

THE CHIEFDOM OF GUDUR (FAR NORTH REGION, CAMEROON) AND ITS MANDARA MOUNTAINS DIASPORA: A MINIMALIST HYPOTHESIS¹

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Abstract

Gudur, renowned as a “pagan Mecca”, has been described as a powerful theocratic polity, its apogee dating to *ca* AD 1600. Fieldwork among the Mofu-Gudur and a re-reading of the historical and ethnological sources suggest an alternative, “minimalist”, interpretation. In this view, the Gudur chiefdom emerged in the relatively recent past, perhaps in response to pressure from the Wandala state or Fulbe expansion. It comprised 15 small chiefdoms linked by a Gudal chiefdom paramountcy limited to matters of ritual and custom and which extended unevenly over other Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms. During and perhaps to a lesser extent before a lengthy period of crises, extending from about 1820 to 1940 and characterized by wars against Fulbe invaders, intensive raiding and slaving, European colonization and locust-induced famines, Gudur refugees settled amongst montagnard groups to their west. Elaborating on a common Mandara montagnard institution for coping with adverse events through the mediation of diviners, it proved advantageous for these refugees and their descendants to vaunt the chief of Gudur’s control over rain, plagues and fecundity, and to consult him on matters affecting their communities. Some early European observers attributed a fictitious antiquity to this practice and an exaggerated sanctity to its priestly chief. These inferences became the foundations of what is now the received historical interpretation, to which we propose the alternative that, in the main, it was dire 19th century circumstances and interactions between montagnards and Gudur refugees that led to their representation and treatment of the chief of Gudal as their last best hope in times of trouble. The paper ends with appendices, the first listing informants and the second contrasting our and Christian Seignobos’s approaches to (ethno)history.

¹ This paper is a development of David and Sterner’s (2009) ‘La chefferie de Gudur (Monts Mandara, Cameroun): une hypothèse minimaliste.’ It has been rethought and adapted for an audience as interested in the Gudur diaspora as in the Mofu-Gudur ritual paramountcy. Our Gudur fieldwork was supported by the SSHRC of Canada and authorized by the Cameroonian Ministry of Scientific and Technical Research and the Prefect of Mayo Tsanaga. We thank the Cantonal Chiefs of Mokong and of Mofu-Sud for facilitating our work and the Lawans, including those of Cuvok and Membeng. We were welcomed by the chiefs and our Mofu-Gudur interlocutors, all of whom demonstrated a lively interest in our project. Alioum Baya Mana, formerly the assistant of the late and much regretted Daniel Barreteau, once again demonstrated his remarkable skills as an informant, guide, interpreter and researchers’ friend. J.-M Datouang Djoussou, a member of our Mandara Archaeological Project team, participated with his usual effectiveness both during fieldwork and in the archives. Sister Aurora and R.P. Dilissen and their colleagues were our kind hosts at the Catholic mission in Mokong. We thank Gerhard Müller-Kosack, friend and colleague of long date, for vigorous and well-deserved criticism of an earlier draft.

The problem

Working in Cameroon and Nigeria since 1984, in 2001-04 the Mandara Archaeological Project (MAP) studied a cluster of sixteen monumental complexes characterized by the accretion through time of terraces and platforms with distinctive dry-stone facades. Located on and in proximity to the Oupay massif, they are called *Diy-Gi'd-Bay*, ruins of chiefly residence, by the Mafa who live around them. Excavations at two of these, DGB-2 and DGB-8, revealed architectural features that include staircases, passages and internal chambers. Various clues, including dates in the 15th to 16th century AD range contemporary with a major drought, led to the interpretation of the sites as foci of ritual performances relating to rain and fecundity by and on behalf of communities of various scales (David 2008; MacEachern and David 2013). After a joint visit in 2007, Scott MacEachern took over the research, in 2008-2011 excavating at DGB-1, the largest and most impressive site, and discovering residential remains at its foot. Radiocarbon dates range from the 13th to the 17th century (MacEachern et al. 2010, 2012).

Gudur is located only 50 km SE of the DGB sites. It was described in the colonial period as a “pagan Mecca” (Shaw 1935) and “a fount of magical authority” (MacBride 1937), a cult center to which communities sent delegations to seek protection from natural phenomena including droughts and locust infestations and for cures of various plagues and infertility. Christian Seignobos (1991a) emphasized the importance of its geographic positioning in the peopling of the Mandara region. Located in one of the rare valleys offering easy entry into the Mandara mountains and interior plateaus, it received streams of migrants from the plains to the east, redistributing them into the mountain west, though also to the south and southeast. We wondered whether Gudur might have inherited its powers over rain from the DGB culture, and it was for this reason that we undertook research there for five weeks in 2004 and ND for a further week in 2005.

The term “Gudur” is a corruption of Gudal, the name in the Mofu-Gudur language of a small chiefdom called after its ruling clan and exercising a limited ritual paramountcy over the majority of other Mofu-Gudur-speaking chiefdoms. ² Following anthropological practice, we shall reserve the term “Gudur”

² Gudur is first mentioned in Strümpell’s (1922-23: 56) account of his visit of *ca* 1906 to the Kapsiki and Sukur. In this he states that the Kapsiki regard it as the former tribal center of their chiefs and the “tribal holy place” located on the eastern side of the Mandara Mountains. Gudur appears to be a name bestowed by outsiders, a corruption of “Gudal”, which is the name both of a clan and of a ritually important Mofu-Gudur chiefdom. The name occurs in many forms and, especially in the west, also as Cakiri, Mcakiri, Mpsakili and variants. This form first appears in Lavergne (1942), quoted in Mohammadou (1988: 268), as “Tchékiri, described as “a mountain presently in French territory and uninhabited” from which migrants left to settle in Kapsiki and Kamwe territory. The Mokong Canton chief had never heard of Mpsakili or any variant of the name, and we are unable to identify this mountain which may well represent an intermediate, short-lived stopping-point on a diasporic route from Gudur to the west. Here and elsewhere translations from French and German are by ND.

