

**THE SOURGA WITHIN THE SOCIO - ECONOMIC LIFE OF
PERE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE PLAIN OF MAYO-BALEO;
NORTHERN CAMEROON**



Rachel Bale Guengue

Thesis submitted for the partial fulfillment of the degree of master of philosophy in Visual Cultural Studies.

Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Tromsø

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DEDICATION

To my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the end of the writing of this thesis, I would like to thank first my supervisor, Bjørn Arnsten who has put in a lot effort in the organization and the structure of this study. He has been advising me and encouraging me when I thought everything was lost. I am really grateful for his patience, direction and constructive criticisms.

I would also thank all my informants. I think about people from Delwalti with whom I had great time during experiencing the *sourga*. I am in particular grateful to Innoua's compound. They accepted me among them and they gave me their attention and knowledge about the Pere culture in general.

I am grateful to the staff of Visual Cultural Studies for their training during these two years of studies here at the University of Tromsø. They are: Lisbet Holtedahl, Peter Crawford, Petia Mankova, Marit Gjerntsen, Reni Wright, Siren Hope. Special thanks to Trond Waage who made me know the existence of the Visual Cultural Studies program. His advice and encouragements have led me up to the end.

I am also grateful to Gary Kildea with whom I had a great experience of editing which enabled me to acquire some more knowledge of what the ethnographic film could be.

I thank Lånekassen for its financial support during the two years of studying here at the University of Tromsø.

Thanks to Samuel Alhassan Issah to have put enough effort to correct the English and made the work understandable to the reader.

When I came here, I met some people who allowed facing some challenges during all my stay here in Tromsø. Inger Britt and Andreas, Astrid, Elie Babale and Ragnhild. Thanks to Cameroonian community here in Tromsø, Rachel Issa Djesa for her advice both on the film and the text.

Thank you to my classmates: Ronnie Smith, Sturla Pilskog, Kristin Hammerås, Kjersti Minderberg, Marie-Eve Leduc, Jalila Hajji, Andre Ganava, Souleymane Diallo and Koulthoumi Babette for two wonderful years of studies.

Thanks to my Friends Odette Attabarka, Kodji Gamache, Tom Jørund Sydilamine Bagayoko, Mahmoudou Alhadji Oumarou, Ndanga Dieudonne, Mouazamou Ahmadou...

Special thanks to my family, parents and brothers, to the whole Pere community in Cameroon for their encouragements despite the distance.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the *sourga* within the socio-economic life of Pere people living in the plain of Mayo-Baleo. The field of study is located in the Northern part of Cameroon, Western part of the Adamawa province at the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. The area is divided into three main villages, Gadjiwan, Alme and Mayo-Baleo and the local populations are farmers. But my focus was Mayo-Baleo where I settled in one household to investigate the processes of the *sourga* as well as its relevance to the everyday life of the people.

I also investigate the changes the *sourga* might have undergone in the last two decades and also see how these possible changes might be related to the socio economic life of the Pere's society.

The theory used in this study is an actor perspective based on two Norwegians anthropologist, Barth and Grønhaug. The *sourga* which is a reciprocal labor exchange where people gather, work, eat drink and enjoy local beer. The Pere farmers utilize *sourga* to organize the agricultural work and the *sourga* has social and economic relevance. It is this combination of living culture and also insures the subsistence.

Nowadays that the use and the need of money have become inevitable, the dynamic of the practice of *sourga* is mostly related to economic interests. The existence of road connecting the area to the other places in the country and outside the country, and also the existence of the local market have reinforced the idea of benefits and a corresponding need of agricultural production. For this reason, the *sourga* remains the most important strategy for the Pere farmers to cover this interest and to make a place and to make a place in the marked economy. Though agricultural practices have undergone modernization, the *sourga* interestingly is continually reshaped and keep being in the center of Pere people life.

Key words: Northern Cameroon, the plain of Mayo-Baleo, Pere, farmers, *sourga*, economy, culture.

