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

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RESEARCH MASTERS’ THESIS IN AFRICAN STUDIES

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To

Paul Nugent and V.G. Fasso, whose works on trans-frontier relations lured me into the ‘curtain commercial economy’.
SUMMARY

There is the temptation to interpret smuggling as something that exists purely in the eyes of the beholder[...] the historian merely has to place himself in the position of the ‘smuggler’- to see things from his/her standpoint-and the very phenomenon of smuggling effectively evaporates.(Nugent 2000:220-221). Gazing at smugglers, we discover relaxed and undisturbed facial expressions, yet they are people who live in a world characterized by uncertainties, ambiguities, risk situations and challenges which they accept, understand and try to control. Life to them is all about manipulating and creating chanced-situations. This is squarely the universe of social actors that this study describes as bush trade.

I have argued that uncertainty; insecurity and risks situations are indeterminate avenues which induce traders to adapt and change both the situation and the self. To attain this goal the study illustrates that agency, group and individual, (De Bruijn Van Dijk and Gewald, 2007), like social networking (Boissevain Mitchel 1973) are indispensable explanatory tools in understanding group dynamics in trans-border ‘uncontrolled trade’. A part of the political margins of the states of Cameroon and Nigeria has been shown as the sphere of these interactions. They present zones of intense opportunities (Nugent and Asiwaju 1996) or are institutional vacuums (Kopytoff 1987) for the unfolding of unregulated trade activities. The outcome of playing with the borders in this connection has been the production and reproduction of a cultural field, here-in described as a ‘traffic island’ (the universe of unregulated trade activities or ‘bush trade’). The island is not water-tight. It negotiates choices with other social fields; the most important of which is the state (of Cameroon) that officially claims unparallel sovereignty over its control.

The study shows that in spite this determination, the state through corrupt officials and fragile institutions ‘sinks into the bush trade system’ exposing in full measure the precarious balance between the state and society (Chazan 1989). The research which to a large extent is qualitative in nature has made use of six case studies that inform in context the nexus between unregulated trade activities and livelihood strategies from the standpoint of uncertainty and risk situations. Data was collected from a combination of empirical field study, oral interviews and exploitation of documented sources. The study has gone ahead of previous studies (MaGaffey et al 1991; Agbaw 2000; Igue and Soule 1992) that have so far treated unrecorded trade from the paradigmatic scheme of a moral debate- “a good or bad activity?”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I sincerely thank the Director of ASC, Leo de Haan, whose incisive criticisms and interest to see me carry on the challenging research gave me the zeal to continue. I am also grateful to the coordinator of the program, Dr. Daniella Merolla and other ASC staff members like Westra Maaiki and Petite Gitty who made administrative procedures easier for me in the Netherlands. Dr. Stephen Ellis’ hard criticism on my naïve conceptualization of the work gave me the ‘baptism of fire’. Such a challenge compelled me to work even extra hard. I particularly reserve exceptional gratitude to Professor Robert Ross whose welcoming attitude gave me the opportunity to discover some additional avenues of exploring the theme. His orientation on how to combine history and anthropology shall remain ever green in my mind.

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N.Takor Kahjum

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ACRONYMS AND LOCAL TERMS

*gwe*  
Warrior especially in some North Western grasslands chiefdoms in Cameroon

*Ardo*  
Fulani traditional authority

*Bambe*  
Local name for a porter or carrier

*Fon*  
Title for traditional ruler (also known as chief)

*fungeh*  
Fuel (Benzine that comes from Nigeria)

*Achaba*  
Local appellation for Motorcycle in Abuenshie and its environs

*CFA*  
Communauté Financière Africain, Legal tender used in CEMAC Africa

*Naira*  
Nigerian Currency

*Gogoro*  
Unrefined gin distilled in Nigeria

*DO*  
District Officers (appellation for colonial administrators)

*ADO*  
Assistant District Officer (auxiliary to the colonial district officer)

*NAB*  
National Archives Buea

*CPDM*  
Cameroon Peoples’ Democratic Movement

*SDF*  
Social Democratic Front

*UNDP*  
(French acronym for National Union for Democracy and Progress Political Party)

*Njangi*  
Local thrift and loan societies

*Operations Villes Mortes*  
Political scenario characterized by boycott and desertion of public places

*Shaa’a-a*  
Local brew made out of fermented corn

*Risk Bearers*  
Traders who manipulate the vicissitudes of uncertainty and risk situations
ILLUSTRATIONS

List of Maps

I: The Partition of Cameroon in 1919 ................................................................. 30
II: Part of Southwest Borders Between Cameroon and Nigeria ...................... 32

List of Photographs

2.2. Alhaji Issa in a relaxed mood on his sofa. Perhaps a sign of a well-deserved economic and social accomplishment. (Courtesy Nixon Takor, April, 2009) ................. 24
2.3. Partial view of the Abuenshie border community: They look young, old, busy calculative and from varied backgrounds; yet they have one goal-make the best out of opportunities at the political margin of the state. (Courtesy Nixon Takor, May, 2009) 33
3.1. Border boys mobilising at the borders between Abuenshie and Abong .......... 38
3.2. Border boys offloading goods and ferrying people to and from Abong in Nigeria .... 39
3.3. Elias (left) and his friend Julius (right) in Ako negotiating over currency (Naira) exchange ................................................................................................................. 41
3.4. Jackson on his motorcycle taxi in Ako .......................................................... 42
4.1. Grinding Mill. Grinding mills have an almost inelastic demand among the communities from the Ndop plain up to the border limits of the Nkambe plateau. This is because the peoples’ main staple is corn fufu- a paste like mixture made out of grounded maize. There is a local conception that the best of these mills come from Nigeria (Courtesy Nixon Takor, November, 2008) ......................................................... 52
CONTENT

DEDICATION ................................................................................................................ ii
SUMMARY .................................................................................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................. iii
ACRONYMS AND LOCAL TERMS ............................................................................... v
ILLUSTRATIONS .......................................................................................................... vi
CONTENTS .................................................................................................................. vii

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SEARCHING AN EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK FOR
BUSH TRADE ................................................................................................................. 1
The Problem .................................................................................................................. 2
Defining Bush Trade ................................................................................................... 2
Bush trade, a semi-autonomous Social field? ............................................................ 3
The Context of Research ............................................................................................ 4
The Search for an Explanatory Framework ................................................................ 9
Objectives .................................................................................................................. 14
Methodology .............................................................................................................. 14
Exploitation of Documented Sources ....................................................................... 14
Informal Surveying .................................................................................................... 15
Choice of informants .................................................................................................. 16
Formal Interviews ...................................................................................................... 16
The Case Studies ......................................................................................................... 17
Mode of Interview and Thesis Outline ...................................................................... 18