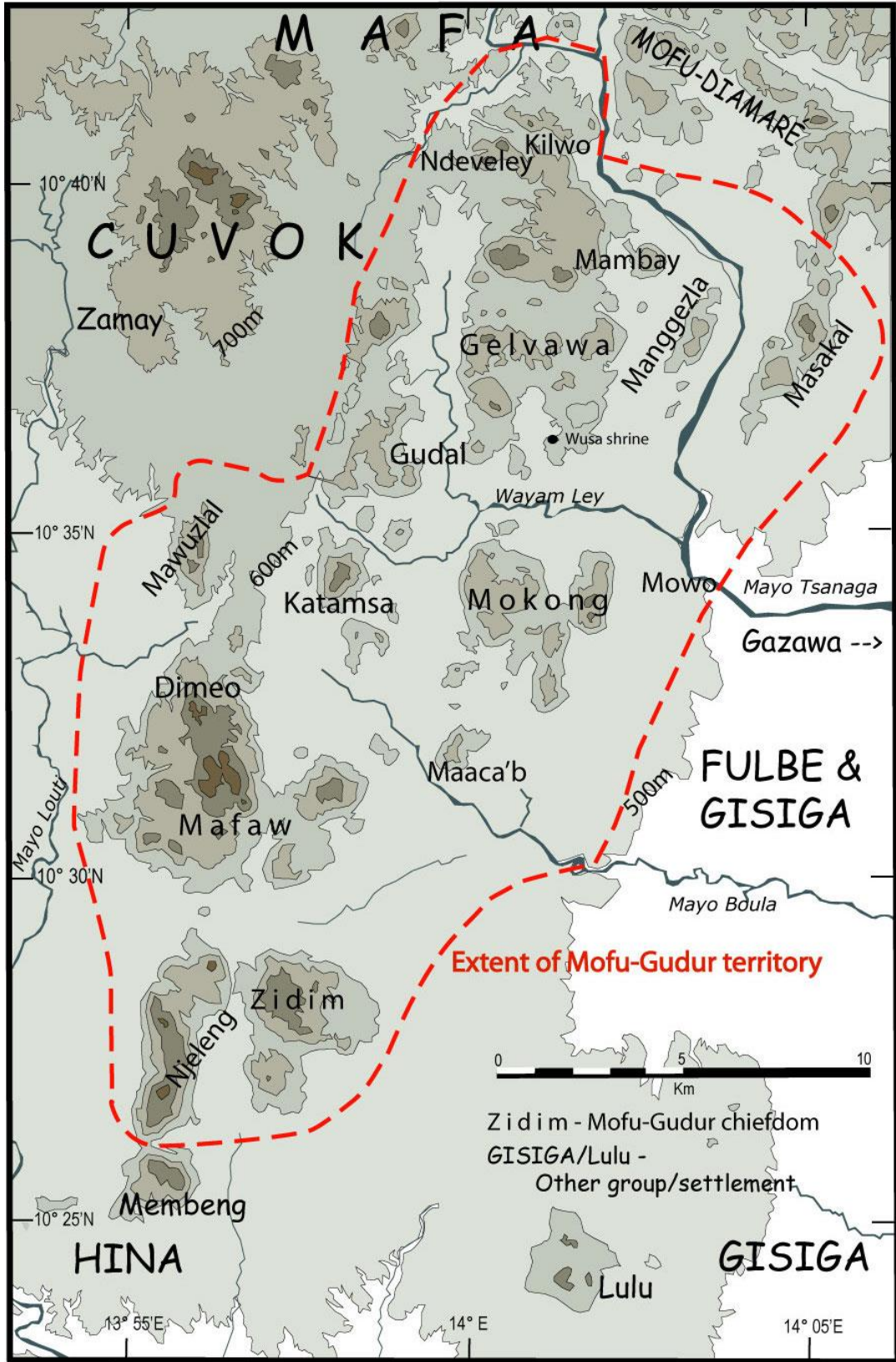


Figure 1. Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms and their neighbors. Contours at 500, 600, 700, 800 and 900 meters.

for this larger social and geographical ensemble. We should be mindful of the small scale of the units with which we are concerned (Fig. 1). The language is the mother tongue over an area of 450 sq. km. In 1943, the population was no doubt under-estimated at 10,653 persons; 38,000 were counted in the census of 1987. The fifteen chiefdoms, each possessing a low but steeply rising mountain and therefore often referred to as “massifs”, include the following:

- Gudal,
- ⁴ “brother massifs” (Jouaux 1989: 271) founded from Gudal: Kilwo, Ndeveley³, Manggezla (Minnglia) and Maaca’b (Mosso), all but the last situated in the north,
- also in the north : Mokong, Katamsa, Mawuzlal, Gelvawa (Gouloua), Mambay and Masakal, the last-named east of the Mayo (river) Tsanaga,
- chiefdoms to the south: Dimeo, Mafaw (Mofu), Zedem and Njeleng,
- to which we should add to the east the (presently) hybrid Mofu-Gudur/Giziga chiefdom of Mowo from whose dying chief, according to legend, Biya, founder of Gudal, received the power over rain critical to his success. Situated in the plain on the right bank of the Mayo Tsanaga, Mowo, with only two hills, is the only chiefdom that lacks a massif.

Characterizing Gudur’s political nature in precolonial times, Christine Jouaux (1991) hesitated between kingdom and chiefdom. At its head is *Bay* (chief) Gudal, head of the Gudal clan and thereby of the Gudal chiefdom, comprising both mountain and valley neighborhoods. From this base, his chiefly authority extended, becoming progressively weaker, to three other zones (Jouaux 1989): the brother massifs founded by members of the Gudal clan, other Mofu-Gudur massifs, and a more distant fourth zone in the mountains, where certain clans claim to originate from Gudur (under its various names). Communities in this zone often regarded Bay Gudur as their last hope in times of crisis. These include on the plains to the east and south some Gisiga and Mundang, and in the Mandara mountains region some Mafa village-polities, especially Vreke (Verdeke) and Soulede, together with Sukur, Damay, Mabas, certain “mountain” Margi including Gulak and Duhu, and Kapsiki and Kamwe (Higi) settlements, besides others among the Bana, Daba, Hina, Gude and Djimi (Lavergne 1942, Podlewski 1966, Jouaux 1989: 262), Seignobos 2000, Müller-Kosack 2003 and pers. comm. 2019, ND & JS 2004-5 fieldnotes).⁴ The chief

³ Perhaps because Ndeveley now forms part of the *lawanate* of Kilwo, Jouaux does not consider it an independent Mofu-Gudur massif. Mambay is also absent from her list, although according to our informants its Bay is recognized by the state as a *lawan* (a chief of one or more villages).

⁴ Shaw (1935: 23) provides a longer list in his “Madagali Intelligence Report”. However, his inquiry covering the history and governance of all the villages in the area was carried out in under seven weeks and should not be accepted on such matters without confirmation. In the Gwoza hills, Gudur influence

(*Hidi*) of Sukur, who according to Shaw (1935: 45) is “unquestionably of the order of Divine Kings” (but see Smith and David 1995), and the chief (*Bi*) of Vreke are sometimes described as Gudur’s representatives in the northern and western parts respectively of the Gudur diaspora.

The most widely accepted view of the history and sociopolitical nature of Gudur in the sense defined above derives mainly from Seignobos for whom Gudur was a theocratic chiefdom endowed with a power that radiated onto the plain but above all into the mountains, its chief’s prestige attracting pilgrims from afar. For Jouaux (1991) this radiation was expressed through an expansionist policy in part realized by colonization. In Seignobos’s (1991a: 250-51) view the diaspora resulted rather from “problems of overpopulation, rivalries ... famines ... the sacrifice in times past of chief-smiths [resulting in flights of smiths] and ... the constant pressure of new arrivals from the plains”. He situates Gudur in a much broader context, that of a long term migratory current flowing from Bagirmi and Lake Fitri (Chad) in the northeast and directed towards the Diamaré plains north, east and south of Maroua and on west into to the Mandara mountains (Seignobos 1991a, 1991b, 2000). In the near absence of archaeological research east of the Logone river, this interpretation, resembling those of Palmer (1931) and Lebeuf (1969), is primarily founded on ethnological data. It has not yet stimulated amongst historians the interest that it deserves. A new integrating element in Seignobos’s hypothesis is an ongoing competition for power between smiths and non-smiths. In the Mandara Mountains and the nearby eastern plains, this struggle, he believes, resulted in diverse socio-political consequences taking the form of phases that overlap in time and space (Seignobos 1991b):

- Phase 1: in certain societies iron technology and political power are associated under the authority of smith-kings.
- Phase 2: the smith-kings are rejected by the non-smiths who assume “chieftaincy over men”, while the smiths suffer various fates. Amongst some groups they are retained as ritual specialists (which, according to Seignobos, was formerly the case in Gudur); amongst others their role becomes limited to artisanal iron-working.
- Phase 3: in a third and last phase and only in certain societies, rejection of the power of the smith combined with the preservation of his craft results in smiths and non-smiths evolving in somewhat separate social spheres. Each possesses its chiefdom but the smiths are obliged to serve as the ritual

also reached the Dghwede through Vreke, but not via migration. Vreke does and Dghwede does not form part of the diaspora (Gerhard Müller-Kosack, pers. comm. 2019).

