.

**Conclusion**

I have shown and argued in this chapter that ‘bush trade’ as a commercial-cum-cultural institution cannot be dismembered from the archaeology of trade. It has been demonstrated that historical antecedents upon which the trade was spun has been overburdened by accusations levied on the colonial man’s, perhaps cautious and speculative vision of ‘balkanising’ communities or creating spheres of influence. I have tried to reduce the monopoly of this position in scholarship by exposing the importance that the traditional institutional bureaucracy had on the budding of alternative trade patterns contemporaneously described as “bush trade”. The chapter has carefully revealed that the post independence period only inherited, but exacerbated the conditions that gave advantage to ‘bush trade’ as an institution. In my judgment, the contemporary ‘bush trade’ which is the focus of this research could not be firmly captured by one single-much echoed variable-contemporary structural exigencies like imbalance development, border neglects, unemployment, etc. Rather, bush trade should be seen more as a cultural historical process that took roots from the pre-colonial period, reproduced itself in the colonial period adapting to the colonial institutional strains. At independence and thereafter, the trade has been metamorphosing
and intimately responding to the structural changes of the modern state of Cameroon.
CHAPTER THREE
ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES
OF ‘BUSH TRADE’

Introduction
As projected in the introductory chapter, ‘Bush trade’ is an economic activity with a characteristic distinctiveness that gives it a social or cultural character. As a field of interaction in the social sphere, the trade will be presented in this chapter in two key domains. In the first place the chapter shall attempt to show the mode and nature of organizational hierarchies that in synergy produce the system metaphorically described as a “traffic island”. Central in this somehow analytical part of the chapter will be an identification of the different actors involved directly or indirectly in the trade. More importantly, this sub interest of the chapter shall try to examine the different patterns of power relations that exist in the system. The contention here shall be to find out whether and how these power relations are able to stay in congruence to the extent of sustaining the order from the institutional shock s of rival social fields. Closely linked to this first part of the chapter will be an examination of the structural principles that govern the bush trade economy. Extrapolating from the first component of the chapter, this part shall vest interest on the rule of law and governance. Attention will also be given to an examination of how legal tensions are solved within the field of bush trade.

Much of the literature that have dealt on the organization of bush trade have looked at the different ways by which actors involve in unregulated trade, master and exploit the institutional frailties of their environment. It has most often been a straightforward description of how people construct their own social niche. Agbaw (2000), MacGaffey (1991), like Asiwaju and
Nugent (eds. 1996) have each on their part attempted to describe how traders in the parallel economy (MacGaffey, 1991) shape their own world. In most, if not all of these seminal works, little attention has hardly been given to a critical appreciation of the social processes that collectively help actors involved in unregulated trade to define and sustain their system. There is therefore the urgency to re-conceptualize this issue from the point of view of current positions in scholarships. Should this premise be any indication to go by then I will be making appeal to concepts like social network, hierarchies, agency and other related concepts like reciprocity, hegemony and resistance. The goal at the end will be to establish a convergence point between theory and social reality. Since the research is strongly actor oriented, it is of interest to knit this conceptual relation from some case studies of people who are still actively making the best out of what appears to be the most difficult, especially when dimmed from an outsider’s position.

**Who are the actors in bush trade?**

Interrogating the bush trade economy from the point of view of those who organize, manage and sustain the order might be simple, but getting to answer the question in a satisfactory manner might suffer from some conjectural lapses. Those who animate the bush trade economy are as numerous and diverse as their contributions in sustaining the order from running into oblivion. In the analysis on the actors involved in bush trade there is an inevitable obligation to establish the link between the official and the unofficial economies. In the best of terms it is technically where two parallel systems meet (Igue and Soule, 1992). In this connection, a social colonization is avoided as the formal sector controlled by the state, like the informal sector, otherwise known as bush trade in our study maintain their
characteristics. The living testimonies of some past and present actors can be so vital in smoothly introducing the actors involved in bush trade.

**Elias Paye: The ‘gogoro’ and fuel Entrepreneur**

Ako is a teeming locality in Ako sub Division of Donga - Mantung division in Cameroon. It is a strategic location because of its warm climate that favours the growth of palms and production of much palm oil. Oil produced in the area is marketed as far as Takum Nigeria. It also serves the oil need of most of the Nkambe plateau. The region is equally very fertile for arable crop cultivation. A good number of persons who moved into the area from different localities were originally attracted by the fertility of the land. Tubers, groundnuts, okra, beans are some of the arable crops that are produced in appreciable quantities. This production is even easier because land is abundant and the land tenure system does not place restrictions on aliens to rent or own land. Such conditions have made Ako an inviting point for people from diversified origins like Takum and Abong in Nigeria, Wimbum and Mbembe on the Nkambe plateau and Nso’ from Bui Division. It is in this environment that Elias Paye was born.

Elias Paye leaves in central street Ako. He was was born in 1980 although he looks older than his given age. He however contends that his appearance is because of social conditions that were a bit hard on him. He has been trading in low cost domestic articles for about nine years. Initially he used to go to Abong to buy his trade consignments but releases in the course of time that it was more profitable to move to distant and cheaper markets in Nigeria especially Onitcha and Takum. In the course of his trading life he has always wanted to be a rich man and he thought to reach that goal he had to be creative in skillfully exploiting the opportunities that
trans-border trade could offer to him. Alias holds that he respected the customs officials and the duty they were doing to regulate border trade but intimates that he could only pretend to be a good citizen by declaring just a quarter of his goods. The rest had to go through the ‘backdoor’ which was risky enough but he knew how to manage it. Avoiding customs control improved his chances of maximizing profits at the same time the risk of him losing all what he has as trade consignments. Elias was very conscious of this and had to invest his organizational ingenuity to control the situation.

**Elias and the border boys**

The people of Abong and Abongshie have very little cultural differences. They speak a similar language and they also communicate extensively in Hausa. They are very much connected and they have family links chaining both ends of the natural and national divide. From Abong a Nigerian will accompany a visitor to Abongshie and vice versa. Movements are relatively very easy as the borders here are partly conceived as zones of cultural intersection. This view is supported by Nugent (1996:76) who conceptualizes that;

> Except for the fact that there is less social cause to cross the boundary on a regular basis, there is no significant difference in attitude towards a boundary when it falls between two culture areas rather than dividing a single culture area. Such boundaries might also be better marked by a physical feature or an uninhabited track. So there is likely to be less cross-border intercourse than across a border which divides a culture group. But only where the physical feature itself is a major obstacle to cross border intercourse does it interfere
with the relaxed attitude of the borderland people to the boundary. Indeed and transborder, people’s facility to language (notably among neighbouring groups) ensures that personal communication is rarely a problem.

Elias’ fortune in bush trade could only succeed if he made use of such a social context. He had to plan with those whose cultural embeddedness gave them mastery over the system. Among the myriads of persons who assist Elias to go about what he considers his daily bread are the young guys at the borders at Abongshie and Abong. A steady glance at the borders gives an impression of young guys who want to make a fortune by all cost out of the border opportunities.

Plate 2: Border boys mobilising at the borders between Abongshie and Abong
Plate 3: Border boys offloading goods and ferrying people to and from Abong in Nigeria

They are all but moneygrubbers. Physically seen they are porters as they offload goods from canoes and load in cars that come to carry them to the customs post and then beyond to their intended destinations. They are also canoe conductors as they ferry people and goods across the river. More still, some have engaged in cash exchange. A good number of them have engaged in a black market of currency transaction as they have created mobile financial institutions where the Naira and Francs CFA have been given exchangeable closest to rates established by international order. An indication that even the obscured borders is connected to the global financial circuit.

Limiting the activities of these guys to portaging might be too quick to understand the multiple camouflaged activities that the young guys at the borders do in bush trade transactions. Elias in this case is a bush trade business entrepreneur whose official business domain is in low cost domestic goods like enamels, slippers and other household utensils. This is
strictly a guise as his main domain of profit making comes from the trade in illicit gin locally called gogoro and fuel. As the man commanding the financial and entrepreneurial capital, Elias’ mission to traffic gin and petrol begins with a strategic planning encounter. This is usually with friends who are in similar domains. He tries as much as possible to get to know the advantages and most especially the difficulties that are eminent in carrying on the transaction. In his view the greatest attention has to be spent on the difficulties that are evident. After strategizing with his peers and other business acolytes within the same domain of interest, Elias’ now maps out his business plan. He estimates the duration that the business is going to take, the volume of the trade and the financial and man power expectations. When this is done he now gets the guys who have to execute the deal. Naturally, Elias coming from Ako some 15km from Abongshie has no choice but to make use of the young boys at Abongshie who have an infinite mastery of both parts of the borders.

To get dry gin and fuel, he gets boys at the borders depending on the capacity of the load. These guys already having a mastery of the permeable borders and more importantly the itinerary of the customs control units are given further instructions as to how to handle the goods with care and diligence until they get to their expected destinations. Prior to this Elias makes arrangements with them on the mode of remuneration. At times the arrangements are in cash and in other instances they are paid in kind especially because a good number of the young porters are indicted to gin consumption (gogoro drinkers). In this case they are compensated with some bottles of the gin. Many at times Elias has succeeded to use this leap services to transport his goods without being intercepted by customs officials but that has not always been so. At times carefully mapped business plans have
failed due to some execution lapses or the imposing smartness of the control units.

In some occasions my boys have been caught and even taken to Ako who they were interned for a few days for fighting with customs officers after being caught transporting illicit gin. It is usually a worry when such a thing happens but we are used to it as each time such a fate befall you, you become either more witty in your ways of doing things or you make new friends with those who are logically your enemies of survival. I have come to know personally even the Gendarmerie brigade commander and the customs chief because of the problem I had with them over the attitude of my boys. They can only sympathize with me whenever I run into problems provoked by my boys.

Elias has always cautioned his boys not to be violent when they are intercepted by control units. Violence to him only made an already bad situation worse. Failure to respect this principle had made him to dismiss from his ranks some boys. At times the boys are caught I go to negotiate with the customs officials for their release and the goods intercepted. Arrangements are made understandably and the customs know fully well that we are all struggling guys. At times shady transactions are done with the complicity of those who are legally supposed to check it. This has been going on for so many years and there is no doubt that states officialdom is part of the wider community that sustains the bush trade economy.
Plate 4: Elias (left) and his friend Julius (right) in Ako negotiating over currency (Naira) exchange

**Jackson-the ‘Achaba’ and “boy boy”**

A new form of collaboration with bush traders has sprouted along the borders between Cameroon and Nigeria. This is being done by young motorcyclists, locally called *Achaba boys*. Conspicuous as they are with their dominant yellow and at times orange colours imposed by the local councils, a security safeguard for easy identification, the motor-cycle boys have entered into an insuperable alliance and brisk business with traders who customarily circumvent custom controls along these borders. Courageous as they are, and claiming to be, *achaba* boys, they have been organizing significant clandestine activities which to an appreciable extent has gone to give a new form of resistance to border controls. Perhaps the profile of Elias, a bush trade entrepreneur and Jackson, a transporter, can be more illustrative
in showing how bush trade is metamorphosing and becoming more complex for common understanding.

Jackson is an indigene of Abuenshie, a Cameroon-border community 75meters away from Abong in Nigeria. Jackson came from one of the families that…traditional social distribution of roles in Abuenshie was not entitled the right to ferry people across the borders to Nigeria. This right which is more or less a privilege to a few families, the hard core autochthones of Abuenshie is really an obstacle to him. He regrets why his father, could not insert himself in this hallmark of fame along the borders. However as a young man, Jackson like most of the young men must engage into one activity or the other to make a fortune out of the unceasing border transaction. He first began as a porter, carrying goods from the borders to the warehouses in Abongshie and at times to other distant locations. The goods at times are taken into the bush and kept for some time and nocturnally transported to localities in Ako, Afuh, Sabongida, Berebe and other neighborhoods.