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF BUSH TRADE ........................................... 20
Living Testimonies of Some Traders .......................................................................... 20
Case 1: Ngu Peter, the Bamenda-Nkongsamba Itinerant ........................................ 21
Case 2: Alhaji Issa, the link between French Cameroun and Nigeria ................... 23
Anchoring the Case Studies to the historical Process ............................................. 26
“It began in the Pre-colonial Period” ........................................................................ 26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tracking the Colonial Origin of “Bush trade”</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Partition of Cameroon and Trade Diversion</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The post Independence Situation</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES OF ‘BUSH TRADE’</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the actors in bush trade?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3: Elias Paye: the ‘gogoro’ and fuel Entrepreneur</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias and the border boys</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 4: Jackson-the ‘Achaba’ and “boy boy”</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing the Life Stories of Elias and Jackson</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Barricades, an Organizational Speed Brake?</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASCULINITY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity: The Appropriation of Male Vitality</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 5: Eddy, ‘Man of all Weathers’</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddy as a Porter</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddy and the ‘Garoua Airlift’</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching Masculinity from Eddy’s Context</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo Names: ‘another form of identity construction’</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names Seen from Common Sense</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Gaze in the Pseudo-naming Social Matrix</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The car encounter’</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Aliases with Veiled Meanings</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE RISK FACTOR, THE ORDEAL OF TRYING EXPERIENCES</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematising Risk</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A Haven of uncertainty’- The Moral Economy of Cameroon</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The Ghost Town Operation’ the Compelling Spell</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 6: Chesi Gilbert alias Mebreada ................................................................. 69
Gilbert and the ‘fungeh trade’ ............................................................................. 72
Bridging Opportunities, Creating New Risks .................................................... 73
Going through the Huddles, another form of Risk ......................................... 74
Expanding and Enduring Further Risk ............................................................. 77
The death of Yaya Bala and Gilbert’s risk ‘mirror-image’ ............................... 78
A Critique of the Risk Factor in Bush Trade ................................................... 79
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 81

CHAPTER SIX

GENERALCONCLUSION:  BUSH TRADE IN PERSPECTIVES ........................82

REFERENCES .................................................................................................... 87
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SEARCHING AN EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK FOR BUSH TRADE

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) has made emphasized to 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 that are constantly produced and reproduced leaving the actors involved in unregulated trade with a characteristic distinctiveness. This study 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 further explored because of its complexity. It is also an attempt to render new insights into patterns of trading history 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 link between trading practices and border studies which has been part of the focus of trans-border relations. In this study, more
attention has been given to trans-border ‘unregulated trade activities’ which for the purpose of reaching a suitable description and context, I have called ‘bush trade’. The present study is an actor-oriented attempt to see what goes on in a ‘semi-autonomous cultural 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 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 differs from author to author. Experts on border studies like Asiwaju (1985) Asiwaju and Nugent(1996), Fanso (1985), 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 that subsist on underground border transactions. This coupled with the camouflaged and at times overt corruption of state officials who for personal economic and social reasons fraternize with smugglers and lend them good support for their shady activities.

Conditions have further been made favorable 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 constraints have not left 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 appropriated and sustained 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 (Roitman 1990; 1998; 2004) 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 theorists of agency especially De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald (2007) everything can creatively be mastered and negotiated. I seek therefore to find out in this study whether and how do externally motivated uncertainties and internally generated risks
situations shape a ‘close’ community of people with the shared objective of guaranteeing and sustaining their livelihood. Questions related to this central interest are:

How do bush traders perceive risk?
What strategy do they use to control, manage and sustain risk situations?
To what extent do they exploit uncertainty and risk situations as a source of livelihood?

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 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’ (Bayart 1989).

It is strongly in my view that another definition circulates among a generation of traders who see the border 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 cannot 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 constraints. The communitarian approach of traders to deviate from what is officially the normal channels, leaves good evidence 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 cultural 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 Falk-Moore (1978). Her 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 cited in Falk-Moore 1978) 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 that of Cochrane (1971) which states that ‘it is society that controls law and not the reverse.’

It is largely in this context that Falk-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, but 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 between 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\textsuperscript{1} social field as boundaries identified not by its organization but by a processual 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 circuit 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\textsuperscript{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 constraints from the prism of law. Although a relevant assumption, her conclusion does not fully express the reasons why and the methods by which people living in legal confines try to disengage themselves from the grip. 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 as it strongly exhibits an order of shared beliefs, values and practices that identifies and characterizes the actors in place and in 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.

\textsuperscript{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 to do so, in their bargaining with one another. See S.F Moore, “Law and Social Change: the Semi-Autonomous Social Field as an appropriate field of Study” in Law as Process: An Anthropological Approach, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp.54-81.

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 (French) 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 lines of demarcation (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. The 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. At present trade regulations only go as far as possibilities of access to the traders can expose. This is usually along the major motor-transport or river transport openings and exits where Customs, Gendarmerie and Police posts are established. Faced with this barrier, a traffic in goods 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 and crack down commercial networks has yielded very little success.

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 unit of observation 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 disparate

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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.
terms 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 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 the divergent views they hold about the borders of the state generally perceived as theatres of opportunities (Nugent,1996:11) These differences in my opinion harbors the crux of the matter which constitutes the major problem of the work.

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 Bennafila (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 (Nugent and Asiwaju, eds, 1996).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. To him, the border is an institutional vacuum where individuals and group of persons appropriate negotiate vital choices.

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, i.e., 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 (1992) 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 (1997), the north-eastern borders with Nigeria and most especially Herrera, et al, (1992a;1992b) along the borders with Nigeria around the North West Province of Cameroon 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 to explaining 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 (Edel 1970).

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 other studies 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. It looks at the bush trade economy as a ‘cultural field’ operating in its own scope, a ‘traffic island’, patterned on the basis of exploiting and creating risk situations as a strategy of livelihood’. Bush trade as a term of reference to understand the complexity and dynamics of unrecorded trans-border trade,
from the above perspective, stands to bring new insights in analyzing the extent to which uncertainty is mitigated and risk situations averted as a strategy of livelihood.

The Search for an Explanatory Framework

In this section I shall attempt to hypothesize the different entry points from which bush trade can be discussed. The rationale of course will be to give an analytical framework to the study. I shall begin by appreciating the nexus between the borders and bush trade. This shall invite other relevant concepts like network analysis, agency and the formalist-substantivist debates of the human motives of making choices.

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 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 (1985) 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 (1985), 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’ argue 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 veil the role the state has to play in binding its citizenship within its legal geo-political space. Nugent and Asiwaju (1996:9) 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

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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.
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).

In general, African boundaries as Nugent and Asiwaju (1996:11) carefully intimate 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. This position resonates well with that of Kopytoff (1987) who earlier on opined that the border [frontier] may also be a force for culture-historical continuity and conservatism. He elaborately argues 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 (1985:33-39; 300-339) corroborates this view when he argues that the near fluidity of political boundaries in the pre-colonial period gave room to a significant trans-border trade which the colonial placement of border restrictions frustrated and turned into contraband trade. Nugent and Asiwaju’s (1996:55-56) share the view when they emphasize the withering away of old trading systems gave space for new modern cross-border trade. Although they fail to establish the difference between the old trading system and the modern cross-border trade, it can be inferred from their generalization that knowledge on unregulated trade can hardly be properly understood without taking recourse to the historical process that shaped and continues to shape it.

It is also a given that, bush trade as a pattern of trans-border trade has exhibited processes of social inter-twinning. The trade has to a large extent relied on a collection of nodes of interactions. Such a relation besides family, friendship 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 some theorists who thought it was limited to the links of kinship, friendship and neighborliness (Boissevain and Mitchel 1973:22). Boissevain and Mitchel argue that these are only specific types of linkages among individuals which are 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.). 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 Mitchel (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 wants. However, the social network theory has been criticized for its exclusiveness. It has the tendency to invest emphasis on the inter-actor 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 appropriated and negotiated.

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 in analysing 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 Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald. (eds.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.” Boissevain and Mitchel (1973:3) expose the
importance of agency when they say apply agency, when say “…networks have to do with (social) individuals, rather than groups.” The theory of agency thus stands out relevant to give an insight concerning individual perceptions and motivations in the bush trade.