⁵ Christian Seignobos is our longtime colleague and a researcher for whom we have a respect bordering on idolatry, without however this depriving us of our critical faculties regarding his historical propositions. Where Seignobos has cleared the bush, it is for others to take up the hoe. We do not know how to treat his 2017 study of Mowo-Gudur rivalry in the context of this paper and discuss this in Appendix 2.

specialists of the chieftaincy over men (Seignobos 1991b: 384). This is the type of society with endogamous smith and farmer castes that existed in Gudur at the start of the colonial period (cf. David and Sterner 2012).

Phase 1 no longer exists. As to the second, Seignobos believes that it is represented by colonies, such as Sukur, originating from Gudur and settling in the west.⁶ The logic of his reconstruction requires that a phase 2-type society must have existed at Gudur at a time in the past that, in 1991, he situated at the end of the 16th and the start of the 17th century, but which he later rejuvenated to the 18th century without explanation (cf. Seignobos 1991a :254 and 2000: 7).

There are problems with this reconstruction. Seignobos was writing before our research on Sukur was published and regarding it he had to rely on colonial era texts of the 1930s reworked by Kirk-Greene (1960). As argued on our Sukur website,⁷ it does indeed appear that at Sukur the earliest inferable chiefdom was held by the Tuva clan of (now) casted iron workers. This chiefly line was replaced by the Kulesegi clan, comprising farmers who (at least as far back as the nineteenth century) also smelted but did not forge. They were in turn replaced by the present Dur chiefly clan who claim Gudur origin and also in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries combined farming with smelting. The earlier chiefly clans have special ritual responsibilities, for example it is the task of the senior Tuva elder to bury his “brother” the Hidi, whom he may not see in life. Dalate, the senior Kulesegi, has important priestly duties both in male initiation and in the Yawal ceremony that celebrates the Hidi and his Dur clan.

That being said, in our opinion there are no differences between Gudur and Sukur societies, both of which would be assigned to phase 3, that support the division into temporal phases such as he proposes. Indeed these are questioned at Gudur itself by Jouaux (1989: 264 footnote). Furthermore, whereas Seignobos appears to regard phase changes as resulting from processes internal to the societies, it is likely that, as at Sukur, migration, conquest and inter-clan competition were often dominant factors. Also, since the evidential bases for the dates suggested by Seignobos have not been presented (though they are based on genealogies), they remain questionable.

When we went to Gudur in 2004, Seignobos’s interpretation was our working hypothesis. However, the testimonies we recorded began to suggest a quite different interpretation of Gudur’s place in history, one that we describe as minimalist because the chiefdom is at one and the same time rendered younger in time and the “pagan Mecca” transformed into the seat of a clan that, from within the chiefly Gudal line,

⁶ Seignobos employs the term “colony” to refer to a group that, for whatever reason, leaves its homeland to settle elsewhere.

⁷ See pages under www.sukur.info/Soc/socindex.htm.

produced a succession of chiefs who combined the local functions of a priestly “chief of men” with that of a diviner of a traditional type, but on whom circumstances thrust exceptional powers.

The historical sources

At the end of the 18th and the start of the 19th century the Wandala state was at the height of its power (Barkindo 1989). To what extent the region now occupied by Mofu-Gudur was impacted by that state is unknown, but it would be surprising if they had not felt the Wandala presence. The Gudur ritual paramountcy is most likely based upon Gudal becoming, by virtue of early Mofu-Gudur settlement, the “magnet that grows by attracting to itself the ethnic and cultural detritus produced by the routine workings of other societies. This kind of social formation ... seldom dates back more than a few hundred years”, as Igor Kopytoff (1987: 7) wrote in his influential African Frontier model of the reproduction of traditional African societies. The Gudur ritual paramountcy may have come into existence in response to Wandala pressure. Its limited geographical, ethnic and, as will be shown, functional extent is not suggestive of great chronological depth. In this it contrasts markedly with Sukur in the western Mandara mountain region where the Hidi was accepted as ritually senior to several neighboring Margi, Kamwe, and Wula (Kapsiki-related) chiefs. This was most notably expressed by the Hidi sending his Tlagama (Slagama) title-holder to barber their ritually important hairlocks at the time of accession to office. These ethnic groups spoke different languages, of three sub-groups of Chadic Biu-Mandara A, suggesting that this cluster had been implanted in the region for many centuries, Sukur being the first established. The Gudur diaspora, we will argue, was a more recent overlay.

Around 1820 the Fulbe (Fulani, Peuls), mobilized by the jihad of Usman Dan Fodio, became militarily active in this region and undertook the conquest of the Diamaré and portions of the mountain zone, parts of which they had penetrated in pre-jihad times as pastoralists living in symbiosis with its Chadic-speaking farmer residents. Partially but progressively the Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms were forced either to submit or to make accommodations with the Fulbe lamidates (*laamido* means chief in Fulfulde) of Gazawa, Gawar and Fulbe-affiliated Zamay that threatened them from the east, southwest and west (Mohammadou 1988).

The year 1902 saw the arrival of Germans in what is now the Far North region of Cameroon and a little later in Gudur. It took them very little time to tip the precarious balance between montagnards and Fulbe in favor of the latter, rendered more efficient predators by the proliferation of firearms. The First World War saw the replacement in 1916 of German rulers by French and British, who in 1922 began to govern under the mandate of the League of Nations.

The first written historical sources on Gudur date to the 20th century and were produced by administrators, military and civil. It is also our good fortune to have Eldridge Mohammadou's (1988) monograph on the Fulbe lamidates of the Diamaré and the Mayo Louti in the 19th century, developed in large part on the basis of oral traditions he collected, and, in the reports of administrators, missionaries, researchers and others, of notes on the relations with Gudur of montagnards on either side of the Nigeria-Cameroon frontier. Kurt Strümpell, German Imperial Resident of Adamawa, heard talk of Gudur when, probably in 1906, he was the first European to make ethnographic contact with the Kapsiki and Sukur.⁸ According to his account (Strümpell 1922-23: 56-7):

... the Kapsiki say that their forefathers lived on the eastern edge of the Mandara mountains. Gudur was the ancestral seat of their chiefs. Here was also the holy place of their tribe that they, installed on the western border of the [Mandara Mountains] continue to venerate. Unfortunately I didn't visit Gudur, so that I cannot present first hand evidence on this place that is so important for the Muffu. From confused native accounts, I was unable to form a clear picture of this tribal holy place. A pot, in which a magical liquid is kept, seems to play a role. It appears to be kept in a hut with a door made of very strong sheets of iron. If the door is opened or broken down by a trespasser, calamity spreads over the mountains. Plagues carry off people and livestock. Whirlwinds devastate the villages, and locusts devour the meagre yield of the fields. Thus it is the duty of the chiefs to contribute to the maintenance of the metal door with gifts of iron, produced in quantity in the mountains, and also to ensure the goodwill of the powerful priest responsible for the care of the fetish. Even the proud [chief of] Sugur [Sukur] ... did not dare to take up arms against Gudur; rather he strove for the goodwill of so influential a chief by sending him a virgin girl, a stallion and a black billy goat. As a countergift the priest sent him magic water.