Plate 3: Jackson on his motorcycle taxi in Ako
In Abuenshie, Jackson operates a motor taxi which he says is owned by a senior custom officer at the custom frontier port in area. He is expected to give the big man 12,000frs. a week which to him, is quite some small cash as he does a lot of business with the bike. With the courage of a young, man and a certain cover of the big man (the custom official) Jackson had a free chat with me about his strategies breaking frontier control principles.

*I have done so many things that time may be too limited to recount. There is virtually no young boy around this border who has not been part of smuggling one or two items to and from Nigeria. Just to give you an idea of some of the things I have done during the past three months. I successfully smuggled gallons of fuel and tins of palm oil to and from Abong in Nigeria. Camouflaged like a boy carrying water for a building construction project, I dribbled the vigilance even of one of the smartest customs officer and passed under his very eyes with eight 40littres containers of fuel. I also transported sixteen 40litres of palm oil from Ako (Cameroon) to Abong.*

Jackson besides ferrying goods across the borders has also been assisting bush traders in other ways. He has been giving accommodation to Nigerians who come in obscurity with trade consignments without accompanying documents. On planned schedules, Jackson uses his bike to pick up traders who come to the shores of the River Donga (which gives the natural and political divide between Nigeria and Cameroon) opening to Abongshie. Most of these traders are lodged in an inn in popularly called Adamu Lunch. It is in this location that the best of strategies are devised on how to transport hidden trade consignments to their intended destinations. Jackson commands
an important place in this strategic phase of negotiation to ferry goods. He says he knows several routes along the River Donga stretch that can hardly be controlled by the few customs officers who make routine patrols. Besides he has become familiar with custom officers as he usually carry them to and from localities like Ako, Berebe and Sabongida. More to that he runs a motor taxi bike owned by a senior customs official in Abongshie. By virtue of these connections he most often has a good knowledge of the working strategies and patrol schedules of the control units. Jackson exploits this connection by giving information during strategic planning meetings with bush traders by providing some near accurate information about the position and patrol missions of customs officials.

**Analyzing the Life Stories of Elias and Jackson**

The life stories of Jackson and Elias are replete with significance. They inform varied processes of human ingenuity and social connectivity. It translates such conceptual positions as agency and social networks that animated anthropological research especially after the birth of a perspective on agency became particularly relevant with the rise of Marxist interpretations of the African condition. Jackson like Elias have skillfully being able to use their ingenuity to plan, and command their environment. Although they most often carry on transactions as a team, it all begins with a careful individual strategic planning which opens up into a social system that needs support. In this case the two personalities are said to be products of the conceptual philosophy of agency which according to one of the most updated theorists, Mirjam de Bruijn, et al. (2007:2)
... directs our quest for the understanding of the dynamics and social transformations of African situations to the domains of creativity, inventiveness and reflexitivity. It emphasises the possibilities that individuals and social groups perceive when faced with constraints that tend to mark African social life.” Throughout African history it could be deduced that is societies have shown that under constraining circumstances be them “political, social, or economic Africans have sought ways in which such conditions are negotiated in often unexpected ways.

Besides Elias and Jackson, the way the different actors (like Gilbert and Eddy) presented in this work have devised, mastered and sustain survival strategies can only give the assurance that no matter how constraining circumstances can be in environmental, economic, political or socio-cultural terms African societies have demonstrated time and again numerous ways in which such conditions are negotiated in such unexpected ways (Mirjam de Bruijn et al. 2007:2). Agency seen in this context can conveniently be seen as going beyond the institutional barricades called structure.

**Institutional barricades, an organizational speed brake?**

Perhaps the best known speed brake to the smooth functioning of bush trade is the state. Our definition of the state in this context is from the Weberian standpoint. Max Weber defines a state as

... a ruling organization [whose] existence and order is continuously safeguarded within a given territorial area by the threat and
application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff. He adds that a compulsory political organization with continuous operations will be called a ‘state’ in so far as the administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly to the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order (Weber 1978:54).

From the basis of this definition the bush trade economy finds its semi autonomy to a large extent because it is sandwiched by the state of Cameroon and Nigeria which commands unnegotiated sovereignty over the people and activities that fall within their official limits. The state through its force of legal superimposition fixes the terms of conflicts through what Roitman (2005:1) circumscribes as “the conditions of possibility for certain regulatory interventions involve circumscribing “problems”, or sources of disorder that needs to be constantly governed or domesticated”. The greatest source of tension and at the same time the domain of opportunity by which bush traders make their world is taxation. Roitman (2005) in her “Incivisme Fiscal” has elaborately shown how the state in her endless quest to earn revenue amidst constraining political and economic difficulties faced by the people has generated a sense of structured resistance. Such a resistance germinates out of a setting of uncertainty for the future which makes appeal for a survival strategy. The state seen in this perspective creates risk situations which are being exploited and managed by citizens.

Such a setting premised on a dichotomized relationship is not always so, as there are always informal overtures of negotiations between the state and bush traders. This can be seen in the case studies presented in this chapter where Elias and Jackson are always able to adjust to mitigating constrains due to the special relations that they have and continue to establish with
customs and Gendarmerie officials. This situation stands same for the other case studies in the work which exposes the degree of solidarity that exists between the state through its officials and bush traders. There is therefore no doubt that the state’s ability to control and contain the activities of its citizens within its legal framework has its limits. In the first place it is limited by institutional lapses like greed, bribery, patronage and corruption that arrest and destroys well planned strategies to regulate the state economy. Secondly, it suffers from the natural logic of fraternal affinities between border communities. The state policy of assigning officials to work in their areas of origin because of its remoteness only helps to create another level of solidarity between bush traders and state officials. It is therefore not a misgiving to say the structure and pull of the bush trade economy commands the ability to sink the state into its system.

Closely linked to the exhibition of agency as a theoretical standpoint to understand the organizational values of bush trade is the theory of social network. The greatest if not an indispensable factor in understanding how bush trade is being organized is nodes of human connectivity that wire individuals into social bands of interaction. The treatises of social network theorists like Barnes (1968, 1969a, 1969b), Boissevain and Mitchell (1973) are still very relevant in this effect. From a look and interpretation of things bush trade is to a large extent a cultural community because of the network of connectivity that anchors people with related social interests and anticipations. The importance of social connectivity in bush trade runs back to the pre-colonial and colonial periods when traders had friends and other social relationships along trade routes and most especially across borders. This was the best formula through which traders like Ngu Peter and Alhaji
Issa survived the difficulties that stood on their way as they traded over long distances like Nigeria and Nkongsamba from Bamenda and the Ndop plain respectively. With friendly connections they could avoid or pre-empt and plan for major embarrassments. The cases of Gilbert and Eddy are not different from those of Jackson and Elias who to a large extent function as a cultural community where each person has one way or the order that he helps to maintain the order. Around the borders the social network phenomenon is so strong to the extent that it is difficult at times to distinguish between what Nugent (1996) calls ‘innocent’ cross-border commercial activity where people trade socially along family lines and ‘professional smuggling’ where individuals trade to earn a substantial part of their living by illegally transporting goods across a border from one country to sell at a profit, in the other.

Generally speaking the mode, nature and pattern of organization in bush trade suggest not only structures and actors which interlace interactively but also the expression of different power ordering. Elias and Jackson although contributing towards one expected ambitions do not necessarily belong to the same social hierarchies. As the entrepreneur he commands authority within the bush trade in different ways. He holds the right to pay the “boy boys”, liberate them when they fall into problems like incarceration, dismiss them from the system when they become wayward. In a nut shell he patterns the system and manages its odds and successes. It might be misleading to situate this power relation within the context of Marxist discourse of social stratification which contends that
“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another....”

This antithetical mode of social relations is associated with antithetical division of roles. The tension between the entrepreneur and the lower level of collaborators “boy boys” should not be seen as a ‘contradiction’ between classes but as collective voluntarism for economic gains. The stress on class consciousness which Marxist impose is not universally tailored. It does not give analytical clues to the existence of a patron-client zero-sum game expressed in the form of exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed. For this reason, Burke (1992:60) holds that the idea of an autonomous ‘fraction’ has been introduced into Marxist analyses. The term ‘ascribed’ or ‘imputed’ class consciousness has been coined in order to speak of a ‘working class’ at a time when its members lacked the necessary sense of solidarity. The bush trade economy and organization should be seen more or less as a cultural field of social reciprocity with a power balance which is hierarchical but not predatory. The existence of a power elite in the system like in Burke’s(1992) given society should be regarded as a hypothesis than as an axiom.

**Conclusion**

So far the interest of the chapter has been to examine the organizational patterning of the bush trade economy. The methodological entry point in this perspective has deviated a little bit from the descriptive approach that has characterized previous research on the organization of unregulated trade. In
the place of the somewhat descriptive tradition, the chapter has made appeal to two case studies-Elias and Jackson. From the life experiences of these cases, an analytical grounding has been established where such current debates like agency, social networking, power-relations and social hierarchy have been re-invited to understand the dynamics that interactivity produces and continue to reproduce the social-cum cultural field of bush trade. The chapter has also shown that the organization and structural principles that governs the bush trade economy can hardly be dissociated from its wider social field. The social field in question is the state (states of Cameroon and Nigeria) which has the monopoly of force and violence like control and sanctions over the citizens who make up the cultural field. The chapter further exposes that the relations between the state and the bush trade economy is not only unilinear. Rather there are always opportunities of interfaces where state officials collaborate with bush traders in their activities. Such a mode of interaction is a merit to the bush traders as it guarantees their sustainability. At the same it shows the level where the states loses its grip as a regulatory institution and sinks into the society.
CHAPTER FOUR
MASCULINITY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Introduction
This chapter has as interest to examine some of the key strands that give bush trade its peculiarity. Conscious of the veiled nature and pattern of the trade, the chapter projects and examines the importance of masculinity as a search for specific identities. As an expression of masculinity the chapter exposes how pseudo-names are used in characterizing and distinguishing bush traders and bush trade from the wider socio-cultural communities. The central contention of this chapter is to find out the role of masculinity and pseudo in the circumscription of bush traders as actors operating in a ‘traffic island’. I argue that the construction of pseudo names, like the appropriation of vitality in the form of masculinity runs in consonance to the multiple ways by which bush traders lace their motives, share their ordeals, and quarantine-to-guarantee their future. In a nutshell I will be interested in looking at how masculinity and the pseudo naming can be used as a ‘flash card’ to understand the identity construction and operational structure of bush trade as a ‘semi autonomous social field’ or better still, as a commercial traffic island-turned-cultural field.

Masculinity: The Appropriation of Male Vitality

*Man pikin na ee heart. We di sabi man pikin for weti ee fit do when condition dem trong. The kind thing wee ee di carriam and the kind mapam wee ee di takam for day time like for nite di show who ee be. We also know ee when ee make some difference wee na few people*
A man is his courage. We come to know a him from what he can do when conditions are critical. The kinds of goods he carries and the obscure passages or paths he uses during the day like at night shows who he is. We also distinguish a man from the rest of the men folk by his life’s exploits. (translation is mine)

There are just so many formal elements that run into the minds of the dominant young generation of boys who animate the bush trade between Cameroon and Nigeria along the different border passages on the Nkambe plateau. Without any intention to generate and exacerbate the gender tension which has characterized some earlier investigations in the Grasslands of the North West region of Cameroon, the life story of Eddy will lend us space to illustrate and appreciate the dangling conception and perception of masculinity among bush traders. More importantly, the appropriation of masculine attributes evinced in bush trade demonstrates another cultural uniformity from which we can make valuable conclusions related to bush trade as a semi autonomous social field or better still an exclusive cultural field with practical governing norms and guiding principles.