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MAP OF THE FIELD

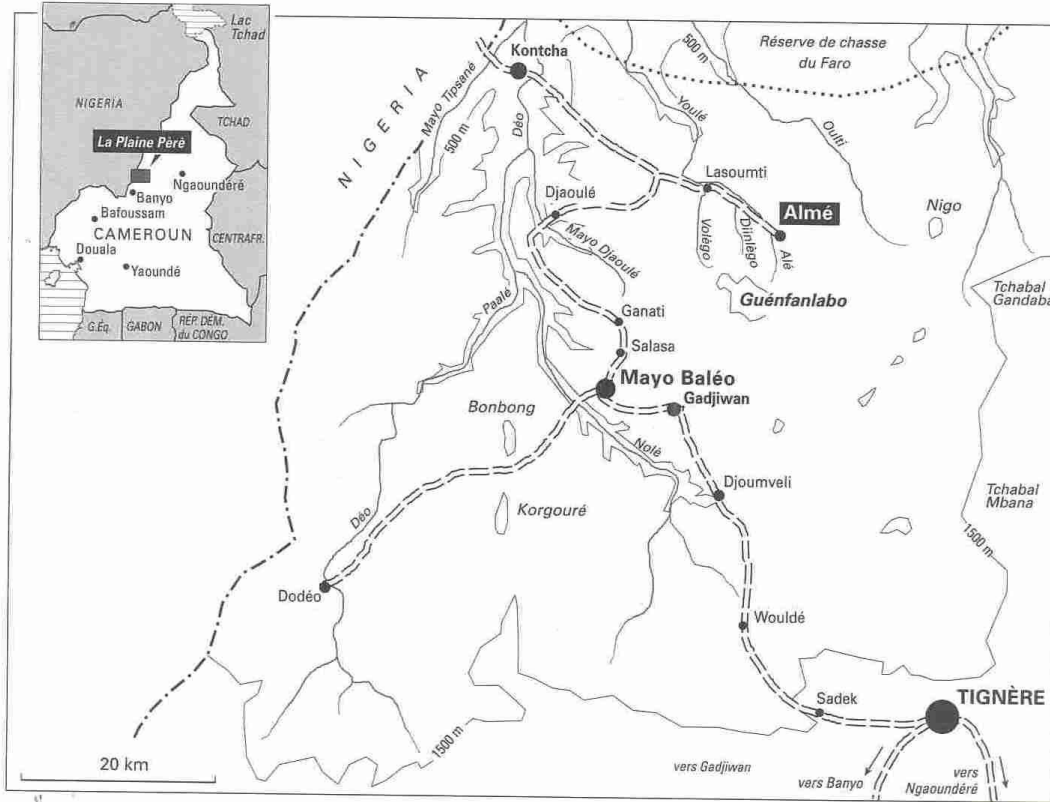


Planche I – La plaine père

The plain of Mayo-Baleo

Source: Rites thérapeutiques dans une société matrilineaire.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1 What's a *sourga*?

The Pere people are located in the plain of Mayo-Baleo; the northern part of Cameroon. They are basically farmers and live around the Guenfalabo Mountain. In their practice of agriculture, the *sourga* has been an important source of labor on farms for many years. It is a reciprocal labor exchange where men and women gather together, work, eat, dance and enjoy the local beer produced from millet. The farm owner provides food and drinks. He is the one who invites people though there are some who do come without being invited. It is a working party which is utilized for weeding and ploughing. In the plain of Mayo-Baleo, it is seemingly the case that the *sourga* has never been used for harvesting or any other activity. It seems to be centered on weeding and ploughing.

Let us take an example of one farm owner who has two hectares of maize. The farm needs to be weeded as early as possible to avoid possibility of the weeds affecting productivity. This is because the competition of the weeds with crops for the soil's nutrients can affect the possibility of a farmer getting a good harvest. In such a situation, a *sourga* becomes inevitable in averting the situation. It could also be that since rains have started, the farm owner has been late for one reason or the other, to plant something on his field. To make up for the lost time, he needs the support of others to facilitate the work on the farm aimed at fighting late farming which will subsequently affect the yield of the farmer. If he has at least twenty twenty-five persons for example, coming to work in his farm for a day, then the chances are high that the farmer can make up for the lost time. The earlier he finishes the weeding work in the farm, the earlier he will get time to rest before moving to another step which is harvesting. The use of a *sourga* on one's farm can reduce the work load on him and consequently reduce the frequency of one's visit to the farm.

The *sourga* does not only serve as a source of labor on the farms, but also constitutes a very important aspect of the peoples' social life. It is for instance an element of identity. De Latour (2005:5) argues that the inexhaustible passion for the dance which encloses all the big ritual

ceremonies is one of the characteristics of the Pere people. They are attached to their clan memberships and as such have a deep attachment to one another. Through the practice and the organization of the *sourga*, people categorize one another based on their capabilities to cultivate big farms. When one does not go to the farm or does not increase the size of his farm land, and then one is considered a lazy man within the society. The attention (in terms of provision of the basic needs like food and drink) of the people on one's farm on the occasion of a *sourga* also affects one's social status among the Pere people. The more one can give to eat and to drink in such an occasion, the more respectable one is and the more people would attend one's *sourga*.