Georges Lavergne, a remarkable French administrator, wrote a significant report on Gudur in 1943. In it he recommended that administration of the Mofu-Gudur by Fulbe indirect rulers should be replaced by that of the (French) chief of the Mokolo subdivision. In support of this advice he supplied valuable information on Gudur history. He put together a list of past chiefs of Gudal (Table 1), of whom the first six are no more than names, some of which are not even Mofu. Dilgam, the seventh, is sometimes given as a praise name of the first Bay Gudur, more usually known as Biya, and with Ngom (Ngwom) we can be certain to enter history. Bay Takwaw I of whom we know little precedes Ngwom in Lavergne's listing but was more likely Ngwom's successor. It was, according to Lavergne, under Ngwom, "an influential and well known sorcerer" that Gudur reached its apogee as "a sort of confederation of villages".

Unfortunately for the Mofu-Gudur, it was in about 1820 during Ngwom's chieftaincy that jihadi Fulbe burst onto the scene. Despite Mofu-Gudur's defensive ramparts, scarcely recognizable today, the Fulbe cavalry proved too strong for their adversaries, already weakened by locust invasions. The Mofu-Gudur,

⁸ In 1902 Hans Dominik, German resident in Garoua, had led a brief raid up to Sukur to apprehend Ardo Bakari of Madagali.

and perhaps especially those of Gudal, many of whom occupied lower slopes and valley floors, faced violent attacks.

“Seeing the confederation breaking up,” Lavergne (1943: 7-8) continues, “Ngom advised his people to retreat further west or up into the mountain tops Gudur lost population and after Ngom’s death the disaggregation of Mofu power became even more precipitous under the skillful manipulations of the Fulbe. What remains today of the power of Gudur? Little or nothing . . . only two villages . . . accept the authority of [Gudal] where reigns, it is true, a pale descendant [Bay Takwaw II] of the great Ngom”.

We have considerable confidence in this outline of the fall of Gudur, recorded by Lavergne from Mofu-Gudur who must have known elders who had as adults participated in the Fulbe wars.⁹ We note that while Lavergne attributes to Bay Ngwom a certain authority over the Mofu-Gudur, and that he characterizes the “confederation” as ancient, this antiquity is not further discussed in his text and would appear to be founded upon his list of chiefs. For Lavergne it is only under Ngwom that the confederation achieved a brief apogee.

Table 1. List of the chiefs of Gudal according to Lavergne 1943 and David and Sterner 2004-2005. The names in bold characters are those of whose historicity there can be no or little doubt. (Dilgam can be read either as a praise or personal name.)

Dates	Lavergne (1943)	David and Sterner 2004-05
	N'gueleo	
	Bêtêle	
	Chele	
	Medje	
	Tapao	
	Bildaouar	
	Dilgam	Dilgam (or Biya) ?Seli/Chele et al.
	Tokou I	Zlengger
?1810-?1840	Ngom	Ngwom
?1840-?1870		Takwaw I
?1870-?1900		Tserbay
?1900-1918	Marba	Merba
1918-30	Bildaram Marba	Bedlaram Merba
1930-80	Toku II Marba	Takwaw II Merba
1980-		{ Hamman Gamale (<i>Lawan</i>) and { Gamaldak Takwaw (<i>Bay nga kwakwas</i>)

⁹ It is true that he missed out Bay Tserbay – but then disgraced rulers are often omitted from such lists. And the earlier part of his list is mostly a nonsense: such padding in the absence of historical knowledge is commonplace, and we can cite examples from Mafa territory and elsewhere today.

Ethnological research

Daniel Barreteau carried out ten months of linguistic fieldwork among the Mofu-Gudur in 1974-5 with visits in 1979-81 and 1983. The introduction to his monograph (1988 vol.1: 11-62) on the language provides an ethnographic sketch. Cathérine Jouaux (1989: 263) undertook fieldwork over eight months between 1986 and 1988 and published two articles (1989, 1991) on Mofu-Gudur political structure and functioning. As for Seignobos, who has worked in the area since the 1970s, his work is always of great interest and his syntheses stimulating. With a passion for ethnology and above all its historical aspects, he takes every opportunity to interview well-informed individuals that he meets in the course of the research he undertakes as a human geographer. He has a wide knowledge of montagnard societies and their pasts, even if a lack of detailed documentation makes it difficult to evaluate his historic inferences. Our limited research intersects with that of these three colleagues.

Jouaux, citing J. Vansina (1961) and J. Bazin (1979) as her authorities, obtained her data by interviewing Mofu-Gudur elders and office holders (presumably all or almost all male). These now include the *lawans*, chiefs of important villages or groups of villages, and mostly descendants of former Bay, who have been appointed by the state to the administrative position of *lawan*, fulfilling functions comparable to those associated with the “chiefs of men” functions of traditional Bay. Meanwhile others, again mainly relatives, have taken over the latter’s ritual and customary responsibilities. These “chiefs of custom” are known as *Bay nga kwakwas*.

The interpretation of interviews is problematic not least because informants’ responses are affected by their political positioning. There is for example a long term dispute relating to the 1957 transfer of the cantonal chieftaincy from Gudal to Mokong. Such disputes color testimonies and may lead to falsification. An ethnologist who works for long periods in a region can extract an underlying truth from disparate statements of this kind, but it is doubtful whether any of us have worked long enough on Mofu-Gudur history to detect the finer nuances. Another problem is the inability of informants to distinguish the successive socio-political periods that characterized Gudur during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. Sadly the archives, so far as we could tell, are only rarely able to resolve the difficult questions that arise in this area.

The political organization of Gudur and the power that Bay Gudal could exercise in Gudal and beyond his own chiefdom must have varied through time depending to a great extent upon exterior pressures on the Mofu-Gudur. We identify four periods:

1. Autonomy – from an unknown date to about 1820. Before that time the Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms must have benefitted from a degree of autonomy greater than any that came afterwards, even if

this was to some extent diminished by influence exerted by the Wandala state. The ritual paramountcy may predate the end of this period.

2. Wars with the Fulbe – 1820 to perhaps 1860. Details of this period during which the Fulbe succeeded in dominating the Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms remain obscure. It is however quite likely that the majority of the defensive walls were built, and some if not all the brother massifs founded during this time interval. Zlengger, the name of a dubious chief who appears before Ngwom in our listing, actually means “rampart”.
3. Fulbe dominance – *ca* 1860 to 1905. The Fulbe enter into asymmetric agreements with Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms, several of which probably remained subject to raiding. Some Mofu-Gudur chiefs become accessories or even allies of the Fulbe in “razzias”, slave raids against the “Kirdi” (practitioners of local religions) to the north and west, particularly the Mafa ethnic group.
4. Colonization, Mandate and Independence. German colonization from *ca* 1905 to 1916 is followed by French colonial military rule from 1916 to 1922, and then by the mandate accorded to France by the League of Nations. In the earlier part of this period the colonial administrations employed the technique of indirect rule through Fulbe chiefs, responsible for tax collection and other duties. From 1943/44 Mofu canton was placed under the direct rule of the French.