**The Case of Eddy, ‘man of all weathers’**

Ndamsa Edison Nya, was born in 1976 to the family of Robert Ndamsa and Juliana Keh, all of whom are of blessed memory. He is the sixth in a family line of nine. As most of the young men in his local community of Bi, he was oportuned at least to receive a primary formal education.
completing the seven years course typical of the primary school education system in Cameroon, Eddy, as he was fondly called said his father was not viable to send him to secondary school for post primary studies. He however, was a little bit fortunate because he got the assistance of one of his kith brothers, Cosmos Mformi who by then was a corporal in the Cameroon army. Eddy could only spend a year in secondary school as his benefactor was among those who were captured as prisoners of the hostile relations that Cameroon was entertaining at the time with Nigeria. This capture of Edy’s brother was an important turning point in the life of the young man. It sapped him of his principal source of dependence and left him with no other alternative than to shape his own future. It was in this frustrating context that Eddy made his entry in the Cameroon-Nigeria bush trade. He started going to Nigeria when the brother was captured and interned in Nigeria. His trading interest centred on cosmetics, grinding mill and motor cycle accessories.

Eddy quickly made his capital out of a lucrative kola nut exchange. Bi, his village of origin was much endowed in the production of kola nuts. At high production during the kola season, he could buy 100 kola nuts for 100cfa francs and re-sell in Nigeria for 2000cfa francs. Eddy started going to Nigeria when the benefactor and brother was captured by some Nigerian coastal guards. Says from Nigeria they bought cosmetics, savon, grinding mill motor cycle. Got into the Nigeria trade through the kola nut trade. Kola came from Bi. Use to carry 700 kola nut. At times 1000 (but with porters).

From Bi, they left two of them, spent two days to get to Nigeria. First went to Nigeria in 1990 at the age of 20. His usual Itenery from Bi went through Sah to Ndamru, then to Telopoh to Kanli to the river Donga where they traversed the river on a hanging bridge. During his first trip to Nigeria,
Eddy was led by Simon Mbu, a family friend. While in Nigeria he usually lodged in Ngorije in the house of a native of Ndu who was widely known as Ardo. The long stay and deep seated Muslim connections coupled with great wealth of this personality gave him much respect and fame in Nigeria. He had exceptional powers in Nigeria as he ran to the assistance of Wimbum\textsuperscript{11}. And other Cameroonian indigenes who suffered the wrath of robust harassment and extortion from Nigerian frontier control officials.

**Eddy as a Porter**

Human porterage was the most widespread modes of transport used by bush traders. This was owing to the terrain which was not motorable and to a good extent on the nature of the trade that was not overt. The carriage of goods could be on the head or at the back depending on the degree of bulkiness or fragility. Some economic historians like Ogunremi(1996) contend that in many parts of West Africa where water ways and packed animals could not be used, [human porterage] remained the only means of transportation; and is why it is often referred to as the ‘pillar of the economy’.

It was in this context of great necessity that bush trade relied ostensibly on the carrier boys who were not only good at ‘lifting and moving’ but were equally very skillfully in navigating border control units. While working for themselves to make earns meet, they were indirectly or directly sharing the risks of their entrepreneurs and at the same time making them ‘men of

\textsuperscript{11} Wimbum is a collective rendition for an extensive ethnic group spread over several villages on the Nkambe plateau of the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon. The term equally stands for the language spoken by the people in this broad social categorization.
fortune’. As an active participant in bush trade, Eddy began life in the bush trade social field in two capacities—first as already mentioned in his life profile as a small kola nut trader. In the second place, he played the role of a ‘carrier boy’ like most of the young boys of his generation.

As a human ‘automobile machine’, Eddy carried trade consignments and at times goods for domestic\(^{12}\) use for different trading entrepreneurs to and from Nigeria. The goods he most often carried from Cameroon included metallic zinc for house construction, cartoons of savon, buckets of maize and at times goats. From Nigeria, he carried fuel (in 40 and 50 litres capacities), parts of grinding mills and motor cycle accessories. At times, he joined caravans that carried vehicle spare parts. The average load he carried weighed approximately 40 kg. With this load capacity, he covered about 5 km an hour. This speed combined with his brief periods of sojourning to recuperate energy could give him a distance coverage of 35 km at seven hours per day movement. It usually took Eddy two to three days to move to and from Nigeria. The duration most often depended on the weight of the goods and to an extent the delicateness of the goods. Carrying firearms, liquor and gun powder or cartridges necessitated some extra prudence and strategization which took some days. Eddy and his companions had to have good intelligence information concerning the location of control units on patrols before they could set out for their return trip. Carrying these articles of trade was hardly easy considering the rough topography that was most often worsened by steep ascents and descents let alone wild savannah

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\(^{12}\) Eddy transported goods from Ngorije to Bi and beyond under the request of John Ngwako (A Nigerian sergeant whose birth origin was Bi, Eddy’s village of origin.). Eddy used to transport across the borders different consignments of goods. In one occasion, he carried musical installations which were offered by the military official turned-‘born-again Christian’ to a local Pentecostal church in his home village. Eddy had come to know the sergeant of Bi origin through the courtesy of one of his brothers who was residing in Nigeria.
stretches and dangerous crossings over streams and rivers especially the Donga and Katsina Ala (See map…). Takor (2007) support this view of the risk associated with the hydrological network that traders had to go through when he says “they could be very dangerous during the period of rains when they out flew their banks. This made crossing and movement daring and precarious”.

An interesting aspect in Eddy’s life as a porter is perhaps the general way in which he fitted himself in the porter institution. Porters from Dumbo like in Ako most often collaborated. They had common hours that they moved with goods and common places they sojourned during transportation trips. An example of a place that was well established as a resting point for traders from Dumbo was Bambewata (mentioned in Gilbert’s life episode in Chapter 4). In Eddy’s estimation human porterage in bush trade was meant for ‘men and for male only’. According to him, it needed a ‘woman in the form of a man’ to be part of the world of porters where belonging in it was not only limited by endurance under the strain of the weight of load but also by the risk to brave the dark hours of the day to move with goods. As exposed in chapter four, traders and porters with unregulated goods moved at nocturnal hours. They moved most often in the early hours of the day after midnight and made sure their goods were at the intended destinations at dusk.

The Garoua Airlift
Eddy’s most scenic and memorable event in his bush trade life happened in 1996 when he was caught along side some of his friends. Not only were their goods confiscated, they were also interned in a border cell at Gembu-Nigeria
where they were subjected to torture and later nocturnally airlifted and dropped in Garoua. Such a treatment was part of a string of rigorous measures that the Nigerian dictator, Abacha put in place in the midst of heightened political tension between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi border principalities. During this period, Eddy says Cameroonians venturing into Nigeria without official credentials were subjected to swallow-arrests and intimidation. As if to give a ‘bad name to a dog before hanging it’ (victims of a disrupted political entente), Nigerian police officials pejoratively called Cameroonians, pagans. It was in this political context that Eddy, as a young man measured the extent of his vitality. Already considered dead by some of the friends who narrowly escaped the arrest at Gembu, Eddy spent two weeks in Garoua in a refugee camp and was later given a travelling pass that took him back to his land of birth in Bi. He got a hilarious welcome from his family and most especially his trading friends. His life experience had become somewhat different. He was the first among his generation of young village adventurers who boarded an helicopter and who had gone as far as Garoua. His travelling and living experiences was packed full with stories that many in his generation could not lead. Eddy had become a hero constructed out of a ‘social accident’.

Interestingly, the Garoua episode did not change Eddy’s attitude towards going to Nigeria for ‘blind trade’. A few weeks after getting back to Bi, he continued his Nigerian adventures and went through similar difficulties with border controlling officials. Amidst the difficulties, he stood determined to compensate the profit margin, he had lost during his period of commercial inactivity. Such a determination paid off as he made some fast gains after some few trips with which he diversified into other commercial concerns. In the first place. He followed the wise counsel of the
mother who cautioned him to invest in the herding of goats, a domain that was fast becoming very lucrative. As an obedient son, he heeded to this advice and got ten goats. This was gradually increased in the course of time to twenty-six. This capital investment and the gains that Eddy was still making in his Nigerian trips gave him another opportunity to exhibit his vitality. He had the urge to break the monopoly of the Nigerian trade for a less stressful adventure to Douala. It was the expanding Chinese low cost goods that had lured him out of the Nigerian route. Attention was now drifted to moving to Douala every fortnight to buy goods. What is important about this process of commercial diversification is the impact left by Eddy. He had become a relatively wealthy young guy with a social potential to flirt with as many girls as possible in his community as well as in his trade localities. Such an advantage, made him a hero of his time. He was the target dream of many young boys and most especially girls who wanted him for a husband. In his exuberance, he gave tough times to so many girls but ended up getting married to two. He could support his juniors like elderly siblings.

**Approaching Masculinity from Eddy’s Context**

From the life story of Eddy can be extrapolated expressions of masculinity at least from an actor-centric standpoint in bush trade. Such an analysis of the link between bush trade and masculinity needs a lucid appreciation of the concept of masculinity which although appearing simple is quite fluid and might translate differently in different situations and interpretative contexts.

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13 The domestication and herding of goats and other domestic livestock is more or less a part of the cultural heritage of the people of the Nkambe plateau like it is among most communities in traditional Bamenda. It was and it is still a form of capital accumulation and insurance against unforeseen and at times planned investments. From the proceeds of goats, strategic family problems are solved. School fees for children are paid out of it. It is also used as an entry fee into some secret societies and also to consult some traditional herbalists. Generally the importance of the goat, especially the black type goes beyond exchange for money.
The case of the Wimbum and Mbembe who occupy most of the Donga-Mantung Division of Cameroon complements Eddy’s life’s exploit to expose the multiple ways through which masculinity is discussed. Among these groups, masculinity represented to a great extent what a male had to be and do in order to insert himself within the ranks of those who mattered. It was a process social ascription that culminated in some social recognition. The means of attaining this social position differed between levels of social interactions. At the level of the village social governance, it just sufficed among other exploits to be brave at traditional warfare, have dexterous hunting talents, command exceptional clairvoyance or supernatural powers capable of detecting unpleasant occurrences or be a courageous itinerant trader who ventured far away from the village. Such exploits ended up with the attribution of honorifics that distinguished them from other men in the society.

At the family level, it was very common for parents to betroth their female children of marital age to ‘men of substance’. These were men whose social accomplishments were assessed in terms of the degree of comfort and satisfaction they could bring to the girl and the family as a whole. They had to be men capable of giving sexual pleasure to their wives as well as procreating so many children. More still, they were to be those who could fetch wood and keep the barns filled all year round, supply meat and oil and generally they had to be ready to sacrifice their comfort to wedge the societal constrains that could keep the wife and family at jeopardy.

One key term that summarizes the perception of masculinity, at least from the foregoing examples is vitality of the male folk. Put differently, it is the ‘performative excellence’ of manliness that counts more than merely being born male (Herzfeld 1985:16). Better still, Eddy’s expression of
masculinity could be situated within the framework of the conflated definition of masculinity that Gutman (1997:385-386) mentions. He holds that there are at least four distinct ways that anthropologists define and use the concept of masculinity and the related notion of male identity, manhood, manliness and men’s roles. The first concept of masculinity according to him is by definition anything that men think and do. The second is that masculinity is anything men think and do to be men. The third is that some men are inherently or by ascription considered ‘merely manly’ than other men. The final manner of approaching masculinity emphasizes the general and central importance of male-female relations so that masculinity is considered anything that women are not.