There is also the need to look for other scholarly debates that can possibly provide analytical leads to the bush trade economy from its motivational and perceptual 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) presupposes 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 position long sustained by Karl Polanyi and his think tank 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.

Playing with the political margins of the state, getting involved in social networks and appropriating inventiveness and reflexivity are just some of the different strategies that actors of the bush trade economy use to manage uncertainty and risk. Risk⁵ (see chapter five) and uncertainty are two concepts that can hardly be sidelined when discussing the link between bush trade and livelihood strategies. Men, women, older and younger people, rich and poor are involved in different approaches to managing risk and uncertainty (Scoones 1996:3). Studies in this vision abound on Africa (De Bruijn, 2005; Whyte 1997; Morris 2008; Dinar 2008; Tandon 2007; Dietz et al. 2004; Van der Geest 2004; Schrijf 2004). Risk and uncertainty fall within the limits of the probability theory of Hackling (1975) who contend that through understanding probability, the chance-dominated world could somehow be tamed (Hackling 1990). Perhaps the best model of uncertainty that suits the character of this study is that espoused by Diggins (1994:223) who holds that experience is characterized by ambiguity and contingency. Using John Dewey’s hypothetical stance of the world being ‘precarious and perilous’, (Ibid) intimates that ‘interacting with our ambiguous and troublesome surroundings we refine our abilities to imagine, plan and control’. Uncertainty seen from this perspective besets agency as it is not to be denied, but

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⁵ Risk is the chance, in quantitative terms of a defined hazard occurring. It therefore combines a probabilistic measure of the occurrence of the primary event(s) with a measure of the consequences of that/ those events (Royal Society 1992:4).
acknowledged as a characteristic of both experience of misfortune and the process of dealing with it(Whyte1997:19).

From the basis of this explanatory framework, it is evident that bush trade as an issue of study can hardly be explained by a single analytical variable. Each explanatory casing commands a certain degree of strength and weakness which makes it necessary to be flexible enough to embrace tradeoffs. However, as a study that has to do principally with examining trader motivations, perceptions and strategies concerning the exploitation of uncertainty and risk situations, appeal has been made to a large extent to the theory of agency which emphasizes the mode, nature and pattern of interaction and flexibility that man and group of people have vis a vis institutional and environmental structures.

Objectives
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 ethic point of view. This attempt sets out to closely examine bush trade (from an emic stand point) as a West African unrecorded cross border trading culture 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 reflexivity in overcoming, shaping and mastering uncertainties and risk situations. 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.

Methodology
Data for the research was collected through three main methods- exploitation of documented sources, informal surveying and formal interviews.

Exploitation of Documented Sources
Although bush trade is a camouflaged economy with little recorded (if not doubtful) recorded evidence, probing into archival and published documented sources was a necessary 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 in the development of the trade. 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 Central library of the University of Yaoundé I was consulted. Of equal importance was the National archives in Buea (NAB) which I consulted to confirm some of the reports I got from informants about the pre-colonial and colonial trade.

**Informal Surveying**

This is perhaps where the greatest attention 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 officials, 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 approaches I employed was participant observation where I lived with the people, interacted with them at various social levels like in public transport cars, drinking spots, international borders, etc. Some local markets (like in Misaje, Ndop in Cameroon and Abong in Nigeria) were visited and a panoramic 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 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 was 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 how risk situations have been exploited and constructed over time in bush trade as a strategy for livelihood.

**Formal Interviews**

Ellis and MacGaffey suggest 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 (1996:25). 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 histories⁶, 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

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⁶ Life history is more appropriate to the nature of this study because it is more down to earth, more devoted to our purposes than those of the autobiographer, less concerned with artistic values than with a faithful rendering of the subjects experience and interpretation of the world he lives in. The social scientist who gathers a life history takes steps to ensure that no important fact or event is slighted, that what purports to be factual squares with other available evidence and that the subject’s interpretations are honestly given. See Becker (1970:19).
operate. (Ibid: 27). The research has mostly followed qualitative techniques of enquiry. This is due in part to the paucity in statistical data as Ellis and MacGaffey (1996) suggest. It is also due to the fact that I intend to generate possible leads and ideas which can be used to understand in a more comprehensive manner the mathematical analysis of the same or similar study.

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 focus on two long-distance trade retirees, 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. In situating the historical context of bush trade, the cases 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 what Mbembe (2000) describes as ‘ambiguities and challenges.’ Eddy’s life episode like those that precedes and succeeds his, show the place of external uncertainties in orienting strategies of guaranteeing livelihood. It also shows how agency is invested by individuals to overcome constraints. 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 a semi autonomous cultural field. Extrapolating from the case studies I have concluded that in as much as brackets of social or cultural worlds (traffic islands) exist, there is always room for maneuvers 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 drawn from his family state which was of low income earning. These difficulties among other chance situations were quickly translated as opportunities by Gilbert to make his livelihood sustainable.

**Mode of Interview and Thesis Outline**

The mode of interview was quite flexible. 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. 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 Falk-Moore (1971) as a semi-autonomous social field. The chapter also exposes inter alia the objectives, explanatory debates and research methodology used for 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. It attempts to show how uncertainty and risk situations have been approached along the historical lane that fashioned bush trade. 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 chapter is 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 pseudonames 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 in 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. 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 knitting the different themes to provide an answer to the central thesis of the investigation. At the same time it provokes other related debates.
CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF BUSH TRADE

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 link which goes beyond the period described. 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 will attempt to interrogate the question; whether or not the present ‘bush trade’ is a stimulus- response invention to certain contemporary economic and socio-cultural exigencies or rather a justification of an endless process of culture-historical intersection. As a methodological approach, the chapter teases the inter-disciplinary conjunction between history and anthropology in constructing social reality.

The chapter illustrates three major interlinking historical periods-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; a colonial ‘restricted trade’ period when the colonial (German, British and French) attempt to map out political spheres of influence meant the establishment of political borders which restricted trade flows. Finally, the chapter quickly examines the post colonial period that inherited the colonial structures of borders and stiffened trans-border movements. Some living testimonies of former long distance traders have been used as aid to understand the historical evolution of unregulated trade (bush trade) in Cameroon.

Living Testimonies of Some Traders

The cases I have chosen to profile are both retirees of the colonial and early post colonial long distance trade between Cameroon (British and French) and Nigeria. While the first
case on Ngu Peter tracks interactions that bush traders had between the Bamenda Grasslands (in the former British southern Cameroons) with French Cameroun, the case of Alhaji Issa goes beyond to show that mobility was not mono-directional. Traders moved to different directions depending on the market stakes and other prospects. Alhaji Issa straddled the borders between Nigeria and French Cameroun. An analysis follows these life episodes to expose how historical processes related to institutional and most importantly border manipulation shape a cultural community which combine uncertainty and risk situations as strategies of livelihood. An interpretation of the life exploits of these two traders will inform the extent to which the desire to manipulate chance situations brought satisfaction or dismay to bush traders.

**Case 1: Ngu Peter, the Bamenda-Nkongsamba Itinerant**

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 his father’s 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.