It is not therefore surprising that Jouaux (1989: 262) recognizes that in her reconstruction “the epoch is never precisely specified, the formulation rests vague and hypothetical”. Following her example, we attempt to understand the different sociopolitical contexts within which the Bay operated. Within his Gudal chiefdom, the position of Bay Gudal, although diminished by conquest and colonization, would have remained recognizable to an observer of the early 1900s. In 1957, “modernization” occurred with the replacement of Bay Gudal as cantonal chief by Bay Mokong, who did not however take over the fading ritual paramountcy. Thus Gudur effectively ceased to exist as a paramount chieftaincy though Gudal remained an administrative entity. Then in 1980, the death of Bay Takwaw II of Gudal was followed by the division of his functions between two of his sons: the role of lawan went to Hamman Gamale and that of customary chief to Gamaldak Takwaw, both still in office at the time of our research and neither living in Yideng Bay, the former chiefly residence. Gamaldak and his wife occupied a tiny four room compound on a small farm. It is he who was then (and maybe still is) responsible for the ritual functions of the former Bay Gudal such as determining the ceremonial calendar, and it would be to him that any delegation from Sukur or elsewhere would initially present themselves to seek relief from some calamity or plague.

Gudal

For the Gudal chiefdom, our results are comparable to those of Jouaux. At the start of the 20th century Bay Gudal was responsible for control of the rains and other natural phenomena but, as we shall see, sometimes in an indirect manner. Just as in the majority of little montagnard chiefdoms, he is a priest-chief, charged with maintaining, on behalf of his family, his clan and his chiefdom, good relations with the world of local spirits,¹⁰ and at the same time with higher order entities including a distant high god (Horton 1971, 1975). Divination, practiced either by the chief or “his” diviner, of the smith caste, precedes negotiations and prayers accompanied by offerings and sacrifice.

The authority of Bay Gudal derives according to tradition from his descent from Biya who came from “Wandala” via Mowo where he had served the chief who, on his deathbed, entrusted to him the stones through which he controlled the rain and a bull that led him in a series of stages to the “mountain of the world”, the future Gudal, before the beast sank into the soil of the future chiefdom. Biya offered a gift of salt to the eldest member of the indigenous Ngwaadama clan, who, while retaining his special relationship with the earth spirits, ceded to Biya the chiefdom of men. This gave Biya and his successors the right to dispense justice and to benefit from work parties and other imposts. The story of Biya is a cliché, with variant forms forming part of the origin legends of several groups in this area. But here the tradition is explicit on one point. Biya (and by extension his people) were granted ownership of the lower slopes and the valley bottoms, while the “autochthones” reserved for themselves and into our days the more easily defended upper slopes and mountain heights.

Bay Gudal was aided in the exercise of his functions, as were other Mofu-Gudur chiefs, by notables¹¹ with various functions, some “nobles” of his own clan, and by his retainers, including in this case some described as soldiers of “Gedar” clan, perhaps of Hina origin or captives gifted to him by the Hina chief (Jouaux 1988: 203).

Jouaux demonstrates that Bay Gudal’s ritual duties, ensuring the wellbeing of the community, were at least as important as his secular responsibilities. From his position he obtained material benefits but his life style differed little from those of his people, except perhaps in the size of his family. Although his armed retainers gave him some control of coercive power, he was far from possessing a monopoly. One account suggests he shared command of these “enforcers” with the Gudal Maslalam. Comparable arrangements are likely to have characterized other Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms from a time unknown to the

¹⁰ As “chief of men” Bay Gudal was not responsible for relations with the earth spirits. These were the responsibility of the Maslalam “master of the earth”, a role inherited within the “autochthonous” Ngwaadama clan. This division of chiefly ritual labor is common in the Mandara mountains.

¹¹ The commonly used term “notables” refers to holders of traditional titles, clan heads and the like, persons, almost all men, of influence in the community.

moment of colonization. Their powers have diminished, above all during the second half of the 20th century with the expansion of Islam and Christianity. This has undermined the practice of local religion and its associated magic, weakening the powers of chiefs.

While other Mofu-Gudur chiefs were either diviners themselves or had diviners working under their command, or both, in the later 19th and earlier 20th centuries Bay Gudal was a diviner, a role that combines both religion and magic with craft aspects, exceptional in the range of phenomena that he was believed able to control and in the area from which he drew his clients. Amongst the most important phenomena were the quantity and timing of the rains, so variable and so critical in this environment, the fecundity of humans and animals, diseases including smallpox, and also leopards and the famine-inducing invasions of caterpillars and the even more destructive locusts.

The brother massifs and the other Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms.

The second zone is that of the brother massifs, Kilwo, Ndeveley, Manggezla and Maaca'b, all with chiefs of clan Gudal descent. These chiefdoms constitute for Jouaux the best evidence of a policy of expansion. However, the frameworks of the sequences of the brother massif chiefs suggest that they were founded within one generation of Bay Tserbay and no earlier than Ngwom's chieftaincy, that is to say at a time when the Mofu-Gudur were already in a state of war with the Fulbe or under their domination. As already noted, the Gudal clan, settled in the valleys and on the lower mountain slopes, was exposed to Fulbe attacks. One can therefore argue that, far from being the product of an expansionist policy, the colonization of the brother massifs was undertaken to escape Fulbe pressure, by refugees who, following the advice of Ngwom, retreated up into the mountains. Brother chiefdoms retained close relations with Gudal in matters of custom and ritual. For example, the chiefs of all four brother massifs were buried at Gudal until the time a smith was swept away by the Wayam Lay stream while carrying a chief's cadaver to Hwad Way, the cemetery of the Gudal chiefs.

Our enquiries among the chiefs and notables of these four massifs leave us with the strong impression that Jouaux has exaggerated the power of Bay Gudal. Although the lawan of Katamsa – whose territorial boundary with Gudal was contested at the time of our visit – denies it, it is possible that, as Jouaux postulates, his chiefdom was once a dependency of Gudal, but inversely, only five kilometers from the residence of Bay Gudal, Gelvawa successfully repelled at least one Gudal attempt to enlarge its territory at their expense. Jouaux (1991:204) claims that “the majority of the massifs admit ... that their new chief was regularly installed by the chief of Gudur” but even if this was true – if only symbolically – for the brother massifs, the others deny that Bay Gudur had a significant role in their chiefs' installations. On such occasions chiefs were, however, accustomed to exchanging gifts.

Neither was Bay Gudur a supreme judge. There was no formal Gudur administration: we know of only one occasion when in the 1930s the Mofu-Gudur chiefs met together, supposedly at Bay Gudal's invitation, but at Dimeo and not Gudal, to discuss resistance to Fulbe exploitation. On the other hand almost all our informants insisted that in the matter of customs they followed the example of Gudal: "Custom resides in Gudal"; "All the tradition is commanded by Gudal"; "Bay Gudal "cries the festivals", meaning that he controlled the ritual calendar. The other chiefs followed him – more or less. For example, at Zedem there are two clans that celebrate the new fire a day after Gudal, but the majority, including that of the chief, do so five months later. There are also indications that several Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms relied on Bay Gudal, acting in his priestly capacity, to ensure fecundity and especially that of sorghum.

While it is true that Bay Gudal enjoyed certain privileges amongst at least some of the other Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms, these were minor. There was nothing, except at Gudal and perhaps Katamsa, that could be considered a tax, and outside Bay Gudal's chiefdom his power to coerce was extremely limited. He rarely if ever paid visits to other chiefs, and if every now and then he or one of his retainers seized a billy goat, it was considered his priestly prerogative to appropriate an animal for a sacrifice that would benefit the Mofu-Gudur as a whole.