2 The plain of Mayo-Baleo: Transition from the subsistence economy to the market economy

Some decades ago, subsistence economy dominated in the plain of Mayo-Baleo. The production was directed toward fulfilling the basic needs of the family. Instead of relying on farming for commercial purposes, they produced basically for consumption of the household. However, hunting and gathering also served as a means of survival of the early Pere people. Pere people in their environment grew food, fish and hunted to satisfy their basic needs; they built their own houses from natural materials such as mud, grasses, wood. Water from the rivers and streams served as sources of drinking water. Herbs in the bush were also used for medicinal purposes.

The rearing of animals was also characteristic of the agricultural life of the early Pere people. They however also grew crops. To maintain or ensure their survival, people valued their cooperation with nature and with one another. Ndotti, a 90 years old man said:

We had a common field. The size of our field was not too big but the harvest was successful and largely enough to feed the whole family for the whole year. Someone was able to fill two lofts of millet.

Doudou Kogneba, an old lady argues that:

What we knew before was to brew the millet beer, invites friends and relatives, work, eat, drink and dance. That is what life was all about.

The goods were redistributed. It was either for the consumption or to organize rituals. Talking about consumption, the goods were distributed among the family and relatives. For rituals, there

were naming ceremonies, sacrifices to organize to have a good harvest, initiations among others. Life at that time was quiet prosperous and calm. The natural environment was favorable for agriculture, for fishing and for animal husbandry but still, some problems were evident such as the irregularities of rains, some years of not good harvest because locusts invaded fields. They also faced some challenges such as the fight to maintain their dignity, peace and freedom during the Fulani conquest.

De Latoure argues that, nowadays, the need of money has become urgent that Pere people have to face new challenges such as buying of clothes, accommodation, and health problems and children education. These challenges have pushed them to increase their agricultural production.

Aujourd'hui, les besoins d'argent sont devenus plus pressants pour faire face aux nouvelles dépenses- vêtement, habitation, dispensaire, scolarité pour les enfants qui souhaitent continuer leurs études au collège de Tignere-, a contraint Les Pere a intensifier leur production agricole. (De Latour 2005:11).

One has his farm and his wife has hers as well. Each of them struggles for his/her interests and as will be determined by one's needs. The bigger the field, the more work the farmer has at hand. Farm size also determines the quantity of the farm harvest a farmer is likely to get from the farm. The produce is either used for family consumption or for sale at the market.

The pattern of agricultural activity has changed. The local population does not only grow subsistence crops such as millet, maize, sesame as before, but also crops as groundnuts, cassava, yams, and beans among others. In the plain, there is also an agricultural administration which works in collaboration with the local population. It has brought modern techniques which are more and more utilized. People sow maize and groundnuts for example in line. Mixed cropping in recent years has become uncommon among the Pere farmers. Accordingly, it is rare find millet, maize, cassava on the same field. The avoidance of mixed cropping among present day Pere farmers is to ensure good harvest. Farmers struggle to get artificial fertilizer to make the soil fertile and weedicides to kill weeds on their farm. People gather into associations. According to Kirba Gilbert, the agricultural delegate in the area, in 1999, there was one association of farmers all over the plain. Now, in 2007, it is about fifty eight (58) associations. Within an association,

these farmers have the possibilities to get some support from the Cameroonian government who provides them with farm implements such as machetes, hoes, and wheelbarrows and sometimes supports them financially. There are also two tractors in the plain owned by the two outstanding farmers of the area. It helps with ploughing but it is not everybody who can benefit for such opportunity because either the demand is higher than the offer, or it is quite expensive for most farmers. People increase the size of their fields. The existence of the local market is facilitating goods' circulation. People come from Tignere (the nearest town) and Nigeria with cars to buy goods. For that, the local population do not need to travel by foot as they did before, carrying on their head a small quantity of goods to be sold. Almost every transaction is done in the local market

3 Objectives and hypothesis

Farming in the plain of Mayo-Baleo has undergone a lot of changes. The economy once relied on the subsistence production, but has changed to the heavy integration of the market economy. It has also been changing from mixed cropping to mono-cropping. It is however, interesting to realize that despite all these transitions, the *sourga* has survived. The survival of *sourga* notwithstanding the transition that farming strategies have witnessed in modern day Pere society makes me assume that, the *sourga* constitutes an essential aspect of the socio-economic life of the Pere people. The main objectives of this study will be:

- To investigate for which purpose(s) the *sourga* is or are utilized.
- To investigate what changes the *sourga* might have undergone in the last decades.
- How these possible changes are related to the general socio-economic life of the Pere society.