The 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 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 Mbouda, Dschang, Melong, Sautcho 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 Cameroun (see map I) by the trade in goods like liquor, beer, soap, cigarettes, 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 cover for his wide objective 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 enduring risk. With this mental setting, he got connected to the world of international trade that made evaded import and export duties and 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 dawn. 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 twelve children to school. He was also able to construct his houses and buy his work equipment after training himself

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7 This type of trading networks is described by Cohen (1971). In his contribution on “cultural Strategies in organizing trading Diasporas”.
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 got into bush trade
to guarantee the uncertain future, a condition that demands ‘taming the chanced dominated

2.1. Ngu Peter in the Periodic Bambili (Bamenda) Market: “Re-inventing a culture
of trade” (Courtesy Nixon Takor, May, 2009)

Case 2: Alhaji Issa, the link between French Cameroun and Nigeria

Alhaji Isa was born in 1918 in Bamessing. He is the 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 common at the
time. Although born in this atmosphere of social fright, Alhaji Issa 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.

8 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 were somehow
2.2. Alhaji Issa in a relaxed mood on his sofa. Perhaps a sign of a well-deserved economic and social accomplishment. (Courtesy Nixon Takor, April, 2009)

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 1914-1916⁹ to the Southern (and later Eastern) 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. This is a vivid situation of the interaction between structure and agency. (See De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald, 2007).

The youthful exuberance that characterized Issa 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

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⁹ Between 1914 and 1916, the First War World 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.
Bamenda on three occasions to get a travelling pass to move to French 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\textsuperscript{10}, cigarettes and kerosene. This strictness only gave Issa and his peers the vision that, there was something profitable ‘behind the curtain’. 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 Issa 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.

From the life dramas of Ngu Peter and Alhaji Issa, we can clearly see how constraints and institutional barricades have been transposed to opportunities. The two traders each in their capacities have been able to establish models of behavior in the face of risk. Fate and fear (Dercon 2008) have been conflated through ingenuity translating the view that “…mankind is not one of people alienated or helpless in a risky, uncertain world; humans are actively and intelligently engaged in creating a degree of insurance despite the lack of assurance” (Whyte 1997:18). We have also seen that the aversion of uncertainty and risk situations has not only been the preserve of the traders in individually using their ingenuity. It has as well been their ability to gain from risk-sharing actors, the collaboration of managing risk situations. In this way we can see the importance of social networking (see Barnes 1968; 1969a; 1969b; Boissevain and Mitchell 1973; Quarles 1999) or the spirit of communitarianism (Slater and Tonkiss 2001) in bush trade as an indispensable strategy to respond to uncertainty and risk situations. The communitarian vision of maneuvering

\textsuperscript{10} From the very beginning of colonial rule in Africa, regulation of the liquor trade figured prominently in European definition of the Imperial burden. A rather vague injunction that Africans ought to be protected from the liquor traffic had been agreed at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, and five years later the Brussels Convention had sought to prohibit alcohol from entering areas in Africa where it had not hitherto been consumed. This was taken further by the Convention of Saint Germain-e-Laye in 1919, which required the signatories to prohibit the importation of ‘trade spirits’ into Africa. See Nugent (2002).
with uncertainty and risk situations expressed in this manner creates a cultural field which in the context of this discussion takes the expression ‘a traffic island’. This ‘traffic island’ at best has an anchorage in the historical process of (long distance) trade in Cameroon.

**Anchoring the Case Studies to the historical Process**

The life stories of Ngu Peter and Alhaji Issa can be a good starting point from which we can better understand the social and political setting in which bush trade developed. In this section, we shall see how the social and political environments of these two personalities shape their destinies and how these actors in turn exploited the institutional frailties, especially of ‘moving borders’ to their advantage.

**“It began in the Pre-colonial Period”**

The life stories of Ngu and Issa are mostly focused on the colonial period of long distance trade in the Bamenda Grasslands but unregulated trade can be traced earlier than this period. It is for this reason that a survey of the pre-colonial link of bush trade is necessary. 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), Bennafla (2002). In most, if not all if these seminal works on the exploitation of borders as zones of opportunities and constraints, very scant attention have been 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.\(^\text{11}\) These traditional polities had a strong sense of power-centrism and fiercely

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\(^\text{11}\) 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 Nut, (an inner core
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 Zeityn (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 centered on the competitive exchange of materials and objects. People also entered this arena of competitive exchange and recent research points up to 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 Zeityn’s (Ibid) 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-distant) was one of the major avenues on which the political prowess of the chiefdoms resided.

Through trade, the traditional ruling elite 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 (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 the 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, it is indisputable that the scale was unprecedented (at least as of the standards of the time). The pre-colonial state of unregulated trade therefore begs for revision on the position held by some historians (like Fonso 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, unconvincing.

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

A common aspect found in the living testimonies of Ngu Peter and Alhaji Issa 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, Cameroon and Nigeria. Nigeria on the one hand 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. 12

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12 See Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924-1927, National Archives Buea (NAB), Cameroon. pp.33. As one of the Mandate territories under the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, it was mandatory for the supervisory powers, Britain and France to send annual updates(reports) on the state of development in the territories(British and French Cameroons). These reports were most often compiled out of the local reports forwarded by District Officers (DOs) and Assistant District Officers (ADOs).
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 open inland commercial firms. After World War I, many local 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 the hinterland 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 I), meant the institutionalization of borders, traditional local and distant markets became strictly ‘foreign’, and were not easily accessible to partners across the borders. The situation in Fanso’s (1985) observation was such that many traders were cut off from their nearest

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13 Nkongsamba had increasingly become famous not only because of its transits location linking the coastal harbors 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).

14 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 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.
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. 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{15} for their produce. Thus the price differentials 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. 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 at 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 signaled as early as 1890 when attempts were made to begin cultivating \textit{col}a \textit{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 \textit{col}a \textit{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 20\textsuperscript{th} century resulted in a relative price drop for kola nuts, so that kola consumption increased remarkably almost everywhere. Once kola became an item of mass consumption, some traders diverted their interest to other profitable trade commodities. The most important of these commodities were liquor, cigarettes and beer which were rigorously controlled by the colonial administration. In spite the restrictions; traders were always capable of trafficking these goods in appreciable quantities across the borders. It should be noted here that the

\textsuperscript{15} 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.
colonial borders generated resistance which was expressed through illegal trans-frontier trade flows or bush trade.

**Map II: PART OF SOUTHWEST BORDERS BETWEEN CAMEROON AND NIGERIA**

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**The post Independence Situation**

The post independence period has not been very different from the colonial period. The issue of colonial boundaries has turned to state boundaries. At best, the state since
independence has been trying to regulate trade with neighboring countries through stringent border controls. A common characteristic about the post colonial border under investigation has been its enclave and backward nature. The road infrastructure linking the area with the rest of the country is deplorable let alone the connection with the state of Nigeria is at best done over narrow and dangerous water crossings. Where road links exist like from Sabongari, they are at best seasonal in nature, ie, very dusty during the dry season and muddy during the wet season. The emergence of new border communities with a strong sense of attachment to either of the states separated by the boundary, 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.

2.3. Partial view of the Abuenshie border community: They look young, old, busy calculative and from varied backgrounds; yet they have one goal - make the best out of opportunities at the political margin of the state. (Courtesy Nixon Takor, May, 2009)

From the basis of the presentation, the post colonial period of unregulated trade 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 trading activity. In terms of structural changes, there was a 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 trade in contraband goods. At present, the actors are not very discernible
as they are made up of people of different social categories (see Bennafia 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 and gun 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 stake uncertainty and create opportunities out of risk situations as a strategy of livelihood.