It must also be stated that a Bay Gudal could be deposed by another priestly figure, the Gudal "master of the earth", in alliance with other community notables. This was the case of Bay Tserbay, who was selling his people to the Fulbe. The coup was mounted with the assistance of the Cuvok, a neighboring group whose relations with Gudur require much further study.

All in all, it seems clear that the political power of Bay Gudal has been exaggerated, and even if Bay Gudal "commanded the custom", this was not the case for all Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms. Njeleng did not follow Gudal in the new fire festival and Masakal – participating in another cycle of ceremonies – followed the Gisiga village of Mogudi and was followed by Mowo. Mowo, the original source of Biya's power, regards Gudal as its junior offshoot. The Mowo are now half-Gisiga, bilingual and with Gisiga tribal marks. And to the west the Mofu-Gudur chiefdom of Mawuzlal seems always to have been as closely linked with the Cuvok as with Gudal. Their new fire ceremony is coordinated with that of the Cuvok. They have never paid tax to or through Gudal.

Beyond his own chiefdom, Bay Gudal's mastery of the forces of nature was contested. The majority of other Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms obtained and still obtain their rain and protection against locusts either from within their own community or through various specialists, sometimes Mafa, sometimes Mofu-Diamaré (Table 2). Bay Gudal was not even directly responsible for the locust sacrifice in his own chiefdom. The Wusa shrine where, according to tradition, a virgin boy and girl were immolated to defend against locust

attacks, was served by a Masuwa clan member. A Bay Gudal who attempted to take over this function by expelling the clan found himself obliged to call back the officiant the next time the locusts invaded.

Table 2. Settlements (ethnic groups) on which Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms depended in 2004 to obtain rain and protection from locust invasions. Source: ND & JS fieldnotes.

Chiefdoms	Rain	Locusts
Gudal	Gudal	Gudal (clan Masuwa)
Mangelza	?	?
Maaca'b	?	?
Kilwo	Durum (Mofu-Diamaré)	Gudal (clan Masuwa)
Ndeveley	Gagala and now Fogom (Mafa)	Their own
Katamsa	Mowo	Their own from “master of the earth”
Gelvawa	Their own	Gudal (clan Masuwa)
Mambay	Morley (Mofu-Diamaré)	Morley (Mofu-Diamaré)
Mokong	Mowo	?
Mawuzlal	Their own from “master of the earth”	Their own from “master of the earth”
Dimeo	Their own from “master of the earth”*	Their own from “master of the earth”
Mafaw	Once from Gudal, now locally	Once from Gudal, now locally
Zedem	Their own from “master of the earth”	Their own from Masuwa clan
Njeleng	Their own from “master of the earth”	No special rite
Masakal	Their own	Mowo

* The name of Gudal is mentioned during rain-seeking at Dimeo.

Thus it seems that even if it is impossible to trace variation through the historic periods, the Bay Gudal was never either a king or a prince in the sense that Vincent (1991) uses the latter term to describe the powerful chiefs of the Mofu-Diamaré. The most one can say is that Bay Gudal was the chief of a Gudur entity that one can characterize as a ritual paramountcy, a social formation that despite its limitations was to the Mofu-Gudur of capital importance.

The great advantage the Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms gained from the existence of this paramountcy was social and economic rather than political. In earlier times people did not casually venture into neighboring chiefdoms without making arrangements, for example with friends or kin, for fear of being captured and even sold as slaves. Speaking the same language did not guarantee immunity. Every chiefdom constituted a *microcosmos* (cf. Horton 1971, 1975), but these microcosms were not self-sufficient in material goods, social relations or ideas. It is for that reason, Horton wrote, that when Africans go out into a wider world, they benefit from converting to Islam or another world religion that offers access to the macrocosm. Gudur was a *mesocosmos*, offering the Mofu-Gudur not only access to ritual services that were considered essential, but also membership of a larger community within which they could find material goods, services and marriage partners, and in which they could circulate with some degree of freedom, and if necessary resettle. “Our exile is at Gudal”, the chief of Zedem told us, referring to those of his clan who had competed for chiefly power without success.

The diaspora

Gudur was something entirely different for the inhabitants of the mountain diaspora. Many montagnard clans, some chiefly, claim Gudur origins of which the mother community – as is so often the case – may well be ignorant. Because those forced to emigrate can rarely play their part in the social life of their home communities, they become irrelevant and are soon forgotten. Jouaux argues that the migrations took place between 1675 and 1750, but her chronology is based on two suppositions. One, biological, is disputable because it reckons the length of a generation as 30 years, arguably too long for the precolonial period. The other is methodologically unsound. When we study the chief lists recovered, we note that in recent generations succession passes often from brother to brother (even occasionally from nephew to uncle), while in early generations succession is always represented as being from father to son, that is to say, assimilated to the father to son ideal. Sensitive to the problems of inferring chronology from oral genealogies and traditions, Jouaux (1991: 209 fn) admits that her chronology is “maximale”. Thus, because Jouaux doesn’t take account of these tendencies, her chronology extends too far into the past.

Our suggestion is thus that the majority of the clans and groups that claim a Gudur origin are descendants of those Mofu-Gudur, with Gudal likely over-represented, who took refuge in the mountains during the Fulbe wars of 1820-60. Not all of course: some would have passed through Gudur earlier for the reasons suggested by Seignobos; others may well have been unsuccessful pretenders to a chieftaincy and their followers; others again falsely claim to have come from Gudur because of its prestige (van Beek 1981: 118). To cite one example, it seems reasonable to infer that the clan called Begeda, perhaps a corruption of BiGudul, with the praisenames Biya (men) and Mbalda (women), which holds the small chiefdom of Damay on the Sukur plateau, was amongst those refugees, and that this accounts for the warm welcome that they received from the chief of Sukur whose ancestor had left Gudur somewhat earlier. As time went by refugees became fully integrated into their host societies, speaking their languages and forgetting the Mofu-Gudur language but not Gudur.

But if these migrations were so “recent” how do we explain Gudur’s reputation as a “pagan Mecca”? Although certain Gudur refugees may have had prior contacts with montagnards to the west, most were penetrating a dangerous world where strangers risked capture and being sold as slaves. Admittedly, in times of conflict or distress, refugees might be accepted for their potential contributions to agriculture, in particular labor-intensive terracing, and defense. But migration was a risky business. Amongst the Mafa, immigrants who own no land are called *keda*, dogs, and treated as such. To avoid this fate, migrants from Gudur would have been wise to impress their hosts with their ability to guarantee access to a great diviner who controlled the rain, caterpillars, locusts, epidemics, fecundity itself. Such were the crises and uncertainties of life in the mountains (cf. Beauvillain 1989) that this would increase their chances of a

decent reception by the villages that had taken them in. Eventually some of the migrants' descendants became chiefs. These were the communities most responsible for magnifying the reputation of Bay Gudur.

“The fount of magical authority”

At Gudur there was no pagan Mecca, no cult center, no holy of holies, little more than a small and doorless hut in Bay Gudal's residence that reputedly held Strümpell's "magical liquid". Neither did pilgrims arrive from afar at the end of a spiritual quest, though chiefs or delegations from distant communities, for example Vreke (Müller-Kosack 2003: 192) and Sukur, visited Bay Gudal to seek his determination of the causes of and cures for the calamities that affected or threatened their wellbeing. When de Lauwe (1937: 57) tells us that "The chiefs of Gudur are, from father to son, the greatest sorcerers of the region", and Lavergne (1943) describes Bay Ngwom as "an influential and well-known sorcerer", we infer that the French "sorcier" is being used in its late Latin sense as a teller of fortunes (*sortarius*) or diviner. Diviners in the Mandara region are lexically distinguished from witches, and from those who cast evil spells or harm by magical means.