From these objectives, some hypotheses are raised to reinforce the preoccupation of the study.

- The *sourga* gives the local farmers the possibility to cope with the increase integration in the market economy.
- The *sourga* is closely tied to the Pere's identity and also to the survival of the culture.

4 Film and text

This study is both a text and a film. The two are complementary in order to grasp a wide understanding of the *sourga*. But they will address this phenomenon in a different way. The text will seek the reasons why the *sourga* is still utilized. It will try to grasp the changes it has brought in the Pere society and also to see how these changes can be related to the Pere's socio-economic life. The text will be more analytical and will go beyond what one cannot see in the film.

The film will focus on the process of the *sourga*. It gives an idea of the whole process of what apparently the *sourga* is. It shows the different steps before the *sourga* starts and the day of the *sourga*. The film gives an idea of the atmosphere people work in, and the music that accompanies the workers. Through the speeches, it shows how people are related to each other, how the Pere society is structured and how they live their culture, this "*fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action*" (Geertz 1957:33). The film will also give an idea of the area where the Pere live. I have been following Innoua and his wife Soubado through this process. They are farmers and live in Delwalti, a quarter of Mayo-Baleo village. Talking about film, Mac Dougall asserts that:

What visual anthropology allows us to do is to see how words fit into the contexts of specific events, along with the posture, gestures, tones of voices, facial expressions, and silences that accompany them."(MacDougall 2006:7).

The film through the sounds and words, enables representation and analysis. Sometimes, words are not good or strong enough to express some aspects of individual's social life. With the film, images tell about themselves in a different way than the words do. It gives us the strong feeling of being there with the Pere farmers, experiencing the *sourga*.

It involves the individual as thinking and feeling person, but also as a body in relation to other bodies, to objects, to time, space and place, and to sequential chains of events."(op.cit 2006:7).

Hence, the film leads us in the Pere's society to "live the *sourga*"-that is we become a part of what the *sourga* really is. Moreover, one should know that:

Ethnographic understanding as a precondition for ethnographic documentary has two components. On the one hand it can be regarded as cultural understanding obtained by actually living the culture in the field, referring to different modes of practical and cultural knowledge and understanding. On the other hand, the disciplinary aspect of this kind of cultural knowledge would also include a certain theoretical (anthropological) interest underlying the specific focus of the ethnographic filmmaker” (Metje Postma 2006: 325).

In other words, an understanding of a social phenomenon requires some theoretical tools to give a full understanding and consequently, a scientific knowledge. It's in the same idea as Metje has pointed out that the film *the work of pleasure, a sourga work party in Mayo-Baleo, Cameroon* has been made to look into the *sourga*. The film presents the atmosphere and the different steps of the *sourga*. It is what Metje calls “living the culture in the field”. This “living the culture in the field” has been oriented by some preconceived ideas or theoretical perspectives which have led me into the process of filming and to build the narration of the film. I have watched for example, other ethnographic films. By doing so, I have learnt how to approach the object of study in order to grasp what I am looking for or to produce an “ethnographic understanding”.

5 Organization of the study

This thesis is divided into six (6) chapters. The first chapter gives us a general background to the study. Chapter two is devoted to the methodology. First I will present the theory chosen in order to analyze the empirical material. Then I will move to how I proceed to collect data in the field. I will reflect in this stage my reflexive position in that process and how it affects the production of knowledge. I will end up the chapter by discussing the filming process during fieldwork which is has been a mean of collecting data

The third chapter presents the physical and the historical background of the plain of Mayo-Baleo. Within the chapter, the presentation of the area will show the favorable physical environment which enables the local population to deal with agriculture in an intensive way, the different methods the local population have adapted to farm. The management of the land would also be part of this chapter. The historical background which is part of the study will lead us to know

who these people practicing the *sourga* are, where do they come from and how their settlement was.