Conclusion
I have shown and argued in this chapter that ‘bush trade’ as a commercial-cum-cultural institution cannot be dismembered from the history of trade. It has been demonstrated and explained from the case studies of Ngu Peter and Alhaji Issa that historical antecedents upon which the trade was spun has been overburdened by accusations levied on the colonial mission of ‘balkanizing’ 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 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 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, re-produced itself in the colonial period adapting to the colonial institutional strains. At independence and thereafter, the nature of trade has been changing and intimately responding to the structural changes of the modern state of Cameroon. In its widest representation, the chapter has shown the endless sequence of uncertainty and risk situations created by social and political intent. Having shown the historical process that conditioned bush trade, it will be incumbent to closely to take a look on the trade to understand how the system works. This will be the interest of the next chapter that treats the organization and structural principles of bush trade.
CHAPTER THREE

ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES OF ‘BUSH TRADE’

As indicated 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 chapter will be an identification of some 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 shocks of rival social fields. Closely linked to this the chapter also will examines some structural principles that govern the bush trade economy.

Much of the literature that have dealt on the organization of bush trade have looked at the different ways by which actors involved in unregulated trade, master and exploit the institutional frailties of their environment for livelihood. It has most often been a straightforward description of how people construct their own social niches. 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 been given to a critical appreciation of the social processes that collectively help actors involved in unregulated trade to define and sustain their source of livelihood. 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 at the frontiers are as numerous and complex as their contributions in sustaining the order from running into oblivion. Bennafla (2002:107) reconciles this complexity by arguing that the actors and users of the borders are individuals or enterprises that directly or indirectly profit from the opportunities offered by the straddling of two or more states. According to her these actors are those who live or inhabit the frontiers and those who live on or make fortunes out of the frontier. 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.

Case 3: Elias Paye: the ‘gogoro’ and fuel Entrepreneur
Ako is a teeming locality in Ako sub Division of Donga - Mantung Division in Cameroon (see map II). 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 people 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 diverse origins like Takum and Abong in Nigeria, Wimbum and Mbembe on the Nkambe plateau and Nso from Bui Division.
Ako like most parts of the neighbourhoods on the Cameroon-Nigeria borders are backward in terms of social amenities. The road infrastructure linking the area with the Divisional headquarters in Nkambe are seasonal; either too dusty during the dry season or very muddy during the rainy season. This infrastructural weaknesses have resulted to the
emergence of competing structures like motor bike taxis (*achaba*) and long distance carriers. It has also made it that people in around the area rely to a large extent on goods coming from Nigeria. The presence of state institutions in the area creates little impact as the border Gendarmerie and Customs’ posts have barely a handful of personnel who in their maximum vigilance can hardly patrol the extensive and permeable borders (Griffiths 1996) that the sub-division shares with the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is in this environment that Elias Paye was born and lives.

Elias Paye lives in Central street Ako. He 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 realized 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 and skillful to exploit the opportunities that trans-border trade could offer to him. Elias holds that he respected the Customs officials and the responsibility they were charged with to regulate border trade but intimates that he could only pretend to be a good citizen by declaring just an insignificant proportion of his goods. The rest had to go through the ‘backdoor’ that 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 Abuenshie (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 Abuenshie 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 [...] trans-border, people’s facility to language (notably among neighboring 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 men at the borders at Abuenshie 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. They are aware of the risks involved in exploiting opportunities but they are always inventive and reflexive to avoid embarrassing circumstances. When things however, fail to work according to anticipated plans, they can only redress their strategy to correct their errors. Life to them is all about maneuvering with uncertainty and risk situations.

3.1. Border boys mobilising at the borders between Abuenshie and Abong
3.2. **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 rates 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 cover up 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 fuel 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’ proceeds to map 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 Abuenshie has no choice but to make use of the young boys at Abuenshie who have an infinite mastery of both parts of the borders. This kind of social network is similar to the friendship network described by Quales(1999) in the Benin cattle smuggling economy.

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 the case. At times carefully mapped business plans have failed due to some execution lapses or the imposing smartness of the control units. Elias expresses this problem in the following words;

In some occasions my boys have been caught and even taken to Ako where 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 boss 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 because they know I’m a gentleman. (Interview 15 April 2009).

Elias’ calm and benign character can meet his arrogation of being a gentleman. He had 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. This suggests that when individuals or
groups of persons in the cultural field fail to comply with the governing rules of the order,
their chances of being subjected to the ‘Darwinian drama’ of leaving the field is high. Elias
holds that when his ‘boys are caught, he goes and negotiates with the Customs officials for
their release and the goods intercepted.’ Arrangements are made understandably and the
customs’ officials know fully well that we are all struggling boys. 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.(also see Bayart 1989;
Cazan 1989).

3.3. Elias (left) and his friend Julius (right) in Ako negotiating over currency
(Naira) exchange

Case 4: 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 motor-cyclists, 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, (on the Cameroon side of the border) 75m away from Abong (on the Nigerian part). He 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 transactions. He first began as a porter, carrying goods from the borders to warehouses in Abuenshie 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.

3.4. **Jackson on his motorcycle taxi in Ako**

In Abuenshie, Jackson operates a motor taxi which he says is owned by a Customs’ officer at the Customs’ frontier post in Abuenshie. He is expected to give the big man 12,000 francs CFA a week which to him is quite some small cash as he does brisk business with
the bike. With the courage of a young man and a certain cover of the big man (the Customs’ official), Jackson had a free chat with me about his strategies violating frontier control units.

_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 containers 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 40litres 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 (see map II). Most of these traders are lodged in an inn in Abuenshie 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 Jackson, runs a motor taxi bike owned by a senior Customs official in Abuenshie. 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 to his advantage. During strategic planning meetings with bush traders he provides some useful 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. They translate the interface between environmental and institutional constraints and human ability to make ends meet. It is also a demonstration by which people negotiate choices of socialization. Jackson’s reflexivity and social networking can be a good model from which we can proffer the human ability to exploit and generate risk situations as alternative strategies of livelihood. Jackson like Elias have skillfully been 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 have exhibited agency which is consistent with, De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald’s (2007:2) definition of:

... [directing] our quest for the understanding of the dynamics and social transformations of African situations 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.” 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 (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;

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

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 power of legal superimposition fixes the terms of conflicts which 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 its endless quest to make 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 constraints 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 Mitchel (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 the 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 other 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 ambition 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 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 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(De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald 2007), social networking,(Boissevain and Mitchel 1973) power-relations and social hierarchy(Burke 1992) have been re-invited to understand
the dynamics that interactively produce 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 inherent in the very wider social fabric are chance situations fabricated by gnaws of political negligence at the margin of the state. The relation between the state and the bush trade economy is not only unilinear. Rather there are always pathways of opportunities for interfaces where state officials collaborate with bush traders in their activities. Such a mode of interaction is an advantage 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. Complementing this interest is the next chapter that emphasis the importance of identity construction as strategies invested by bush traders to tame uncertainty and reverse the impotency of risk situations to chance situations of making ends meet.
CHAPTER FOUR

MASCUINITY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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 in the search for a specific identity. As part of this identity construction, the chapter exposes how pseudo-names are used in characterizing and distinguishing bush traders from the wider community. The central contention here will be to find out the role of masculinity and pseudo names in the creation of group agency pertaining to a ‘traffic island’. I argue that the appropriation of vitality in the form of masculinity and the construction of pseudo names, runs in consonance with 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 names can be used as a ‘flash card’ to understand the identity construction and operational structure of bush trade as a ‘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 strong. The kind thing wee ee di carri-am 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 dem fit makam for life* (excerpt of a pidgin English conversation with Kimeng Alidou, May, 15, 2009)

“A man is his courage. We come to know him from what he can do under certain constraints. The kinds of goods he carries and the obscure passages or paths he uses during the day like at night demonstrates his ability. We also distinguish a man from the rest of the men folk by his life’s exploits”. (Translation, Nixon Takor)

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 an exclusive cultural field with practical governing norms and guiding principles geared at taming uncertainties and mastering risk situations.