Here as often in pre-modern Africa, irrational chance was not accepted as an explanation of harmful events. It was the diviners' task to establish the causes of events, past, ongoing or future, by deciphering the codes provided by a range of divinatory techniques. Thus divination, practiced by some men and some women of all ranks, was very much a part of daily life in the Mandara mountains, and one of the many ways in which the social was constantly being reproduced. For example, divination by household and clan heads and by chiefs reinforced their social status and powers. The underlying causes identified included but were not limited to the anger of spirits -- of things (for example, rain stones), of the ancestors, of the community's mountain spirit and of higher order beings -- and to curses, witchcraft and sorcery of the evil kind. Appropriate responses included prayers, offerings, sacrifices and magic (Vincent 1971, 1975, 1987).¹²

The ability of a Bay Gudal, mediated through his ancestors and the rain stones, to attract (and we believe also to repel) rain, was inherited from his ancestor Biya and constituted his most important power. His chiefly ability to offer protection against a range of calamities at the scale of the Gudal community is not exceptional. What is extraordinary is the vast magnification of the reputation of later chiefs, the respect in which they were held, and the geographic range over which their powers were called upon. A line of local

¹² The reader is referred to these papers by Jeanne-Françoise Vincent which contain ethnography of a very high order and, while on the Mofu-Diamaré, are largely applicable to the Mofu-Gudur and, at a lower level of specificity, to Mandara montagnards generally. De Lauwe (1937: 57-60 and Plate IV: 2) describes Bay Takwaw II, whom he photographed, praying to his ancestors, receiving clients and consulting a diviner.

priest-chiefs, diviner-healers in an old montagnard tradition, had morphed into greater than life size figures, regionally recognized practitioners of their craft and magic, who, in return for prestations of horses, iron sheets, castrated goats, slaves and the like, furnished their clients from distant places with explanations of their troubles and instructions on rituals to be performed, and magical medicines, mostly it appears balls of beer dregs, that they took home with them to share with their community. For this transformation of Bay Gudal into a diviner of unprecedented status, we argue, the Gudur diaspora was primarily responsible even though it was achieved, so far as we can tell, without significant collaboration between the ethnically differentiated descendants of the diasporic refugees. This is only comprehensible in the context of a long period of crises extending from the first half of the 19th century to 1940 (inasmuch as it has ever ended), a period fraught with wars, Fulbe slave raids, European colonizations, shortages and famines, above all those provoked by the invasions of migratory locusts (Beauvilain 1989:116-117, 129). European observers of the 1930s – a time of major locust attacks – and especially the “Anglo-Saxons” in the zone under British mandate, culturally conditioned and even required to seek out “natural rulers” among the colonized, attributed a bogus antiquity to what they perceived as a theocracy and attached exaggerated powers to its “Prester John” equivalent. Paradoxically it is their notions and not those of the French administrators across the border, predisposed to discover egalitarian, acephalous societies (Sterner 2003: 15), that formed the foundation of what became the received historical interpretation, the one that we have disputed in this paper.

To conclude, our minimalist interpretation:

- conforms to the historical account – that of Lavergne – closest in time to the disaggregation of Gudur,
- explains why the emigration of Mofu-Gudur and other eastern Mandara mountain elements into the western Mandara mountains and plateaux was forgotten by the society from which they originated, even though from time to time emissaries of their chiefdoms travelled to Gudal to consult its chief.
- explains why – in contrast to Hidi Sukur – Bay Gudal did not play a legitimizing role in the installation of chiefs of other Mofu-Gudur chiefdoms (with the partial exception of the brother massifs) nor of Gudur’s supposed colonies,
- explains why Bay Gudal and his diagnostic and magical powers were more respected and sought after by distant groups, to the extent of being accorded unprecedented diviner status, than by the Mofu-Gudur themselves,

- and why their Mofu-Diamaré neighbors, speaking a language close to Mofu-Gudur, have never held Bay Gudal in special esteem, and
- finally it explains the absence of solidarity among montagnards claiming a Gudur origin, or, in other words, why there was never any diasporic Gudur commonwealth.

What is required to validate or reject this hypothesis? First, detailed restudy of Gudur and its diaspora in the mountains and elsewhere. Are we right in thinking that the bulk of the implantation of Gudur refugees in the mountains can be situated in the period of the 1820-60 wars with the Fulbe? We hope that there are researchers or their students who will take up a challenge that left us with a profound respect for our Mofu-Gudur interlocutors. They are the proud inheritors of an unusual form of socio-political system that allowed tens of thousands of montagnards to live together in peace, and to resist their enemies with considerable success – for they are still there – and all this in the absence of an over-arching authoritarian or coercive hierarchy. A fine example of African originality.

Finally, we should note that we found no evidence in Gudal or elsewhere in Mofu-Gudur territory for any specific DGB to Gudur linkage that might support an inheritance by Gudur of DGB magico-religious control over rain or other natural phenomena. Both represent aspects of a common northern Mandara mountains cultural tradition. On other hand we were struck by the apparent intensity of iron smelting in the Gudur region evidenced by quantities of slag and other smelting debris and remains of small “Sukur-type” furnaces (see David 2010). Is it possible that the florescence of the famous Sukur smelting industry and iron market, dating at least in part to the 19th century AD (David 2012, 2013) was stimulated by the Gudur diaspora?

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviews 2004-05

Persons interviewed in relation to Gudur fieldwork. Date, name, *title* or identifier(s), chiefdom, estimated date of birth. An asterisk * indicates more than one interview. Interviews were carried out in various combinations of Mofu-Gudur, French, and Fulfulde.

Date	Interviewee; title or identification; estimate of date of birth
Repeatedly	Alioum Baya Mana, our assistant & former asst to D. Barreteau, Mokong; b. ~1955
2004/06/22*	Al Hadj Hamadou Bay Sadou, <i>Chef de Canton</i> , Mokong; b. ~ 1926
2004/06/22	Hamadu Gamale, <i>Lawan Gudal</i> ; b. ~1948
2004/06/22*	Gamaldak Bay Takwaw, <i>Bay nga kwakwas</i> , Gudal; b. ~ 1939
2004/06/23*	Mihirta Mabirkata, <i>Maslalam</i> , Ngwaadama clan, Bilavay hamlet, Gudal; b. ~1920.
2004/06/25	Kemcey Mazagwa, <i>Slagama</i> , Gudal; b. ~1930
2004/06/26	Mathieu Paslakola, son of head of Masacavaw clan, Mt Gilgam, Gudal; b. ~1965
2004/06/28	Gabriel Zamkwala, grandson of Bay Slawata, Gelvawa; b. ~1970?
2004/07/02	Oumar Dewere Ngabanai, Masuwa clan, son of Usa shrine keeper, Gelvawa; b. ~1970