The fourth chapter provides a wide description of how the *sourga* takes place. It would be based on Innoua's *sourga*, the farmer I understudied during my fieldwork. I will describe the different steps of the *sourga*. By describing it, I present such details as, the preparation of the millet, the announcement of the *sourga*, the day of brewing of local beer and the day of the *sourga*. How do people, how the atmosphere people work in is, and who are the participants. Before that, something little will be said about the compound. I would present Innoua and his compound and the relationship which exists among people living in that compound.

The fifth chapter deals with an analysis the concept of the *sourga*. The analysis will be made based on the research questions that have been used in this thesis. It is within this chapter that I would make use of the theories chosen to analyze my empirical data. The chapter's aim is to put the *sourga* into the context of socio-economic life of the Pere farmers. Talking about economy, one will see how through the *sourga*, the farmers provide what is needed for their consumption and the market economy. This is achieved by the man power which they benefit from the *sourga*. The existence of the local market allows a wide network of goods circulation from the plain of Mayo-Baleo to the outside world. Moreover, the chapter will depict how the *sourga* is tied to the Pere's social life. It is a place where belongingness and identity are expressed by the Pere people. I will present the changes the *sourga* has brought to the Pere society. The chapter will also look at the *sourga* as a reproduction of the Pere culture.

The last chapter, six, is devoted to the conclusion and summary. It will present some closing remarks of the study. It will also investigate the extent to which the laid down hypotheses in this thesis have been confirmed or otherwise.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the methodology and the theory chosen for purposes of this current study. The chapter will open up with the theoretical approach. For this study, the generative models of Fredrik Barth and the concept of social fields developed by Reidar Grønhaug will be utilized. And the methodology will be based on my position as an insider and an outsider in the field. It will be argued that my position as an insider and outsider influenced the process of data collection as part of the process of knowledge production. I will also explain the ways in which the camera equipment influenced my data collection process.

2.1 Analytical tools

2.1.1 The generative models of Fredrik Barth

The point of departure of how I will analyze the empirical material starts with the generative models of Barth. He has this actor perspective and to explain it he argues that:

I wish to explore the extent to which patterns of social form can be explained if we assume that they are the cumulative result of a number of separate choices and decisions made by people acting vis-à-vis one another (Barth 1981:36).

The starting point of Barth is people's interactions. He further opines that:

The consequences of having overlooked generative problems are perhaps most strikingly revealed in our most-used concept of status. Introduced into the field in a pair with role, the two concepts together equip us to analyze the fundamental social process whereby binding rights and obligations are made relevant in particular social situations. (Op.cit 1986:36).

Each individual in interaction with others seeks particular interests or values. To maximize these values, choices are made and social forms come from these values and choices made by the individual.

As Barth argues, people interact within a particular social situation where they carry with them their status and roles which are respectively their rights and their obligations to accomplish any action. Not every status an individual has that can be used in a social situation. Ecologic system and the structure limit people interactions at the same time, these limits are influenced by the individual's choices. Through these influences, changes occur. By using Barth perspective, I will examine the values farmers seek in the practice of *sourga*. I would further investigate how their status and roles are utilized within this particular social situation in order to achieve what is needed. It will enable me to look at the *sourga* as a reproduction of culture. In other words, farmers in Mayo-Baleo by practicing the *sourga* have been reproducing the past. By looking at it this way, I might grasp the changes which occur in the practice of *sourga*, what keeps its continuity and how it is related to the socio-economic life of Pere farmers.

2.1.2 The concept of social fields

The concept of social fields of Grønhaug is the second tool that would be used in this study. Grønhaug inspired by Barth perspective leads us on the actor perspective when he introduced his concept of social fields, an aggregation of social relationships which are sets of complementary roles. He is occupied with this “micro-macro relations”. In other words, he would like to see how a society, a community through people interactions can be connected to the outside world. By doing that, he divides the society into social fields and each of them has his proper dynamics which take place within a time and a place and vary at different level of scales. He stipulates that:

I take society to be a whole that contains the total set of social prerequisites and determinants for individual lives, the social production and destruction of human beings. Initially the anthropologist cannot know how to circumscribe the relevant society, to measure it, or to count its members. In order to describe society in Heart I must first define relevant kinds of analytic units and discover how to study their interrelations.(Grønhaug 1978:82)

The *sourga* is a part of social fields with different complexity and extension. By following the activities of the *sourga* as part of these fields, it is possible to understand how the micro activities of the *sourga* are related to the macro levels. Three social fields would be identified in this case.