**Case 5: 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 of nine. As most of the young men in his local community of Bi, he received elementary formal education. After completing the program, 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 had at the time with Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula. This capture of Eddy’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. His trading interest centered 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 100 francs CFA and re-sell in Nigeria for 2000 francs CFA. As earlier mentioned, Eddy started going to Nigeria when the benefactor and brother was captured by some Nigerian coastal guards. From Nigeria he bought cosmetics, soap, grinding mill and motor cycle accessories.

From Bi, Eddy usually joined the caravan of young boys who went to Nigeria through Sah, Ndamru, Telopoh, then to Kanli before crossing the river Donga on a hanging bridge. During his first trip to Nigeria in 1990, when he was 20 years old, Eddy was led by a family friend, Simon Mbu. While in Nigeria he usually lodged in a locality called Ngorije. This was in the house of an indigene of Ndu origin who had moved and settled in Nigeria.
He was widely known by his title *Ardo*\(^{16}\) (a Fulani traditional authority). His long stay and deep seated Muslim connections coupled with his great wealth, gave him much fame in Nigeria. He had recognizable powers in Ngoriye which he exhibited as he ran to the assistance of Wimbum\(^{17}\) and other Cameroonian indigenes who suffered from 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 on the back depending on the degree of bulkiness or fragility of the goods. 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 that 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 skillful in navigating border control units. While working to make earns meet, they were indirectly or directly sharing the risks of their entrepreneurs and at the same time making their fortunes. 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\(^{18}\) 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 soap, buckets of maize and at times goats. From Nigeria, he carried fuel (in 40 and 50 litres capacities), parts of grinding mills, motor cycle accessories and vehicle spare parts.

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\(^{16}\) Ardo is a good example of a product of the culture of mobility in West African societies (See De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Foeken (2001)).

\(^{17}\) 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.

\(^{18}\) Eddy transported goods from Ngoriye 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.
4.1. Grinding Mill. Grinding mills have an almost inelastic demand among the communities from the Ndop plain up to the border limits of the Nkambe plateau. This is because the peoples’ main staple is corn fufu – a paste like mixture made out of grounded maize. There is a local conception that the best of these mills come from Nigeria (Courtesy Nixon Takor, November, 2008).

The average load he carried weighed approximately 40kg. With this load capacity, he covered about 5km an hour. This speed combined with his brief periods of sojourning to recuperate energy could give him distance coverage of 35km at seven hours per day. 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 necessitated some extra prudence and astute strategy. Eddy and his companions had to have a good knowledge concerning the location of border control units 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 stretches and dangerous crossings over streams and rivers especially the Donga and Katsina Ala. 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 five). In Eddy’s estimation human porterage in bush trade was meant for ‘men 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 chilly and obscure nightly hours.

**Eddy and the ‘Garoua Airlift’**

Eddy’s most scenic and memorable event in his bush trade life happened in 1996 when he was caught alongside 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, Sani Abacha, had put in place in the midst of heightened political tension between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi border principalities. During this period, 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, 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 to have boarded an helicopter and who had gone as far as Garoua. His traveling and living experiences were 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 to traffic goods. 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\textsuperscript{19}, 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 made 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 and elderly siblings.

\textbf{Approaching Masculinity from Eddy’s Context}

From the life story of Eddy one can appreciate 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. 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’ in the community. It was a process social ascription that

\textsuperscript{19} The domestification and herding of goats and other domestic livestocks is more or less a part of the cultural heritage of the people of the Nkambe plateau like it 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.
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, possess 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 constraints 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 social scientist 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 into bush trade are not necessarily compelled by the desire of to attain manhood, exhibit male identity, express manliness or play the man’s role as Gutman (1997) posits. 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 their strategies to mitigate uncertainties and risk situations.

**Pseudo Names: ‘another form of identity construction’**

As I went around the localities of Misaje, Dumbo, Berebe, Ako, Abuenshie (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 strings 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 especially with risk management.

**Names Seen from Common Sense**

In the past like in the present, people use 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 difficulty 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 and women 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 et al. (1984:146) hold that

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\text{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.}
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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 et al. (1984:143) estimation defines

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[...]\text{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, they can change depending on the expectant social changes in the life of an individual. This holds true of Fjellman and Goheen’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 context\(^{20}\) 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 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).

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

\(^{20}\) 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. Chern Langhee, and V.G. Fanso, *Nso and its Neighbours: Readings in Social History*, Massachusetts: Amherst College,1996 pp 399-416.
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 anthropological techniques of inquiry to a systematic study of social and humanistic sciences. In this part of the chapter, I shall quickly describe my travelling experience. This will be integrated with and followed by emphasis on how it is linked to identity construction 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 concourse of buyers and sellers other social gatherings that usually gives 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-seat 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

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21 Dumbo is situated in the Northern part of Nkambe in Donga Mantung Division along the Bamenda-Nkambe-Wum Ring road. It is located along the eastern side of the ring road after Misaje town. It is bordered to the east by northern Nigeria, to the west by Menchum division and to the south by the Kimbi game reserve, river Kimbi and Mungong village and to the north by the Gongola state of Nigeria. This area is found in the Northern part of Bamenda high lands and forms part of the most important grazing lands in Cameroon. This makes the area suitable for the development of the Dumbo cattle ranch in that area.
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 men 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 ‘enjoying 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 young man 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 (in pidgin English).
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)

Translation

“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, Nixon Takor).

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. He was a young man of about 27 with a weird facial expression and a coarse voice seemingly caused by an undisciplined culture of

22 Jato’s declaration of being apolitical or disinterested in politics might not be very convincing. It is important to note that even though he claims not to be involved in politics, his appreciation of politicians as corrupt citizens who think more of themselves than the community they are designed to lead exposes the level of awareness and concern that he has about the decadent moral economy in Cameroon. Jato takes umbrage behind this situation and uses it as a leverage to get into bush trade. The motivation of this young man (like most of his peers) to join the bush trade economy to a large extent is coordinated by the uncertainty that the corrupt political system in Cameroon generates. Bush trade to him is a strategy to tame and insures the uncertainty.
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 run into several problems with border control units, some of which he was detained and others where he had his trade consignments 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 aroused an unparallel resistance among the other young bush traders who had been victims of harassment and extortion. It was in such a 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 Donotsop. 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. Rather, it is mere strategy to reverse uncertainty and manage risk situations to make a living.

23 Paul Donotsop 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 Donotsop, a name that goes up to date.
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 cultural field with distinct behavioral choices. Names, especially aliases, are part of the strategies that 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, are 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
We can further make strong meanings out of names as illustrated in chapter with the case of Gilbert. The use of a referent like John Kikai as to one of his trade acolyte, 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 followed 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 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 gives 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 constraints and any form of social re-education. 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. Masculinity and pseudo names have been used here to show how local ingenuity in shading personalities can produce and reproduce a cultural community of people who circumvent uncertainty and risk situations.