Looking at these definitions from an etic point of view, Eddy’s expression of masculinity tends to capture all the definitions. But a closer examination might translate somewhat different. Eddy like the others who venture in bush trade are not necessarily compelled by the desire of meeting the oft mentioned philosophy of African traditional societies for males to attain manhood, exhibit male identity, express manliness or play men’s roles as Gutman’s (1997) definitional imagination posits. Even more misleading is the perception that Eddy like his social cleavage saw masculinity as the biological edge that a man was by dint of ‘first creation’ (The view of Christians), suppose to have over the woman. The process of gender fabrication in bush trade should be seen more or less as part of the multi-variant ways by which people sharing a common social trade map themselves and leave frontiers (where negotiation) as to neighborliness and mutual and at times conflictual relations are bound to exist
Pseudo Names, another form of identity construction

As I went around the localities of Misaje, Dumbo, Berebe, Ako, Abongshie (in the Donga-Mantung Division of Cameroon) and Abong in the Taraba State of Nigeria, during my field encounter, my interest was to garner information related to the ‘second’ or parallel commercial economy’ or as MacGaffey et al.,(1991) summarily calls it the ‘black economy’. My primary objective was to find out the string of economic and socio-political motivations that spurred people to enlist into this type of economy which I have re-named ‘bush trade’. Although sentimentally attached to this research locus, my field encounter revealed other interesting aspects which acted as a caveat to reshape the conceptual framework of my research interest.

One of the most striking aspect that could not leave my attention indifferent was the different names—showy and most often thought-provoking, forms of names that most, if not all of the active participants of the bush trade carried as a form of identification. What was very evident from my observation was the apparent masking of the birth names or officially registered names. I sought therefore to know why aliases were frequently used by actors involved in the trade. The obvious question that authoritatively loomed in my mind was how and why are such names constructed and to what extent do they represent distinctive trademarks that hedge the bush trader from the wider social community. As an entry point to the discussion on the use of pseudo-linking social identities, it will be proper to explore the different ways by which names can be interpreted as a mere form of identification in different social situations.
Names Seen from Common Sense

In the past like in the present people use(d) names as a means of personal identification. The names attributed differed from one community to the other and represent to a large extent the cultural and historical events associated with such communities. Names are also given to match certain situational occurrences faced by the parents or family during the period of the child’s gestation. It was common place to get names like ‘Trouble’ for new births that gave the parent too much difficulties during delivery. Conversely, a difficult delivery could also be quickly forgotten by attributing some relieving names like Blessing, Favour, Grace, etc. At present names have been linked to contemporary heroes. In most parts of the Nkambe area like the Bamenda region, there were uncountable number of children named Clinton after, Bill Clinton (the US Democratic President-1993-2001) and Desmond after Desmond Tutu the South African Nobel Peace prize winner. Preceding this naming spree was the attribution of Jordan to many male births to crown them with the heroism of the great US basketball star- Michael Jordan.

In traditional Africa, names were usually attributed as a form of re-linking the dead and the living or linking the younger and older generations. Children were named after their grand- parents, or other elderly family relations. There were usually name- giving ritual ceremonies where children were named after certain local heroes like chiefs, village warriors, renowned herbalists and other men of redoubtable exploits. Still, some went by some traditional institutional titles like fon (meaning chief), gwe (meaning warrior) as in Bum. This naming culture was greatly affected by the contact the hinterlands community had with Christian missionary activities. This has
been exposed in the case of the Enewetak people where, Carucci, Hills and Colorado (1984:146) hold that

Once the mission gained a footing, traditional designations were discarded- they became associated with "being in the darkness" (i.e., not yet saved). Early mission preachers expounded on evils which evoked fear of eternal damnation; parishioners readily adopted new names to affirm their acceptance of the word. A biblical name indicated one was a Christian. Within a few years of missionization all married couples were wed in the church, but even before that, children were baptized and given Christian eponyms irrespective of the status of their parents' souls. Moving the naming ceremonies to coincide with baptism confirmed the commitment to Christianity. As an inalienable part of person, biblical praenomen indicated children were born in innocence, as children of God

Names as used in this manner, although appearing complex in character can easily be taken to mean words that a person is known by. It is a form of multi-variant identification which Lindsky (1977) in Carucci, Hills and Colado’s (1984:143) estimation

[defines] persons in terms of set categories of existence. Names pointed out commonalities with culturally defined events, with parts of nature, or with markers of social distinction. Names also indicated how people had failed to accomplish feats, how they differed from others, or how inept they may have been in encounters with the wild. These appellations were assigned on the basis of appropriateness.
Their semantic content associated souls, living or dead, with significant occurrences. Names for ancient Enewetak residents thus had philosophical "sense" as well as "reference".

Names once attributed are not fixed, there can change depending on the expectant social changes in the life of an individual. This holds true of Fjellman and Gohen’s (1984) captivating account of a prince of Nseh, Benjamin Fonseh who on 23 April 1980 in Kumbo [Cameroon], legally changed his name to Benjamin Gham Shang. In an enticing manner they connect this situational occurrence with the wider social, historical and political context14 in which Benjamin was embroiled. In a conclusive manner, they contend that the change of names had two motivations – Benjamin wanted to hide his connection to Nseh in order to get on politically in the Kumbo-Centered modern sector. The hiding of his identity was equally an affront to Nseh pride, nursed out of good deal of anger directed at him in Nseh. This observation of metamorphosing names to suit dynamic social processes of identification has been captured elsewhere by Mann (2002:311) who intimates that:

[...] families and individuals occasionally adopt new family names in order to signal their occupation or status, since the connections between names and occupations vary regionally, as do the names themselves. In other circumstances, families might adopt new [names] in order to change their status; thus Jean-Loup Amselle claims that

14 This was the political imbroglio between the Fondom of Nso and the Chieflet of Nseh in Bui Division of Cameroon described by Goheen. See M. Goheen, “Chiefs, Sub Chiefs and Local Control: Negotiations over land, Struggles over Meaning”, in B. Chem Langhee, and V.G. Fanso, Nso’ and its Neighbours: Readings in Social History, Massachusetts: Amherst College, 1996 pp 399-416.
after wars ravaged pre-colonial Wasulu, a region southwest of Bamako, some men sought to escape death or enslavement by "passing themselves off" as nyamakalaw (specifically as numuw or blacksmiths).

In particular, frequent shifts in family names and the adoption of aliases make it difficult to trace individuals across distinct registers of evidence (Mann, 2002:310). Names seen from common sense leaves us with little or no insight beyond the scope of personal identification and perhaps distantiation. Names, incisively examined can “place one in direct association with historical sequences and situational social processes as well as a uniqueness of character. Through personal names marked commonalities between persons and their social trades can be established. An attempt will be made here to re-think and actualize the important role aliases play in the ‘bush trade cultural world’. The theme will be appreciated from the prism of evidence extracted from my field observations as well as from some life stories.

A Gaze in the Pseudo-naming Social Matrix

As a researcher on the field, I equally had the opportunity to observe directly some of the social phenomena I was out to investigate and knit into a coherent story. This made me a living witness of a social process I would have abstractly collected from informants. Perhaps, this technique of constructing social reality demonstrates the extent to which anthropology commands the social and humanistic sciences. In this part of the chapter, I shall quickly describe my travelling experiences. This will be a vital step in
gazing through the eyes of the researcher to savor his position on the use of pseudo names in bush trade.

‘The car encounter’
It was about 5.30pm on October 13, 2008, when I boarded a clumsy-old scrapped Toyota DX sedan carrier from Misaje to Dumbo. It was in a noisy and congested day (in Misaje) which no doubt stood to express the concurso of buyers and sellers like other social gatherings that gave the periodic market days in Misaje, its characteristic distinctiveness. The noise-crammed atmosphere that came from the hustling and bustling of the market square was fading off to a new imagination in my mind. It was all about how twelve of us were going to occupy the five-seats sedan car whose technical state was highly doubtful. It could only have been my worry but the park boys were just doing their normal loading routine and the other passengers were already accustomed to the squeezing boarding. At the time of departure it was an eight-man heaving inside car. I had gotten a place on the driver’s seat to his left which I complained but was consoled by a nearby passenger who made me to understand that my position was the ‘executive type’ because I was new to the system. True enough, this was perhaps better than the space occupied by four other passengers who hung like ‘smart cats’ on the car carriage having paid the same fare like those of us in the cabin. In such a congested setting one could have only expected a nightmarish trip. It seemed so at the beginning as the road was rough and dreary expressing in full measure a preceding season of rains that had gullied lines of least resistance along the road.

What would have otherwise been a bad experience soon turned to be interesting as during the 35minutes ‘horse ride’, I was fascinated by the
cream of names that the young guys in the car used to call each other. I got names like ‘Ndolo,’ ‘Power,’ ‘Commandant’ and ‘Fru Ndi’ which beat my imagination. The names appeared common and could be interpreted at least by many in different ways. Ndolo, in my faint apercu of Duala, the likely origin of the word meant ‘life’. Power, literary perceived meant energetic. This could be true because the figure behind the name was of well built wrinkled muscular-masculine physic. Commandant on his part could just be a leader with imposing character. It may well have been so for the young man whose voice at any stop to give the car a support on the bad roads was authoritative. For Fru Ndi, it was my guess that the name had been adopted from the ‘ace and lion-hearted’ Bamenda based politician and chairman of the Social Democratic Front Party (SDF) who challenged the single party Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) regime in the 1990s and led Cameroon into a multi-party democracy. Could this name mean the guy was interested in politics or was it an attribute to the politician’s kind of braveness? It was this puzzling question that led me to plan a conversation at Dumbo with these guys who were quite ready to grant me an audience the next day after we alighted from the car. In a relatively calm day, at Dumbo, as the sun was ‘withdrawing its power of illuminating the land’, we got into a small grocery and beer off-license in Barrack Quarters where I offered the four boys something to sip as a means to win their time and interest.

In some sought of a light hearted beginning, our conversation began with life and politics in Dumbo which left names like ‘Fru Ndi’. Fru Ndi alias Jato Kimeng said he was not interested in politics because politicians were very dishonest persons who thought more of themselves than for the common folk like himself. Life to him was nothing more than what he could make out of his personal exploits. In his words
Country don spoil for way weh man must try for survive. I be suffer boy weh e no get back. I di use my head for live. We all for here di go Nigeria buy things dem. I be start buy na fungeh but kaki people dem di over worri we because the cargo big plenty. Now I di mostly deal na with gun powder and medicine like paracetamol and quinine for pains and malaria. (Interview 14th October, 2008)

The country is badly run leaving each person to struggle to survive. I am a struggling boy without any support. I live by my intelligence. All of us sitting in here go to Nigeria to buy goods. I started with the fuel business but was discouraged because of its bulky nature that made it very visible to the uniform [police and customs’] controls. At present I deal in gun powder and some pharmaceutical products like paracetamol and quinine for pains and malaria. (Translation is mine).

Such a pronouncement was a clear indication that ‘Fru Ndi’ alias Jato was part of the bush trade economy and perhaps his name too was a circumscriptive shade that could be further quarried to get more meaning. Reacting about the source of the name, he says it came because of his courage. He had been caught on four occasions by border control officials but was always able through skillful intrigues to make his way out. The most common act of braveness to which his friends always remember him for was his courage to transport cartridges, gun powder and liquor across border control posts undaunted. He got the name Fru Ndi as a mark of his courage in going through obscurity in the most relaxed manner.