The first social field is the economy. The more people one has working on one's field, the higher the possibility of getting a large farm land and consequently a bumper harvest. The more one can sell, the more money he can get to face some life challenges such as children education, health problems... The plain of Mayo-Baleo has moved from the subsistence economy to the market economy. The goods they produce are used for consumption and the surplus is sold in the local market. People come from Nigeria and Tignere come to buy it in order to sell to others in their area.

The second social field is the traditional political system. In Mayo-Baleo, there is a great chief (*lamido*) called *Guenne* in the local language. He is the one in charge of the whole village. He has elders as collaborators; working with him in varied domains such as defense, justice, fishing, animal husbandry among others. In the court of the *Genne*, the representative of the agricultural affairs is called *Sarki Nouma*. He is in charge of farmers in the whole village. Since the village is divided into quarters, each of them has a *Sarki Nouma* working in collaboration with the *Djaouro* of the quarter and the *Sarki Nouma* in *Guenne* court. In the quarter, the *Sarki Nouma* is the one in charge of agricultural activities. If one has a *sourga* to organize, one should inform the *Sarki Nouma* who will set the day for him so as to ensure that, there would not be a clash of a *sourga* on a particular day or same time. The *Sarki Nouma* has collaborators and together, they keep in touch with the households within the community. By virtue of these checks in the system, it implies that, the *Sarki Nouma* is aware of every *sourga* in the community. He then subsequently informs the *Genne*.

Kinship is the last one. When one organizes a *sourga*, the whole family is involved. The nuclear family is primarily involved at the household level. The next is members of the large family: uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins and other relatives. There is a big mobilization of the family. Some extra supporters are brought to the farm owner to complete his efforts in the organization of the *sourga*. When one hears of one's family member's *sourga*, it is an opportunity to make their clan show the level of solidarity in that family. Accordingly everything possible is done by family members to have a good representation at the *sourga* of a relative. This is because among the Peres, the *sourga* is an indicator of social identity as well as the level of unity within the clan

or family. Accordingly, a *sourga* in which one's family is not well represented is frowned upon in the Pere society.

Three social fields have been discovered as part of my research. I will bring out how through the *sourga*, the whole plain moves from the micro to the macro level. To reach that point, a deep glance will be thrown in the dynamism within each social field.

2.2 Methodology:

During a research process, there are some challenges a researcher oftentimes goes through in order to have access to the data. These challenges may vary from researcher to researcher. The challenges may be influenced by such factors as the nature of the field, the project, the strategy and even the position of the researcher. In my case, my position both as insider and outsider was the main target on the field. It has been leading me from the onset until the end of the research process. To approach this issue, I used several methods.

2.2.1 What am I looking for?

I approached my field with a double position; which implies that I was both an insider and an outsider borne out of the fact that I am Pere. However, I have for sometimes not been close to my community. I had lived in Ngaoundere and then in Norway. This made me a “stranger” to my culture and as such a bit of an “outsider” as I refer to myself in this research. Being a Pere, I have a fair command over the Pere language but somewhat ignorant of some aspects of my culture and tradition. When I went back home to conduct the research, there were some reasons that motivated my choice. Below are some of the reasons that motivated my choice. First, very few researches have been conducted in the plain of Mayo-Baleo. Boutrais argues that:

c'est encore de nos jours l'une des régions les plus mal connues au cameroun a cause d'un isolement Presque total.”(Boutrais; 1978:105).

In other words, it is one of the places in Cameroon which is not known because of its isolation. Even existing literature could not help me learn my culture. This is because relatively very few researches have been conducted in this part of Cameroon and in particular on the Pere people. An alternative in this situation was therefore, to learn my culture by experiencing it. The text and the film that will come out from it will somehow make the Pere people known. It is also an

opportunity for me to get to learn more about my society and tradition. In short it is much more like exploring my cultural identity, to take up with my culture.

2.2.2 Doing participant observation

In doing participant observation, you will locate yourself in some place; you will watch actors of one sort or another and become involved with them; you will observe and participate in activities. These primary elements do not exhaust the social and cultural meaning of social situations, but they do serve as a springboard into understanding them. Most important, by focusing on a single social situation you will greatly simplify the task of beginning your ethnographic research. (Spradley 1980:39-40).

I have been involved in my informant's activities to experience their life and to learn and understand their culture. I ploughed, sowed and weeded the fields together with them when it was possible for me. I have also shared the food with them. To take an example, it was the day they were brewing local beer. I took the stirring stick to see how it works. But the way I was doing it was not the best as it was pointed out to me. They taught me how to hold it. I learnt how to do it but I also understood what these ladies feel while brewing the beer, how hard work it is and the pleasure within which they can accomplish such a task. By observing and listening to them in this particular social situation, I noticed how important the local beer of millet can be for them in the practice of *sourga*. My participation in the different activities was moderate to “maintain a balance (...), between participation and observation” (op.cit 1980:60).