Masculinity and identity construction have been used in this chapter to show how people in the bush trade economy wrestle with economic and social insecurity. The insecurity is partly blamed on the state which has a policy of cracking down deviant practices like unregulated trans-border flows and the standards inherent in some local communities concerning social status recognition. Masculinity and pseudo naming as shown in the case studies become relevant to understand why traders make certain risk choices. It is evident from the ways these actors negotiate choices that the bush trade cultural field is not an isolated entity. Rather it is explicitly embedded; linked and at the same time dissociated from the wider social fabric. The chapter has come to re-emphasis the centrality of individual and group agency in managing uncertainty and playing with risk situations. The entrepreneurial management of risk situations will constitute the next major interest of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE RISK FACTOR, THE ORDEAL OF TRYING EXPERIENCES

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 for its part will focus on risks as experienced and maneuvered by the bush trader in the cultural 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 argues that risk is most often an idiosyncratic perception born out of a social environment of uncertainty which people exploit to create cultural communities as a coping mechanism.

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.  

24 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).

25 This is an excerpt of an interview with Tam Gilbert alias Mebreda, on July 16th, 2009, at Holy Quarters in Ndumbo, a border locality in Cameroon some 40km from Nkambe, the Divisional headquarters.
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 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.

I have decided to use the concept of risk in this chapter to sum up the perception that bush traders harbour concerning their activities. It is not by chance (rather is a design) that this chapter comes at the end. In my opinion it comes to crown the central interest of the study which has so far through different entry points demonstrated the extent to which ambiguities and uncertainty (Mbembe 2000) can be negotiated in the bush trade specific cultural field (‘traffic island’). Risk situations are symptomatic to unregulated trade activities and their manipulation and management by the traders can be useful to establish reasonable idioms relating to trader motivation.

Risk is also a central part of livelihood in the developing world [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 incertitude of the future.

While I acknowledge that there are different approaches to risk analysis, I am however, beholden 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 related research surveys. In this generalized context of viewing unforeseeable societal constraints, 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 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.

‘A Haven of uncertainty’- The Moral Economy of Cameroon

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, reinterpretations and redefinitions for another (Moore, 1978:40-41).

I have presented the political situation in Cameroon in the 1990s in the first place to expose the degree of insecurity and uncertainty that the state left on the lives of many citizens, one of whom was Gilbert (the case profiled in this chapter). This discussion shows how the political crises which had as correlate economic and social crisis created uncertainty but ideal situations that was exploited my many to make or ameliorate their livelihoods. This quest for certainty will be complemented by the agency that will be employed by people who find themselves unsecured faced with the political situation.

Cameroon has a history and social setting which can be used to understand in a more comprehensive manner the way young men had to negotiate choices of dealing with the risk economy. From the 1980s, 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).

‘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 Peoples’ 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 handled almost the entire trade of Cameroon and its landlocked neighbors shut down.

The popular constraints 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 ingrained risk environment had as immediate result, a risk economy. Whether ‘poor’ or ‘rich’, it was a period when Cameroonians of all shades of life thought it a matter of urgency to individuate anticipatory investments as insurance to uncertainty. Agbaw (2004) captures this position well in the title of her publication “buying the future”. The gloom that barricaded the future led many people to devise alternative strategies of livelihood. Taxes were evaded; economic generating sources drastically dwindled as public market stalls were closed throughout the week. The advent of the economic crisis and its associated policy responses which included two salary cuts in 1993, one in January and another in November; the July 12th, 1994 devaluation of the francs CFA and retrenchment
in the public service, introduced a new poverty class in Cameroon. This new class of the poor is made up of civil servants, state agents, contract workers, retrenched workers and retired public sector workers. (Baye 1998:435).

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 uncertain (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 standstill. A good number of students had to leave the lone university of Yaoundé to seek for other opportunities as the school year was interrupted by frequent student strikes. It was this wider setting of uncertainty that Gilbert had to define and make a life.

**Case 6: Chesi Gilbert alias Mebreada**

As I went round in the localities of Ako, Bi and Dumbo 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, I got into one of the market stalls at the eastern end of the market piazza where some energetic and exuberant youths were entertaining themselves with *shaa’a* a local brew made out of fermented corn.

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 discussion was very much coded in style and content. All I knew was that, it was a story about one of their trade

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27 The market in Dumbo like other localities in the traditional Bamenda Grasslands, still respects the eighth day periodic rhythm as described by Hills (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.
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 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 boys. Among this group of boys, I arranged to meet Mebreada 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 chapters, 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 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 5000 francs CFA 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 2500 francs CFA in Dumbo, fetched 5000 francs CFA across the borders in Nigeria.

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28 See Chapter of the use of pseudo-names as and the multivariate expression of social distinctiveness in Bush trade.
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 5.30 a.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 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 footsteps. 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 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 1000 francs CFA, the equivalence in terms of exchange with the Cameroonian francs CFA currency. Finding the commodity comparatively cheap, Gilbert bought (even without assessing his physical stamina to transport the load back to

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29 Bambewatta is a name given after the social importance of the locality where traders especially carrier boys or porters locally called bambe, sg, bambes, 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 it’s historic significance today and is well known by all the bush traders.

30 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 Furu-awah 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.
Dumbo) 2 buckets of groundnuts for 300 Naira, (2000francs CFA). As a new man in the business he could not follow the pace of his friends who were already 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 a young carrier (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 ‘fungeh 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 cannot 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 trade, Gilbert could not rely only on the capital that he had made from the previous trade. He had to solicit the assistance of his father, by then a petty trader in pharmaceutical products.31 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 80000 francs CFA. This money was added to 160000 francs CFA which was what Gilbert had acquired from his previous trade. The center of the fuel trade was in the Nigerian border town of Bissula.(seemap II).

From the groundnut trade, Gilbert entered into another network of friends who were all making their livings out of the fungeh traffic. He usually left alongside these friends

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31 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 80,000 francs CFA francs was quite enough money to send him to school but certainly that was not his father’s plans for him.
from Dumbo to Bissula. At Bissula, 50 liters of fuel sold for 10,000 francs CFA. During the first trip, he got three containers (i.e. 150 liters). When this fuel got to Dumbo, a 50 liters container made an interest of 15,000 francs CFA giving him a net balance of 10,000 francs CFA as 5,000 each went to the ‘carrier boys’. After about half a year in business, Gilbert’s financial capital unprecedentedly increased to about 400,000 francs CFA.

**Bridging Opportunities, Creating New Risks**

There was a time when Bissula had political tension with the neighboring polities of Kotep and Kossasi. The feud which emanated from the attempt by 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 neighborhoods of Kotep and Kossasi. The skirmish interrupted communication for some time between the 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 francs CFA and re-sold the bread at Bisula for 500,000 CFA 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 affectionately called him *mebreada* 32 which meant the supplier of bread.

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32 The use of names in bush trade has been given closer attention in an independent chapter of the work.
Gilbert was the only one supplying bread in Bissula at the time. He was an icon in that community. His financial capital was moving to the neighborhood of a million francs CFA within a few months of the bread contract. When 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 constraint. His network in Dumbo extended to villages like Sabongida, Fonfuka, Misaje where he got demands to supply cartridges, cosmetics, guns, liquor and products to manufacture local gin. This new interest sent him going as far as Onitcha in Nigeria where he bought assorted goods. Some people made advanced payments for their goods. With this money Gilberts’ business capital stood at the neighborhood of three million francs CFA. 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 his cultural sphere of influence and how the different actors adjust to certain constraints. ‘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. The nature of the terrain alone subjects the actors of the trade to risk. Not only is the landscape accidental 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 50naira for a day in Nigeria. If they had to go beyond Bissula, 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 fungeh fuel, earlier discussed. This and more is made evident in his account when he says; “…But with 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 10000 francs CFA, I will give him an extra 5000 francs CFA. This movement was strictly nocturnal. When the person was entering Dumbo, he had to do it by midnight 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

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33 Fungeh was the main automobile fuel used by most Cameroonians 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 federal and 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:

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.