It was evident from Fru Ndi’s account that most of the names of his peers had been adulterated to re-live a particular social experience. This was
very telling with Bam Mbunwe alias Commandant’s experience. Bam, was an indigene of Ndu who had shifted his livelihood frontiers from his birth town on the Nkambe plateau towards the Nigerian border route that went through Dumbo (see map…). He was a young man of about 27 with a weird facial expression and a coarse voice seemingly caused by an undisciplined culture of smoking and alcoholic consumption. Although appearing slim in size, his voice and tone of speaking and perhaps his close to 1.85m height gave him an imposing personality. Like his friend ‘Fru Ndi’, Bam had been a porter for close to ten years. He started accompanying trade caravans to Nigeria when he was barely seventeen. As a young ambitious boy, he had ran into several problems with border control units, some in which he was detained and others where he had his luggage confiscated. Such ordeals among others emboldened him to the extent that he one day led a group of four in Nigeria that had some Nigerian border control authorities who had intercepted them and pressed for a cash compensation beaten. It was an exceptional act of bravery which sent strong signals to Dumbo and arouse an unparallel resistance among the other young bush traders who had been victims of harassment and extortion. It was in such logic of intervention that Bam Mbunwe muted his birth and official names for the name ‘commandant.’ The case of ‘Ndolo’ alias Francis Weila and ‘Power’ alias Genesis Mengang stood in the same context of shading official names to construct inclusive social identities.

The regular use of pseudo names in this perspective runs in consonance to a culture of associating people with certain events, situations and generally to put them in ‘social containers’. It is very common especially among peers to forget about their given and surnames and adopt new names, most often generated out of their social interactions. For
instance I have about four friends with whom we share the identity 
Dontsop\textsuperscript{15}. The use of names in bush trade certainly has its own story. It is 
consistent with the obscure character of the trade. To a large extent, it is an 
attempt to include the different actors within a common social niche. It is 
evidently clear that these names translate differently and inform varied 
processes of inclusion, exclusion and heroism. Such variation in the use and 
interpretation of names in this social context is not necessarily evidence of a 
‘loosely defined’ social situation, nor should it necessarily be taken as an 
expression of individual-actor choices dismembered from larger social 
constraints.

In the context of this chapter, the use of aliases should be seen more 
or less as the power of defining and controlling a social situation-the bush 
trade. It should also be seen as the ingenuity of bush traders as a group or 
individuals to make choices harmonious to a sense of the place of interaction 
in the definition of self. Identity construction seen from this perspective 
becomes an important basis from which we can appreciate and understand 
the social processes which in one go defines, expounds and exposes the 
intricacies inherent in the bush trade economy. The bush trade economy far 
from conjecture is a ‘traffic island’ patterned in its own ways, one of which 
is the apparent use of pseudo names whose interpretation demonstrates both 
the power of defining a semi-autonomous social field with distinct 
behavioral choices. Names, especially aliases, are part of the strategies that

\textsuperscript{15} Paul Dontsop was a Cameroon Minister of Foreign Relations in the early 1980s. We got to identify 
ourselves with such a name out of a frustrating attempt to garner information on this personality for a class 
assignment in the university. This was because it was the first time we were getting to know that the given 
personality was among the great figures of Cameroon History. For over two weeks we searched in the 
major documentation centers, attempted some oral interviews but at best we could only have a sketchy data 
on the personality. We had no choice but to insert the personality within his wider political setting and 
develop the assignment. After miraculously going through the daunting task, we started calling each other, 
Paul Dontsop, a name that goes up to date.
bush traders use to distinguish themselves from the wider social community. The importance of names needs not to be overemphasized as it has been the central interest of the science of onomastics. What is perhaps important is the multiple dimensions that can be used to make meaning out of names. It suffices here to catch a glimpse of what names represent in the lay man’s mentality to better understand how their mutation suggest another social insertion of personal and group identification.

**Other Aliases with Veiled Meanings**

Extrapolating from the life story of Gilbert (See Chapter 4), we can further make strong meanings out of the names that were used in his social milieu. Names like John kikai in a lay man’s perspective can simply be his identifier. Away from this, it can mean John from Kikaikilaiki, a locality in the Nso’ Chiefdom of Cameroon. To Gilbert, a bushtrader, the name John Kikai reminded him of the provenance of one of his most strategic trade commodity-marijuana. Each time allusion was made to the name, it was like nursing a strategy through John’s courtesy to get some trade consignments of marijuana. The use of the name, John Kikai, as exposed here shows beyond reasonable doubts that the attribution of pseudo names were not haphazardly done. They follow strict-senso a traffic organizational strategy that the layman could not easily understand. In their veiled identity, the bush traders appropriate identities which to them express manliness. Manliness and all what male chauvinism incarnates as a criteria of circumscribing bush traders from their wider social environment is embedded in a cultural perception of male vitality that delineates the social field. Masculinity or the traditional perception of what a man should be in society becomes a
complementary aspect rather than an anomalous concept that bush traders their characteristic distinctiveness.

Conclusion
In this chapter I have so far argued that pseudo names and masculinity are two central themes that complementarily go to give us a closer understanding of what the bush trade social field is. Drawing from some randomly chosen names, I have in the first instance illustrated the general perception that people have as far as names are concerned. In these cases, names for the most part have simply been a form of identification, although at times they could mean beyond that when they are muted to respond to anticipated status, societal constrains and any form of social re-edification. In such situations the names have hardly been so engraved in meanings as to profoundly illustrate how a group of persons can veil their names for reasons other than mere identification. Pseudo names have been used here to show how local ingenuity in shading personalities can produce and reproduce a cultural community of people who claim manly attributes. Masculinity has been interwined with pseudo names to show how bush traders construct their own social niche.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE RISK FACTOR, THE ORDEAL OF TRYING EXPERIENCES

Introduction
The chapter interrogates the concept of risk in bush trade from two central positions. On the one hand, it attempts to track risk as a context-auguring factor related to the wider setting of uncertainty inherent in the broader borders of the social or cultural field of Bush trade. Cameroon is presented as this social fabric where constrained political, and socio-economic circumstances leaves people to negotiate choices between containing the contempt of the system and supporting its continuity or going out of it and creating alternative strategies of livelihoods. The second pre-occupation on its part will focus on risks as experienced and maneuvered by the bush trader in the semi-autonomous social field or the cultural social entity of bush trade. The chapter takes up the theme of risk in a broader context to demonstrate how the affront between social incertitude and situational adjustment leads to an unending process of solution-seeking or indeterminacy. The chapter shall argue that risk is most often an

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16 The concept of indeterminacy appeared in Sally Falk Moore’s chapter on “Uncertainties in Situations, Indeterminacies in Culture”, in *Law as Process, an Anthropological Approach* published in 1978. It tries to reduce the insistence on whether a focus on regularity and consistency should be replaced by a focus on change, on process overtime, and on paradox, conflict, inconsistency, contradiction, multiplicity, and manipulability in social life. (1978:37).
Problematising risk

You know we are in a business that is ‘not straight’. It is very risky. After all, life is all about risk. We have several ways of managing this risk to make ourselves safe... Risk in our business is usually spread because of the understanding that reigns among us. In most cases we are one another’s keeper. This bond is very telling in the way we help each other to avoid or come out of problems. Whether here on the Cameroon side of the border, or across the border in Nigeria, we have the common philosophy that ‘man lives by man’. In as much as we struggle to overcome difficulties there are always some moments when we regret entering into this type of activity.  

The following remark is meant to connect us to the perception of risk in bush trade. It provokes the questions; what is risk? How is it manipulated and what results does it produce? The use of such a concept finds great harmony with the ‘obscure’ character of the trade. It measures the attempt by the different actors to resist external forces that has the tendency of generating uncertainty but at the same time compelling even the most unwilling social generation to find opportunities in a new social identity constituency. It is evident that the concept of risk translates differently and

17 This is an excerpt of an interview with Tam Gilbert alias Mebreada, on July 16th, 2009, at Holy Quarters in Ndumbo. A border locality in Cameroon some 40km from Nkambe, the Divisional headquarters.
informs varied processes of social alternative strategies of survival and resistance. This analytical framework can be deduced from the life story of a bush trader-Tam Gilbert alias Mebreada.

Risk is a central part of livelihood in the developing [like in the developed world]. It affects many different aspects of peoples’ livelihoods. It affects whether people can maintain assets and endowments, how these assets are transformed into incomes via activities and how these incomes and earnings are translated into broader development outcomes. Risky events are treated as ‘exogenous’ not directly under the control of people. (Dercon, 2005:483-488). In response to this, people appropriate safeguarding measures as strategies to survive present challenges and to ‘buy the future’. By so doing as Dercon (2005) intimates, ‘informal community or network-based-risk-sharing arrangements are made’. The result of such a social linking network is the formation of a cultural community apparently distinctive in the way its people view and manage risk and most especially the manner in which they try to reduce the incertitudes of the future.

While I acknowledge that there are different approaches to risk analysis, I am however, beholdened by the fact that much emphasis has been invested on its causative origin and its result, which is vulnerability. This line of reasoning has denominated most of the health related and to an extent disaster-proned research surveys. In this generalized context of viewing unforeseeable societal constrains, risk has been presented as common or economic wide occurrence that affects the social fabric and leaves it vulnerable. Risk appreciated in this manner gives scant concern to the role of

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individual agency in negotiating choices at neck-tied situations. Risk as presented in this chapter goes beyond its concerted or economic-wide scope to include idiosyncratic manipulations by individuals in the interminable process of checking the shocks of the social environment and managing and mastering difficulties and uncertainties.

Tam Gilbert alias Mebreada
As I went round in the localities of Ako, Bi and Dumbo (all in Donga-Mantung Division) close to the Nigerian borders, I quickly noticed that there were a good number of boys who were always ready to catch an opportunity that demanded moving to Nigeria to get some goods which unquestionably had some comparative economic advantage. Arriving in Dumbo on Wednesday July 16, 2008 which coincided with their local market day\textsuperscript{19}, I got into one of the market stalls at the eastern end of the market place where some energetic and exuberant youths were entertaining themselves with corn beer, a local brewery.

Convinced that such a gathering was certainly going to be part of a relaxation spree after tedious and tiring weeklong activities, I carefully followed for sometime the discussions that ensued in the drinking spot. Well, it was all about comparing life in Cameroon and Nigeria. For some time, it was as if the discussions did not interest another group of six guys whose facial expressions could not deceive me that they belonged to the age cohort of 25-30 years. Their discussion was strongly focused on a caravan trip to Nigeria. Interesting as it was, I was a bit lost for some time as the

\textsuperscript{19} The market in Ndumbo like most part of traditional Bamenda Grasslands still respects the eighth day periodic rhythm as described by hills\textsuperscript{(1963)}. For further interest see P.Hills, “Markets in Africa”, in the Journal of Modern African Studies, vol.1, no.4, December 1963, pp.441-453.
discussion was very much coded in style and content. All I knew was that, it was a story about one of their trade deals. In the whole scenario, I could not remain indifferent as I had to probe in with some comments that kept most of them wondering where I was coming from and the purpose of my trip. In some sort of an imposing voice, one of them introduced himself to me as *ngumba boy*²⁰ and stood still to know who I was. I was however not threatened by this but knew it was just a matter of courtesy to introduce myself and inform them of my mission. In this exchange, I enlivened the atmosphere by offering a round of the corn beer that was the galvanizing force, at least, in the gathering. This brought me closer to the guys. Among this group of boys, I arranged to meet Mebreading whom I found particularly interesting because of the reverence or respect that the rest of the boys were giving to him in the corn-beer ‘social fellowship’

Chesi Gilbert Ngong alias *mebreada* was born in Dumbo in 1980. He is the fourth in line among the nine children of Abel Kong and Bridget Naati who lived at Holy Quarters, one of the residential units in Dumbo. Like the other cases we have examined in the previous chapter, he was a product of the risk economy of Cameroon. While a teenager in primary school the parents were poor and so could not take care of his school needs. At times he had to pay his school fees and buy some of his books. He had to devise a strategy of catering for himself. One of the ways he coped with this was to enter a petty trade in two key basic necessities-oil and kerosene, selling a few bottles and making some small gains. It became a routine for him; after classes he had to hawk around the village with oil and kerosene. He confessed that he did everything possible when an opportunity availed to

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²⁰ See Chapter of the use of pseudo-names as and the multivariate expression of social distinctiveness in Bush trade.
boycott classes in the afternoon so as to have enough time for his petty trade that was running on a meager but symbolic capital of 5000cfa francs, (about 7, 6 Euros) given to him by the father under a threatening voice which he understood as an investment that had to yield dividends in the nearest future.