2.2.3 Insider and outsider

I was introduced in the field with the help of my father. He is a very well known and influential person in the area. He helped me to get in touch with people of *Delwalti* (one of the quarter of Mayo-Baleo village). He also found the Innoua's household where to settle during my research process. Innoua, as my main informant, the first time I met him said

“I am happy to be chosen amongst all the households of Mayo-Baleo, to be that person who will show other people how we Pere live and what we are doing. You will have a room for yourself to stay if you really want to because we don't have modern houses as you are used to. I will tell everybody in this compound that you

will come and live with us. I will also inform the whole quarter and the association we in this compound are members.”

As an insider, it helped me to integrate the community. I had little competence in the language used for everyday communication. It is only through that language that they always explained things to me. But when they used complex words or expression, I had to stop them and ask for explanation. I also had the opportunity to discuss with my parents about my project. I felt at home, learning for my studies and also for myself. However, being an insider has also closed some doors. While I was filming during a *sourga*, a man in the background corrected me by telling me “*how can you stand up filming while people are eating.*” That was frustrating and an obstruction for me. It means I have to control my movements and gestures and consequently, I was stopped to discover. I should keep aside all my status as an educated girl coming from Europe. This didn’t matter for them. I should have some respect for people and for the culture. I wonder what would have happened if it was a western or any stranger conducting that research. I agreed with Ndanga who came to the conclusion that “*I have to believe that a foreign researcher is freer and has a better “marge de manoeuvre” than a native one.*”(Ndanga; 2007:19). Things from that time started to be a bit complicated for me. Now I had to behave as a Pere girl who is supposed to know some rules of respect. Moreover, I should also take care of my father’s position in the society. Being a daughter of an influential man within the society, I had to be mindful of my inter-personal relations. It was confusion for me and at the end I did not know exactly what I was looking for, why I was there.

On the other hand, people knew that I have been away for years and consequently, I might not know everything about my own culture. They were explaining things to me in the simplest way for me to understand. This position of outsider allowed me: “*to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world*” (Malinowski 1922:25). Through it, I can position myself as a scientific researcher, kept out from subjectivity and preconceived idea but doing an effort to manage almost everything objectively.

Before going to the field, I knew what my motivations were and what I was looking for. Willing to experience my own culture reminds me an experience of Srinivas that Narayan tells about in the following words:

In returning from Oxford to live in a village, Srinivas stated his hope that

my study... would enable me better to understand my personal cultural and social root". But did the presence of these roots mean that he was regarded as a "native" returning home to blend smoothly with other "natives"? No he was an educated urbanite and Brahman male, and the power of his narrative ethnography lies very much in Srinivas's sensitivity to the various ways he interacted with members of the community: sometimes aligned with particular groups, sometimes set apart. As he confesses, it was only in the village that I realized how far I (and my family) had traveled away from tradition. (Narayan quoted by Jean koulandi 2006:48).

I found myself in what Narayan argues that a native Anthropologist is when he goes back home for research. I cannot say I haven't learned anything from my informants, but still, I have realized how far I am to be integrated into my community and my culture again. Somehow, they understood my effort to reintegrate the society with my background. I did not get only for myself but also data to produce a scientific knowledge about this part of Cameroon in general and of Pere people in particular. At the end, I came to the conclusion that, it is whilst one is on the field that one has methods and methodology in order to handle one's research. While writing a research project, it is comfortable to put some theories of how to approach the field. Indeed, one learns more through the practice of these theories. Nothing is straight and smooth in the research process. The right strategies are found in the field according to what one can face.

2.2.4 The video equipment and its effects

Video equipment was one of the tool I used in the field to collect data. I have been filming some of my informant's routines at home, their activities on the field and the process of *sourga*. In the field, it had an effect both on the filmmaker and the characters. But introducing it to them was not easy.