During my field contact, I found it in abundance especially in Akp where it is still the only available source of auto-driving energy.
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 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 brigands along the enclave trade routes was always a present worry. Brigands in more than one occasion had attacked 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 this occurred, 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, 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 francs CFA per cartoon. Four for example meant 20000 francs CFA. This could only be done when all expressed means of escaping from them had failed. It was preferable in his imagination to spend 5000 francs CFA to pay a bambe (porter) to skillfully carry the goods than risk losing
15000 francs CFA to the Customs’ officers. Risk as seen in this account was evident but the certitude to pre-empt it was indeterminate.

**Expanding and Enduring 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 and 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 formally known as Kikai John\(^34\) who instigated Gilbert into a new trade in grinding mills (see pic. 4.1).\(^35\) He got it in Nigeria for about 250000 francs CFA and resold in Cameroon for approximately 400,000 francs CFA. 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 700,000 francs CFA 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. He was drawing closer to a new period of situational adjustment (Moore, 1978). In Nigeria he had a close associate, Tijani, who usually accommodated him in Bissula. Tijanni was also a

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\(^34\) 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.

\(^35\) 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.
fuel trafficking agent based in Bissula. 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 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 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 francs CFA. If I bought six to seven bags I was sure of about 500,000 francs CFA (as a 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 and Yaya 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 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

36 Marijuana trade and consumption is strictly prohibited by law in Cameroon and Nigeria.
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 and interned for seven days in Nigeria. He spent about 15000 Naira (approximately 150,000 francs CFA) to obtain a bail. That was in 2004 when Gilbert was 24 years 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 too complicated for me to understand.

Risk to him like to most of his collaborators was merely the ability to be flexible in times of constraints or in anticipation of difficulties, or just another way of life.

**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 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) cannot 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 unprecedented limits in the 1990s translates 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, caused a good number of people 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 re-echoed by Agbaw (2000:107-186). While I fully agree with her emphasis on the economic crisis, it is just one of the different avenues that produced environmental shocks which led some people into bush trade. The extensive, peripheral and bemoaned undeveloped borders and the rigidity of state control along it has permanently made the border as a risk zone which Nugent and Asiwaju(1996) and Nugent(2002) elaborately show how they are transformed into avenues of opportunities. These are some of the different risk situations that Gilbert courageously and skillfully manipulates to make his livelihood. The different risk contexts presented show that uncertainties in situations bring about indeterminacy in the insurance scheming process.

Falk-Moore’s (1978) 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 and are computed out of the system. Some see the field as a stepping stone to joining the official economy. An independent example is the case of Freddy, a former bush trader who now operates a grocery store in Yaoundé. 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. 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, problematizing risk in this social context is not straight forward. It is rather as complex as the varied perceptions 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 continually struggle to negotiate their ways out of unbearable situations. 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 conflicting in its configuration and indeterminate in its manipulation and control.
CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION: BUSH TRADE IN PERSPECTIVES

Researching on bush trade has been the principal focus of the work. In the introduction, I tried to situate the context of my discussion. I presented ‘Bush trade’ 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 from De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald’s (2007) recent arguments in the domain of agency I have used different themes in the different chapters to nest the view that the dynamics of creativity, inventiveness and reflexivity 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).

In chapter two it was illustrated that ‘bush trade’ as a commercial-cum-cultural institution cannot be dismembered from the history 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, 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 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, re-produced 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 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 focus 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 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 conflicting 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 constrains. This is to say, as a product of the environment, it is man that controls the society not the society controlling him. Man undoubtedley commands strength beyond structure.

The study has shown that bush trade has a long standing history. It goes as far back as the pre-colonial period when some people violated and circumvented the monopoly of trade in certain commodities that rested intimately in the hands of the ruling elite. It has been shown in chapter two that the institution steadily grew and reached unprecented limits during the colonial and post colonial periods when international borders were placed. The pre-colonial economic grip of the traditional ruling elites and the colonial and post colonial practice of regulating the trade in certain commodities like liquor left an economic vacuum.
of uncertainty. This coupled with the political and economic crisis that Cameroon noticed, to exacerbate the level of insecurity. A corollary to the uncertain environment as illustrated in the study has been risk situations. Manipulating uncertainty and risk situations has been the central interest of the study. It has been raised in chapters two-discussing on the historical context, chapter three illustrating the organization and chapter four and five where the themes of identity construction and risk have been used as levers to show how actors in bush trade have responded to situations fraught with future peril (Whyte 1997:19). Uncertainty and risk situations in bush trade have been projected in the study as a reality that is embedded in daily experiences. It is not a vague existential angst, but an aspect of specific experience and practice that has evolved over time.

Through the different life histories used in this study one can understand the political economy of the two countries (Cameroon and Nigeria) which have created opportunities for bush trade to thrive. Each historical period has come to re-emphasis and intensify bush trade. At the time of colonialism it was the border issue. Currently it is the unfavorable economic situation that came about as a result of bad governance. In each of the chapters the centrality of bush traders exploiting a chance situation is undisputable. This is exemplified by the life profiles of the selected case studies. State policy and regulations have remained the same since colonial times. The maintenance of state regulations has always led to adoption of different strategies in the bush trade. The actors of the bush trade economy have barely been sketched in chapter three around the life episodes of Elias and Jackson but conventional wisdom holds that they represent a wider group with no specific bounds of social and moral categories (Bennafla 2002). It is interesting to note that the regulatory body (incarnated by the state) is a travesty of law and order. Practices like bribery and corruption have come to suspend the power of the state and shows the precarious balance between the state and society (Chazan 1989).

In the study risks was presented as occurring in different forms-external environmental constraints (Roitman 1990; 1998; 2000), elements of indeterminacy (Falk-Moore 1978) and the nature of the borders which are amply exploited by traders (Nugent and Asiwaju 1996). Another form of risk that has been presented is that which is created by actors in bush trade as shown in all the life stories especially that of Gilbert in chapter five. This form of creating and exploiting risk situations rest on the ingenuity of traders to exhibit reflexivity and inventiveness to take advantage of chanced situations. In analyzing this view, I made appeal to the concept of agency (see De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Gewald 2007). Besides agency, the study in all the chapters has shown how bush traders in trying to
exploit risk situations shape their sphere of interaction-a cultural field more coalesced and bond abiding than the legalistic semi-autonomous social field espoused by Falk-Moore (19780). This cultural world has been explained from the spectrum of the network theory (Mitchel, et al.1973).

The study in general besides showing the strength of human intuitiveness in taking advantage of opportunities for livelihood, can be situated within the context of Scott’s (1978) power relation model of dominance creating subaltern resistance or the negotiation of power that takes place offstage out of public realm (Scott 1990). It shows the limits of the state in making things work according to its design (Scott 1998). The state-society relations in unregulated trade as Bayart (1989) posits has occasioned ‘straddling’ which according to Geshiere and Konings (1996:25) indicates the wide range of possibilities and strategies of accumulation. It is perhaps in this connection that bush trade fits in as one of the many ways in which livelihood strategies are appropriated, negotiated and sustained.
REFERENCES


De Bruijn, Mirjam, Van Dijk, and Gewald, Jan-Bart eds. 2007. Strength Beyond structure: social an historical Trajectories of agency in Africa, Leiden: Brill