While he was happily doing his local petty trade, some of his peer mates, whose courage he admired and hoped to emulate were already trading, far beyond Dumbo. Some were already venturing to Abafum (one of the last Cameroonian settlements towards Nigeria), before the teeming present and historic border trade center of Bissula in Nigeria. These young men had discovered some lofty business in trading maize and groundnuts that they made known to Gilbert. They were making a hundred percent profits in their transactions as exemplified by their purchasing and selling costs. A bucket of maize bought for 2500cfa francs in Dumbo, fetched 5000cfa francs across the borders in Nigeria. The profit margin per trip could be greater depending on the number of buckets successfully carried. Energy and stamina to resist the weight of load could be an additional impetus to become rich. This quick profit maximization attracted Gilbert who was not making even a quarter of what his friends were gaining in a business trip.

After completing from primary school in 1994, the inability of the parents to foot his academic bills exacerbated. This complemented the zest he had nursed out of his friends’ commercial adventure to motivate him into the Nigerian traffic. He describes his first attempt of trading beyond the confines of his locality of birth with some nostalgia in the following lines:

*I left Dumbo one day with friends at about 5.30a.m trekking to Sabongidda. Arriving Sabongidda we rested for about 30 minutes to*
recuperate energy for another tedious stretch that had to take about 45 minutes. The next stop was at Bambewatta\textsuperscript{21} where we rested for 15 minutes and took another decisive one hour face-twisting journey where communication could only be heard from the rhythmic placing of foot steps. This stretch led to Gidda Njikum (another Cameroonian border settlement). We had to take half an hour to refresh ourselves because the next lapse leading to Abafum had to go for two hours thirty minutes. This trip ended in Abafum where we bought groundnuts and corn. Although, a polity in the Cameroon sphere of the border, Abafum\textsuperscript{22} shared so many characteristics with the neighboring Nigerian economy. The main currency in use there was the naira and there were just as many Nigerians like Cameroonians living there.

When Gilbert got to Abafum in his maiden journey, he bought a bucket of groundnut at the rate of 150 naira which was 1000cfa francs, the equivalence in terms of exchange with the Cameroonian cfa francs currency. Finding the commodity comparatively cheap, Gilbert bought (even without assessing his physical stamina to transport the load back to Dumbo) 2 buckets of groundnuts for 300 naira, (2000cfa francs). As a new man in the business he could not follow the pace of his friends who were already

\textsuperscript{21} Bambewatta is a name given after the social importance of the locality where traders especially carrier boys or porters locally called bambe, sg. bamba, pl.) stopped to refresh themselves with fresh water and food. It was equally a meeting points were members of the caravan regrouped to move together especially in moments of insecurity. The place still carries its historic significance today and is well known by all the bush traders.

\textsuperscript{22} The example of Abafum is just a case in time to show how border communities create their own context of social and economic interactions. In most cases, the domineering state elbows its neighbors and exerts economic influence beyond its borders. Such situations usually come when the state system concentrates on the center and and neglects the borders. The case of Ako, where I did a survey for this research and Furuawah in Menchum Division is a clear illustration of how the state of Cameroon has neglected it borders to the advantage of Nigeria that signals its presence through its currency and an ever expanding commercial population.
adapted to the stress and duress, let alone the rugged terrain they had to cover back under the weight of load to Dumbo. He had to sojourn at Gidda Njikum before continuing the trip to Dumbo where he had no doubt about a ready market that was waiting his new trade commodities. After disposing of the first trade consignments, Gilbert took a two days rest to recuperate energy exhausted during the first trip. On the third day, he joined the road again, this time around not to get just two buckets but four. Two of the buckets of groundnuts had to be carried by one young carrier boy (locally called *Bambe*, he had hired. This time around he followed the same itinerary but with little difficulties as he was already gaining mastery of the terrain and the system. Getting back to Dumbo, Gilbert sold the four buckets of groundnuts and made even greater gains. This routine went on for about a year when it dawned on him to diversify his trading sphere. Whether because of the high quest for greater gains or uncertainty for groundnuts since it was a product of a rain fed economy or the internal competition that peer pressure was building up in Gilbert’s social field, he turned to the trade in illicit petrol that was locally called *fungeh*.

**Gilbert and the Fuel trade**

Gilbert diverted to *fungeh* trade under the pretext that groundnuts was too bulky. This justification is, less convincing when we come to fully understand his entry into the fuel business. It suffices here to say a 10 liters volume of groundnuts can not be heavier than a 40, at times 50 liters volume of fuel that he later transported further than the provenance of groundnuts. To start the *fungeh*, Gilbert could not rely only on the capital that he had made in the previous trade. He had to solicit the assistance of his father, by
then a petty trader in pharmaceutical products.\textsuperscript{23} This was more so because it was a trade that demanded some significant financial and fixed assets capital. After buying containers his father once again came to his aid and supported him with the sum of 80000cfa francs. This money was added to 160000cfa francs which was what Gilbert had acquired from his previous trade. The center of the fuel trade was in the Nigerian border town of Bissula.

From the groundnut trade, Gilbert entered into another network of friends who were all making their livings out of the \textit{fungeh} traffic. He usually left along side these friends from Dumbo to Bissula. At Bissula, 50 liters of fuel sold for 10,000cfa francs. During the first trip, he got three containers, that is 150 liters. When this fuel got to Dumbo, a 50 liters container made an interest of 15000cfa francs giving him a net balance of 10000cfa francs as 5000cfa francs each went to the ‘carrier boys’. After about half a year in business, Gilbert’s financial capital unprecedentedly increased to about 400,000 cfa francs.

\textbf{Bridging Opportunities, creating new Risks}

There was time when Bissula had political tension with the neighbouring polities of Kotep and Kossasi. The feud which emanated from the attempt of Bissula to reduce Kotep and Kossasi to tribute paying vassal states led to outright skirmishes which severed diplomatic links between the communities. In this state of affairs Bissula suffered most as it had over the years relied on food supply from the neighbourhoods of Kotep and Kossasi. The skirmish interrupted communication for some time between the

\textsuperscript{23} This may contradict Gilbert’s earlier mentioning of his parents as being poor. Poverty to him was more or less the inability of the parents to pay his school fees and meet his school needs. The sum of 80000 cfa francs was quite enough money to send him to school but certainly that was not his father’s plans for him.
settlements and by implication food supply to Bissula. This unfortunate situation was a price that the people of Bissula had to pay but a ‘prize’ or reward for Gilbert whose onward struggle to manage the existing economic and social risk was leading him into an always thinking-process of ‘buying the future’.

Another opportunity had come for Gilbert to expand his insurance scheme. The crisis of food and the suspicion that reigned between the indigenes of the warring communities, made Gilbert who had gained a wide network in Bissula and beyond through the fuel trade, an important figure during the time of no compromise between the communities. He won a contract with a bakery in Dumbo to supply bread to the severed Bissula. His business frame expanded rapidly as he was carrying larger caravans of twelve to fifteen boys to convey bread to Bissula. Gilbert usually ordered bread for about 400,000 cfa francs and re-sold the bread at Bissula for 500,000cfa frs. These boys were equally hired as porters on their return trip to Dumbo. The bread trade had a new orientation as Gilbert made use of the carrier boys in their return trip in a different manner. Instead of sending his trade consignments through them, he sold out their services to other traders who had trade goods to transport back to Dumbo. He also began staying in Bissula for some days, usually three to four days during which time he enlarged his social network and cemented links with the community. The Bissula people were calling affectionately called him *membrede*\(^{24}\) which meant the supplier of bread.

Gilbert was the only one supplying bread in Bissula. He says, he was an icon in that community. His financial capital was moving to the neighborhood of a million within a few months of the bread contract. When

\(^{24}\) The use of names in bush trade have been given closer attention in an independent chapter of the work.
the political tension between the communities diffused and communication links re-opened Gilbert’s bread hey days had come to past. He had saved quite much as insurance to future ‘rainy days’, yet he thought that was not enough guarantee for the unforeseeable future. As a supplement and to ensure continuity, he immediately thought of another business to get into. This time it was easy, for him because financial capital was not a major constrain. His network in Dumbo extended to villages like Sabongida, Fonfuka, Misaje where he got demands to supply cartridges, cosmetics, guns, liquor, chemicals to produce dry gin. This new interest sent him going as far Onitcha in Nigeria where he bought assorted goods. Some people made advanced payments for their goods. With this money Gilberts’ business trip be evaluated at about 3million cfa francs. This new business concern did not close up his earlier interest in the fuel trade. Some diversification was done at this level to expand business and spread risk. From Onitcha he, stopped at Takum where he got the fungeh in drums and transported to Bissula. The fuel was then head loaded by ‘carrier boys’ to Dumbo where it was distributed within a maximum period of two weeks.

Going through the Huddles, another form of risk
The following account of Gilbert’s experience in bush trade focuses particularly on the different obstacles that the young man encounters in his endless efforts to guarantee his future. His life story in this context is directly related to what happens in the semi-autonomous social field and how the different actors adjust to certain constrains. ‘Bush trade,’ as defined in the introductory section of this work had to do with a mirage of unregulated or ‘clandestine’ trade activities that takes advantage of the porous nature of the national borders dividing Cameroon and Nigeria (for
more emphasis see the chapter on the nexus between the state and bush trade). The nature of the terrain alone subjects the actors of the trade to risk. Not only is the landscape accidented and traversed by fast flowing dangerous streams, the presence of dangerous reptiles and most especially ‘men of the underworld’ or band of armed robbers, makes bush trade from its very setting, a risk-laden social field. At the same time, the fact that the bush traders can go around these obstacles in their flexible tactics of absorbing, managing and averting risks, there is no gainsaying that the end product is the ability of a group of persons in society who by dint of their risk-exposed nature, call themselves risk bearers. As risk bearers, they live every moment of their lives in risk, justifying the fact that risk is a never ending social problem.

The life account of the huddles that Gilbert encounters in bush trade leaves room for us to appreciate how the risk factor gives the participant a distinctive characteristic.