- 2004/07/06 Ahmadou Oumarou, *Lawan* Maaca'b; b. ~1959; and Kitkel Maloum, *Bay nga kwakwas*, Maaca'b; b. ~1947
- 2004/07/06 Saadu A'bsang, nephew of Bay Gwalazang, Manggezla; b.~1930.
- 2004/07/09 Zumtala Beler, deposed ca 1947 as Bay when Ndeveley incorporated into Kelwaw, but still *Bay nga kwakwas*, Ndeveley; b. ~1932
- 2004/07/10 Abdourahman Moussa, Chef de Canton Mofu-Sud and *Lawan* Zedem; b. ~1962
- 2004/07/12 Jauro Palangadu, elder of Zedem; b. ~1923.
- 2004/07/12 Yaya Bello, *Bay nga kwakwas*, Zedem; b.~1937
- 2004/07/13 Ngimarga, nephew of *Masahwoyak*, Mambay; b. ~1922
- 2004/07/14 Hamidou (Kaatimi) Kadanga, *Lawan*, Mafaw; b. ~1939
- 2004/07/19 Hamman Bouba, *Lawan* Katamsa, and elders; b. 1928
- 2004/07/20 Alioum Kawatse, brother of *Chef de Canton*, Mokong; b. ~1950
- 2004/07/21 Medeley Kusaf, *Lawan & Bay nga kwakwas*, Kilwo; b. ~1936
- 2004/07/22 Abdullahi Wandala, *Lawan* Mowo; b. ~1962; & Hura Kitekil, *Bay nga kwakwas*; b. ~1914
- 2004/07/23 Yaya Kazhiki, *Lawan* Dimeo; b. ~1937
- 2004/07/25 Oumarou Nassourou, *Lawan* Mawuzlal; b. ~1949
- 2005/11/08 Kodji Ndangawa, *Lawan* Njeleng; b. ~1940
- 2005/11/09 Hinivaw Katiba, *Lawan* Gelvawa; b. ~1940
- 2005/11/10 A group of Masakal men comprising: Tavram 'De'dkam (b. ~1959), assistant to Zliwa Bay Gaza, Masakal's *Bay nga kwakwas* and *Maslalam*; and Bay Gaza's nephew, Maidadi (b. ~1970), and Illa (b. ~1977), son of Masakal Lawan Abdoullaye Moutouroua's elder sister.
- 2005/11/10 (Interviewer J-M Datouang Djoussou.) *Lawan* Hamman Gajere, Membeng, a Hina chieftaincy immediately south of Njeleng; b. ~1950
- 2005/11/11 Hammadou Mongvaha, *Lawan* Cuvok; b.~1942; and Comey Ndima, his FBS; b. ~1939

Appendix 2: Seignobos's "maximalist" view

In the 15 years since we first presented the first version of this paper in Maroua, no one to the best of our knowledge has argued a detailed case against our interpretation. However, in 2017 Christian Seignobos published a dissenting "maximalist" view of northern Mandara culture history with particular reference to Gudur and Mowo. We reproduce here ND's translation of his conclusions (pp. 144-5):

Mowo and Gudur hark back to an ancient societal order that was dominated by the sacred. More particularly the Mowo are somewhat reminiscent of a past world that underlies the present peoples of the Mandara mountains. They have had to accommodate themselves to emergent forms of political structure that were strongly influenced by refugees from the plains (Giziga, Zumaya, Monjokoy-musgum) who promoted the preeminence of temporal power in the framework of small, clearly delimited ethnic groups that developed into the ethnic partitioning as it appeared at the start of the 20th century. These developing entities rejected a religious tutelage judged sometimes stifling in favor of keeping only those symbols reserved for their own chiefs. Certain massifs, e.g., Mofu-Duvangar, demonstrated a radical rejection of the Mowo and Gudur amounting to a true ostracizing, while others (Massakal, Wazang and Durum), in return for certain forms of allegiance, protected the Mowo. Elsewhere (at Mbokou, Molkwo, Muayang) forms of politico-religious symbiosis prevailed.

The Gudur, however, did not have the same destiny as the Mowo, preserved as they were in their hills and above all because they knew how to adapt to social changes. Their secular domain spared them from being marginalized and blacklisted as was the case of the Mowo. The Mofu-Gudur, while retaining their religious power, appeared hardly any different from the Mofu Zedem, Wazang, Duvangar or the Mafa ... and could without difficulty exchange wives with all their neighbors. Besides, the “word of Gudur” (their propaganda) showed itself to be effective. Thus the positive role of their past sacrifices prevails in people’s memories, while Gudur might have been suspected of releasing all kinds of evil.

Of Mowo, on the other hand, what sticks in the mind is the power of their sacred objects (*kuley*), their irreversible and dangerous aspect. The image of the ravages inflicted by caterpillars imposed itself once locust invasions ceased at the end of 1930. The Mowo, rejected into the camp of the outcasts, seem to have been incapable of renewing their image. The arguments regarding them are still not over. Old informants such as the chief of Morley don’t hesitate to sing the praises of the Mowo, whose authority rested on knowledge that had the aim of bringing peace to the world. The Morley chief wished to make black-skinned Europeans of them, so superior did their power seem compared to that of their contemporaries.

However, in conjunction with modern communities this non-conforming ethnic group is no longer understood especially by young Christian school leavers. At Duvangar and even at Wazang the Mowo are regarded as pariahs, untouchables, or as strolling players, until recently going about with their xylophones. They are even accused of having in the past created a sort of religious hypnosis. Today to live outside the cantonal chiefdom is to live outside the national community. This marginalization has the effect of rendering such people forever dangerous.

As is evident from this extract, the paper does not challenge ours directly but rather offers an alternative vision of the past. Like so much of Seignobos’s work it is full of ethnographic information and insights drawn from many parts of the northern Cameroonian Mandara mountains, for example the author’s emphasis on the traditional role of the Mowo as peacemakers in pre-Fulbe times. Seignobos draws wide-ranging historical inferences from the varied information he has gathered from observations and interviews. But there is no explicit method used in their generation, and only some informants are named. Thus his inferences are neither controlled nor reproducible by others. We may also question the utility of some of Seignobos’s core concepts such as “the sacred” or “governance” when applied to peoples who before the introduction of world religions did not regard sacred and secular realms as distinct, and whose behavior was controlled more by custom, force or the threat of force, and *ad hoc* negotiation than by formal institutions of governance. Neither do we accept that an ethnic identity such as that Seignobos attributes to the Mowo can survive for centuries under the sociopolitical and environmental conditions that obtained in the Mandara region. Mowo is now a single village and, as of 2005, one that presented mixed Mofu-Gudur and Gisiga characteristics. Its religious influences can hardly have been manifested in several zones over the centuries as Seignobos (2017: 119) proposes. On the contrary, while languages can remain distinct though ever changing over long periods, ethnic identity in this region is constantly in a process of becoming, and while there are, as JS (2003) has shown, commonalities in northern Mandara

mountains material culture, economies and technologies, political and social organization and indeed in world view, a claim for sustained influence on regional conceptions of religion on the part of a single ethnic group, let alone a village, conflicts with this broader appreciation of cultural commonalities and variety. It therefore requires exceptional documentation, which is not offered.

For these reasons, we believe that (ethno)history is best approached from the bottom up, starting with critical comparisons and analyses of observations, interviews and studies of material culture at the scale of the community, building outwards and through time to larger entities and institutions such as the state or, in this instance, the ritual paramountcy. Oral history (e.g., Vansina 1985), historical linguistics (e.g., Janda and Joseph 2004), besides archaeology, genetics, botany, musicology and many other disciplines (e.g., Gabel and Bennett [eds] 1967) can all be employed using the appropriate methodologies to wring history out of diverse data. While our limited attempt in this paper does not exemplify such a broad scale approach, it may serve as an element in future studies of that nature.

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