Gilbert holds that they used to leave Dumbo to Turuwa, a small village where Nigerian frontier police usually stationed to patrol and guard against clandestine trade which was increasing in character and dimension. At this post, they paid a border fee of 50 naira for a day in Nigeria. If they had to go beyond Bisula, they had to declare what they were going to do at the Nigerian border post. After this declaration, they had to pay for the number of days they were going to spend in Nigeria. Gilbert used to pay about 350 naira for week. After buying his trade articles, he went to the border post and declared his goods. The goods declared were merely assorted commodities ranging from cosmetics to household utensils and detergents. The real trade, (bush trade), never came to the fore, through the “official channel”. It had its own itinerary. One of such products that was
traded behind the scene was, the \textit{fungeh}\textsuperscript{25} fuel, earlier discussed. This and more is made evident in his account when he says; “…But with \textit{Fungeh}. I always escaped from the customs. At times we don’t use to declare all the goods. Things like cartridges and gun powder had to go through the bush.” We used to pass towards the bush. You had to pay the person carrying the risky goods higher than normal in order for him to expressly deliver you at home in Dumbo. If the normal carrying charge was 10000cfa frs, I will give him an extra 5000frs. This movement was strictly nocturnal. When the person was entering Dumbo, he had to do it by mid night or the early hours of the morning. They were so many routes some of which I saw in my field contact. They were mostly footpaths along winding hills and valleys that appeared clear of grass due to continuous to and fro movements by traders. Gilbert refused to describe the routes but however talked of the stretch from Sabongida-big-Wata where they garnered information concerning the location of frontier officers and mobilised strategies on how to circumvent them. From there they meandered in the wild and widely opened savanna passing through strings of small settlements and then reaching a route connecting the chief’s palace in Dumbo.

In Dumbo Gilbert had a ready market to collect the goods he had smuggled from Nigeria. Hunters collected the cartridges which were of two types ‘AA’ and ‘BB’. Gun powder was equally widely distributed because

\textsuperscript{25} Fungeh was the main automobile fuel used by most Cameroonian during the civil strife and ghost town operations in the 1990s when the national refinery corporation (SONARA) suspended distribution as a result of the unsecured political climate. It went by different names like \textit{federal} and \textit{zoa-zoa}. It was very popular source of energy despite its pungent smell. During the 1990s it was used as a weapon by political demonstrators to fight back the forces of law and order as Roitman (2005) describes:

\begin{quote}
People are willing to confront the police because they have petrol. They can burn things and the gendarmes are afraid of being burned alive in their cars or in their houses. And all the people have petrol; its everywhere because of the traffic with Nigeria; it’s all over the streets and in every house. And the gendarmes can’t do anything because they [themselves] are still in the traffic.
\end{quote}

During my field contact, I found it in abundance especially in Ako where it is still the only available source of auto-driving energy.
of its importance during funerals and traditional festivals. Gilbert confesses that trading in arms and ammunitions was very dangerous and risky. If trapped in the deal it was tantamount to imprisonment or an equivalent fine which would have meant ruining him albeit all the precautionary strategies that he had laboured over the years to establish. He was conscious of this but thought, he had the ingenuity to maneuver with the problems inherent in the trade. The traffic in arms went hand in glove with the fungeh trade which Gilbert intimates was ‘his soul of business’. In his determination to remain in business, he came face to face with the crude realities of the field. The threat of armed armed brigands along the enclaved trade routes was always present worry. Brigands in more than one occasion had aggressed him and some of his ‘carrier boys’. This cost him some business losses but never deterred him from risking further in business. As a safe guarding measure, commercial caravans transporting his goods were also armed with poisonous knives and arrows. More still, their numbers increased making it difficult for armed brigands to hold them hostage. This situational description conjures some of the shocks that the bush trade faces with other social fields like that of high way robbery or armed brigands.

Risk in the social field was equally spread to the ‘carrier boys’ in the process of conveying goods. Some used to fall and destroy trade consignments especially fungeh. When it happens the porter lost his hiring commission. So even those who transported trade goods also bore risk because the business organizers used to tell them that any accident was not pardonable. So they had to exhibit dexterity and cautiousness in the course of circumventing customs and police controls along the borders. Negotiations with customs’ officers were usually a ‘B’ plan when all plans to escape their vigilance aborted. ‘Gilbert had to make them his friends’.
When they caught him escaping or any of his articles of trade, an entente had to be reached through some financial compensation. In a cartoon of cartridges of 25 packets (‘AA’ or ‘BB’) he says, they used to ‘settle’ the customs 5000 cfa frs per cartoon. Four for example meant 20000 cfa francs. This could only be done when all expressed means of escaping from them had failed. It was preferable in his imagination to spend 5000frs to pay a ‘carrier boy’ to skillfully carry the goods than risk losing 15000 cfa frs to the customs’ officers. Risk as seen in this account was evident but the certitude to pre-empt it was indeterminate.

Expanding and endearing further risk
By the time I left the field, Gilbert had not stopped negotiating and treading his way through the complex social field characterized by risk. He had come to understand that the social system as (Moore, 1978:37) opines

"... are frequently full of inconsistencies, oppositions, contradictions, and tensions, that there is much individual and situational variation, and that cultural and social change is continuous, though it may take place at a more or less rapid rate and be more or less radical or pervasive."

The extension of Gilbert’s trading network as earlier mentioned was growing far away from his locality of birth Dumbo. It was spreading beyond Donga-Mantung, the Divisional headquarters of Dumbo to Nso’ in Bui Division. Many loved the business but the major problem, as Gilbert had faced in the initial phase of the trade was a significant entry capital. This handicap made so many people to rely on his commercial network. One of
such peoples who later became a close business partner, was a boy of Nso’ origin casually known as Kikai Francis who instigated Gilbert into a new trade in Grinding mills. He got it in Nigeria for about 250000cfa francs and resold in Cameroon for approximately 400000cfa frs. The problem that he encountered was usually to pay porters from Bissula to carry the disassembled block of machine to Dumbo. To transport a mill, he spent about 700000cfa frs for six porters depending on the category and weight that ranged from 10 to 13 horse powers. Through the grinding mill connection and with the links with Kikai Francis, a new era dawned on Gilbert was drawing closer to a new era of situational adjustment (Moore, 1978). In Nigeria he had an intimate friend where he usually slept with each time he was in Bissula. He was called Tijanni who was also trafficking fuel between Takum and Bissula in Nigeria. He was the one who led Gilbert into discovering some commercial avenues in Nigeria.

Up to this juncture Gilbert’s account has been presented as if trade was a mono-directional flow that is traders leaving Cameroon to buy cheaper Nigerian goods and not vice-versa. This perhaps was not necessarily so (although not on equal terms), Nigerians also came to Cameroon to buy things that were deemed comparatively cheaper in Nigeria. Although they were mostly coming to sell in Cameroon, they however bought things like mattresses because it was expensive in Nigeria. Some were dealing in

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26 Kikai Francis is not the legal or official names that will be found on the national identity card or any official credential of this boy. It is an alias or pseudo-name through which he is identified in bush trade. See greater details on the chapter of masquerade identities and masculinity in bush trade.

27 Grinding mills are very common in the corn eating belt of the Bamenda Grasslands. It is found in great numbers in virtually all the localities having as staple corn fufu. Most of the grinding mills which are diesel driven found in localities like Dumbo, Misaje, Fonfuka, Konene and up to Nkambe and Nso’ get into Cameroon clandestinely from Nigeria. See more of this on the chapter relating to masquerade identities and masculinity.
marijuana (Indian hemp). This is the commodity that caught Gilbert’s attention, the most. He carefully assessed the extent of the risk involved through one of his most dreadful and ensanguined experience. This was the death of one of his key trading associate, Yaya Bala.

The death of Yaya Bala and Gilbert’s risk ‘mirror-image’

...we had a network with some frontier police men in Bissula whom we always ‘settled’ with money. We took marijuana to Wukari or Maraba. A bag of marijuana leaves me with an interest of about 100,000 cfa frs. If I bought six to seven bags I was sure of about 500,000 cfa frs (as net return) but the problem was the risk. Those who carried the marijuana were ‘high risk bearers’ and they were remunerated also in like manner.

Yaya was a Bissula indigene in whom Gilbert found the greatest complicity in the marijuana trade. His Nigerian origin and mastery of the system was a perfect complement to Gilbert’s understanding and control of the Cameroonian network. Gilbert was the one who led Yaya and his other Nigerian network deep into the marijuana producing areas of Kuvluv, Kikai, and Nse’ that Kikai Francis had introduced to him in Nso’. When they got into the Nigerian villages it was Yaya who took the relay in leading the group. This division of role between Gilbert was meant to limit risk. Was this risk of being trapped by state authorities really mitigated? They had places in Maraba and Takum were they usually hid the bags of hemp while prospecting for potential buyers who were usually very available. For the

Marijuana trade and consumption is strictly prohibited by law in Cameroon and Nigeria.
market connection, they to an appreciable extent relied on some brokers, one of them was locally known as Bakari Chakara in Takum. He was the one who scouted for customers in Nigeria. In compensation for such risky services, Gilbert and Yaya Bala always gave him some cash motivations when things ran expressly. They functioned like this for a couple of months until one fateful day when arrangements did not move as anticipated and there was just no reason in the calculations of Gilbert and his friend Yaya to leave something for Bakari. Ignoring the state of affairs Bakari, thought it was just but normal to have at least some compensation for the risk of looking for customers to collect the marijuana even if it did not materialize. In his insistence to get this compensation, he met a frustrating encounter from one of Gilbert’s associates who battered him mercilessly.

Finding himself disgraced in public, Bakari headed straight to the police station and betrayed the whole group. In an attempt to escape, from a police intervention, Yaya Bala was shot dead. The others sustained minor injuries while Gilbert, already hardened by years of risk bearing ventures, thought it was more secured to stay put than to escape. His attempt to plead innocent in front of the police yielded no dividends as Bakari’s web of betrayal had also exposed him as the ring leader of the deal. He was arrested in handcupps and interned for seven days in Nigeria. He spent about 15000naira (approximately 150,000cfa frs) to obtain a bail. That was in 2004 when Gilbert was 24years old. This unfortunate event sent Gilbert out of the marijuana trade. He lost money and part of his business consignments. Out of seven bags of marijuana that he had hidden in a restaurant whose owner was also a partner in the transaction, Gilbert only recovered three which he still gathered the courage to sell, the proceeds of which was used to buy a small consignment of assorted goods and pharmaceuticals. This frustrating
situations was not the end of the story, Gilbert continued to organize clandestine trade across the borders in a wide varieties of goods, some of which he said was to complicated for me to understand. Risk to him like to most of his collaborators is the ability to be flexible in times of constrains or in anticipation of constrains, or just another way of life.

**Gilbert, a product of a frustrating social environment**

An emphasis on the range of manipulability within micro-situations[ like the bush trade field] does not do away with the fact that larger political and economic contexts exist, that common symbols, customary behaviors, role expectations, rules categories, ideas and ideologies, rituals and formalities shared by the actors with a larger society are used in this interaction as a framework [...] to exploit the rules and indeterminacies as it suits their immediate purposes, sometimes using one resource, sometimes the other within a single situation, emphasizing the fixity of norms for one purpose, exploiting openings, adjustments, reinterpretatations and redefinitions for another (Moore, 1978:40-41).

Gilbert’s vision and strategy to survive is a clear demonstration of the type of social environment in which he found himself. Cameroon, his country of origin has a history and social setting which can be used to understand in a more comprehensive manner the way the ambitious guy had to negotiate choices of dealing with the risk economy. From the 1980s, around when Gilbert was born, the country was gradually entering a conspicuous period of economic crisis which was caused by the fall in the price of agricultural products in the world market and a staggering inflation. This period of gentle economic stagnation was accentuated by the troubling 1990s when the country like most other African states entered an exciting
period of political upheavals which came as a response to a heightening phase of economic crises that was exacerbated by inept and inefficient state structure.(See Mbu, 1993; Baye, 1998)

‘The Ghost Town Operation’ the Compelling Spell

Boycott and desertion of public places [were] the dual aspects of the civil disobedience and ghost town campaigns of the early 1990s in Cameroon... The ‘ghost’ took hold of public places as shops closed except on Saturdays and Sundays (Mbaku and Takougang, 2004: 293).

The 1990s witnessed the reintroduction of multi-party politics in Cameroon. The political renaissance was characterized by stiff ideological tension between the ruling political party, the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the opposition front which was animated by parties like the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP). As a strategy to cripple the state machinery and force out the regime the opposition party which had entered an alliance called the ‘opposition coordination’ adopted as its plan of action, a careful scheme to boycott all economic activities that had the potential of giving revenue to the state. The coordination issued calls, ultimatum, tracts, hand bills, posters, etc, inviting the public to ground the economy by staying indoors, refusing to pay bills and taxes and boycotting markets and public offices. The Douala seaport which handles almost the entire trade of Cameroon and its landlocked neighbors shut down. The popular constrains stringed to this period of political re-awakening in Cameroon placed a large portion of the social fabric at unprecedented levels of uncertainty. Such an
The general scenario was gloom and misery. *Operation villes mortes* or ghost town was in some aspects a success; for a time, it crippled the Cameroonian economy and thus achieved its goal of depriving the regime of its fiscal base. There was a moment of uncertainty that involved doubts and questions about the very field of positive knowledge in which state interventions in citizens’ lives have been conceptualized and enacted. This made the future not rosy or not sure (Roitman:2005). Out of this setting, people tended to develop alternative strategies of survival. In the capital as well as in the provincial headquarters especially Bamenda economic and social activities came to a stand still. A good number of students had to leave the lone university of Yaounde to seek for other opportunities as the school year was interrupted by frequent student strikes.
A critique of the risk factor in bush trade

Risk as reproduced by this needs to be appreciated carefully to fit it in the appropriate context of the bush trade social or cultural field that is the matrix of this study. To conclude that the crisis of the 1990s was an important turning point in the process of making Cameroon a risk economy (Agbaw, 2000; Roitman 2005) can not be doubted. However, this will only be a situational-minded analysis which brings discomfort to the complex rim of contradictions, continuities and congruencies that connect to give the bush trade social field uncertainties. Centering the origin of risk in bush trade from the economic crisis context in Cameroon, that began to be expressed in the mid 1980s (Mbu, 1993:131) and reached unappreciated limits in the 1990s when an already ailing economy was further crippled and made unreliable by the political strategies of civil disobedience and ghost town operations devised by an emerging opposition regime. This in essence was translating the economic wide covariant risk described by Dercon (2000) where the context of economic peril in which the Cameroon state found itself at the time and the consequences it left on the masses, a good number of people had to devise risk coping strategies. One of these strategies was to get into bush trade as an insurance against uncertainty. This position has been interestingly echoed by Agbaw (2000:107-186).While I fully agree with her emphasis on the economic crisis, it is in my view that in describing the social setting of smuggling, very little or no attention was given to individual agency in the process of ‘buying the future’. Uncertainties in situations bring about indeterminacy in the insurance scheming process.

Sally Falk Moor’s intriguing analytical assumption of the elements of indeterminacy potential and present in most if not all situations best summarizes risk as an ordeal of trying experiences in bush trade. Her
position as a legal anthropologist can be appealed in analyzing the nature and scope of risk as perceptible in the bush trade economy. She contends that there are two levels at which indeterminacy can be approached. The first are all kinds in which people try to control their situations by struggling against indeterminacy, by trying to fix social reality, to harden it, to give it form and order and predictability...This is done so that individuals can hold constant some of the factors which they must deal...The second, the countervailing processes, are those by means of which people arrange their immediate situations (and/or express their feelings and conceptions) by exploiting the indeterminacies in the situation...or by reinterpreting or redefining the rules of relationships. They use whatever areas there are of inconsistency, contradictions, conflict, ambiguity, or open areas that are normatively indeterminate to achieve immediate situational ends...These strategies [make] social negotiations...[and] absolute ordering the more impossible. These processes introduce ...the element of placidity in social arrangements which [Moore] calls ‘processes of situational adjustments’. (Moore, 1978).

It is also worth noting that not all those who decide to follow the life exploits of Gilbert remain in the cultural field. Some who cannot stand the test of the ordeals logically withdraw are computed out of the system. Some see the field as a stepping stone to join the official economy. An independent is the case of Freddy, a former bush trader who now operates a grocery store in Yaounde (the capital of Cameroon). He can only recount with nostalgia his days in the bush trade economy but he thinks he had taken enough risks to graduate from it. This parallel is to attest that cultural fields are not watertight; they are opened to those who want to come in and go out. It is to
a large extent the in and out movements are conditioned by the desire to favourably negotiate opportunities.

**Conclusion**

The central interest of this chapter has been to examine the risk factor in bush trade. As has been presented, problematising risk in this social context is not straightforward. It is rather as complex as the varied perception of the nature and scope of risk. Far from conjecture, much emphasis has tried to visit the theme more or less from its common or economic wide position. In this setting risk has been presented as being the result of shocks generated by a setting independent of the ability of the bush trader to contain. This is just a part of the story as there is also an idiosyncratic justification that shows how agency is used by the bush traders to manipulate the constraining structure. Risk as exposed in the foregoing discussion is also seen to be generated by actors in bush trade as a strategy of livelihood. Gilbert's investment in risk deals only goes to confirm this position. There is always room for maneuver where actors continuously struggle to negotiate their ways out of some unbearable situations into another. It is not an outdistanced statement to say one risk serves as insurance to another risk. Risk in bush trade, to go by the account and life story of Gilbert, is not the uncertainties that one goes through in life nor is it the difficulties that stand on the way of guaranteeing or ‘buying the future’. It is both and even more the ability to play with these social constrains. It is simply put a process creating and recreating a pattern of life for a group of people committed to a harmonious way of looking at themselves. They share one major commonality-risk bearing. This to them is a normal rhythm of life perceived as always
uncertain and conflictual in its configuration and indeterminate in its manipulation and control.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

Researching on bush trade has been the principal focus of the work. From the introductory section of the project I have tried to situate the context of my discussion. ‘Bush trade’ has been presented as a commercial activity with multiple links-social, cultural and economic which builds-up to a process of creating and recreating a group identity with shared objectives, values and practices. It has been argued across the chapters that bush trade is a semi-autonomous social field that has a strong cultural character. Borrowing Bruijn de, Rijk van and Gewald’s (eds.2007) most updated theorem of agency I have used different themes in the different chapters to nest the view that the dynamics of creativity, inventiveness and reflexibility has always given man the ability to circumvent environmental and institutional constrains.

Through six main case studies and some empirical encounters the study has looked at smuggling from the prism of a semi-autonomous transformed cultural field called ‘bush trade’. By dint of the construction of the activities of the actors involved in bush trade, I decided to brand the people involved in bush trade and their devised activities and strategies as a traffic island’. This title owes its justification to the fact that bush trade as a commercial activity has been treated and presented as a distinct field of social and economic interactions with norms and values peculiar to the system. The study has handled different themes in separate chapters excluding the general introduction(chapter one an.

In chapter two it is illustrated that ‘bush trade’ as a commercial-cum-cultural institution cannot be dismembered from the archaeology of trade. It has been demonstrated that historical antecedents upon which the trade was
spun has been overburdened by accusations levied on the colonial man’s, perhaps cautious and speculative vision of ‘balkanising’ communities or creating spheres of influence. I have tried to reduce the monopoly of this position in scholarship by exposing the importance that the traditional institutional bureaucracy had on the budding of alternative trade patterns contemporaneously described as “bush trade”. The chapter has carefully revealed that the post independence period only inherited, but exacerbated the conditions that gave advantage to ‘bush trade’ as an institution. In my judgment, the contemporary ‘bush trade’ which is the focus of this research could not be firmly captured by one single-much echoed variable-contemporary structural exigencies like imbalance development, border neglects, unemployment, etc. Rather, bush trade should be seen more as a cultural historical process that took roots from the pre-colonial period, reproduced itself in the colonial period adapting to the colonial institutional strains. At independence and thereafter, the trade has been metamorphosing and intimately responding to the structural changes of the modern state of Cameroon.

Chapter three examined the organizational patterning of the bush trade economy. The methodological entry point in this perspective deviated a little bit from the descriptive approach that characterized previous research on the organization of unregulated trade. In the place of the somewhat descriptive tradition, the chapter made appeal to two case studies-Elias and Jackson. From the life experiences of these cases, an analytical grounding was established where such current debates like agency, social networking, power-relations and social hierarchy have been re-invited to understand the dynamics that interactively produces and continue to reproduce the social-cum cultural field of bush trade. The chapter also showed that the
organization and structural principles that governs the bush trade economy can hardly be dissociated from its wider social field. The social field in question is the state (states of Cameroon and Nigeria) which has the monopoly of force and violence like control and sanctions over the citizens who make up the cultural field. The chapter further exposes that the relations between the state and the bush trade economy is not only unilinear. Rather there are always opportunities of interfaces where state officials collaborate with bush traders in their activities. Such a mode of interaction is a merit to the bush traders as it guarantees their sustainability. At the same it shows the level where the states loses its grip as a regulatory institution and sinks into the society.

Chapter four show that pseudo names and masculinity are two central themes that complementarily go to give us a closer understanding of what the bush trade social field is. Drawing from some randomly chosen names, I have in the first instance illustrated the general perception that people have as far as names are concerned. In these cases, names for the most part have simply been a form of identification, although at times they could mean beyond that when they are muted to respond to anticipated status, societal constrains and any form of social re-edification. In such situations the names have hardly been so engraved in meanings as to profoundly illustrate how a group of persons can veil their names for reasons other than mere identification. Pseudo names have been used here to show how local ingenuity in shading personalities can produce and reproduce a cultural community of people who claim manly attributes. Masculinity has been intertwined with pseudo names to show how bush traders construct their own social niche.
The central attention of chapter five has been to examine the risk factor in bush trade. As has been presented, problematising risk in this social context is not straightforward. It is rather as complex as the varied perception of the nature and scope of risk. Far from conjecture, much emphasis has tried to visit the theme more or less from its common or economic wide position. In this setting risk has been presented as being the result of shocks generated by a setting independent of the ability of the bush trader to contain. This is just a part of the story as there is also an idiosyncratic justification that shows how agency is used by the bush traders to manipulate the constraining structure. There is always room for maneuver where actors continuously struggle to negotiate their ways out of some unbearable situations into another. It is not an outdistanced statement to say one risk serves as insurance to another risk. Risk in bush trade, to go by the account and life story of Gilbert, is not the uncertainties that one goes through in life nor is it the difficulties that stand on the way of guaranteeing or ‘buying the future’. It is both and even more the ability to play with these social constrains. It is simply put a process creating and recreating a pattern of life for a group of people committed to a harmonious way of looking at themselves. They share one major commonality-risk bearing. This to them is a normal rhythm of life perceived as always uncertain and conflictual in its configuration and indeterminate in its manipulation and control.

The central interest of the study has been to examine how external risks situations and internal creation of risks and uncertainties are exploited by traders in trans-border trade for insurance against livelihood demands. Through the different case studies, I am of the view that risk and uncertainties should be giving another thought when scholars set out to talk about risk economies and disasters. Man and group of people are always
able to overturn even the worst of situations to their advantage. Human agency has hardly failed to provide strategies that can be used to understand, manage and circumvent constraints. This is to say, as a product of the environment, it is man that controls the society not the society controlling him.
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