The first time I met my informants, I told them about the camera which I would have during my stay with them. They didn't find any problem with that because they didn't know what it was exactly. The reason why I said that is that they were wondering the first time I introduced it to them. Filming for them is to take still photos. They were right in their way of perceiving it because according to the local language the way to say I want to film is much more said in a way that it means, I want to take a picture. Because of that, they were not comfortable in front of the

camera especially when they knew that I was able to record what they said. They started to control what they said in front of the camera. They made sure that what they said or did was right. They would like to look cleaned and nice in front of the camera. One day while Soubado was preparing to take out the millet from the pot, she realized that her wrapper was torn. She turned against me and said “*this is something that white people will watch; let me have an un-torn cloth*. She wanted to show the audience that what she is not at the time she was accomplishing this task. I understood the lady in this context since she was taking cognizance of the situation. Accordingly, she tried adjusting to the situation. If there was no camera, then she would have acted as she wanted without taking care of how she appeared. She was also aware of the audience and she was behaving according to the kind of audience who would watch her. Lisbet and Bjørn have described these situations by saying that:

When the anthropologists are in the field interacting with the local “informants”, i.e. with their research partners, they have notions about who will be their target groups. They see themselves processing material for future dissemination. These target persons have qualities and interests. We think that these notions are relevant for the anthropologists observations and behavior. But the research partners also have their target groups: first, they are each others’ audience in the social situations. In addition they are often conscious about other audiences or target groups with which they are more or less familiar: the future readers of the anthropologists’ books and viewers of his/her films. (Bjørn&Lisbet 2005:3)

For me, I wanted them to be and to live their real life, do things as usual of their daily lives without being influenced by the camera. The camera thus limited their freedom of expression and action. They also had in mind an idea of how they would portray them negatively. Some critics or an expression of anger was immediately stopped. They were in order way deciding for me on what I really need, what I should have and what I shouldn’t have. Facing this problem and knowing that I needed information, I started to not go closer to them with the camera. I stayed away from them and held the camera as if I was not filming.

The video equipment had not been always an obstacle to get information. It has also opened other doors during the process of knowledge production. With the rushes I had, I had an opportunity to watch again and again my footage. The next is the editing process where I have

been dealing with images. All these processes have enabled me to discover some cultural codes that I have not discovered while I was filming. It gave an opportunity to see the material in different angles. Some scenes or says that one did not understand anything going on there. But by listening and watching it, some understanding comes up. During the editing process, I felt being close to the people than when I was on the field and consequently made understanding almost clearly their cultural rules. Then one can get more ideas to elaborate his work.

Having the camera on the field has some constraints. It made me more the less a prisoner throughout the period of the fieldwork. Wherever I was going, the camera was my companion. This made me most of the time thinking about the film. I was always asking myself, do I have this element for the film? It was difficult to extend the thought about some aspects of my project. For example, because my informants had their farm as the regular place where they spent their time, I was stuck in this particular place with them. It was difficult for me to say, I could work around to really get in touch with some other realities such as talking with the delegate of agriculture's collaborators. Though I knew that my study was both the film and the text, it was observed that the camera had influenced me to concentrate more on the filming part than the writing (text) aspect of it.

CHAPTER 3

PRESENTATION OF THE PLAIN OF MAYO-BALEO

This chapter aims to locate the plain of Mayo-Baleo. The chapter will open up with a historical background of the Pere people. It will tell us about the origin, the settlement and the slavery period the local population has gone through. The second part of this chapter will depict the plain of Mayo-Baleo after some social and political changes that occurred in the area. It will present how the organization and the composition of the Pere society have been changing over the time. The chapter will end up with the activities, the people are engaged in. An accent will be put on the agricultural activity as the basement of the economy, the different utilized strategies to practice it and how the households are organized according to this activity.

3.1 Location of the plain of Mayo-Baleo

The plain of Mayo-Baleo is located in the Western part of the Adamawa province (Northern Cameroon) in the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. It is one of the places in Cameroon which is not nowadays known (Boutrais 1978) because it is remote. It is known to be one of the remote areas in Cameroon.

After Tignere, the town located at the edge of the plateau, there is a small road going through a cliff which leads directly to the plain of Mayo-Baleo or plain Koutine. The plain is limited in the North by the subdivision of Poli, in the west by Nigeria, in the East by the subdivision of Tignere and in the South by the subdivision of Galim-Tignere. The landscape is mostly constituted by mountains: Tchabal Mbabo(1960 meters), Guenfalabo(1600 meters), Dzilempai, Nawa Ngoum, Sengout, Ngombote (Sali 2002). The assembly of mountains North-South cut off completely the plain from the Dodeo. The Guenfalabo closes the opening of the plain to the Northern part. In the East and the West, two other assemblies of mountains close completely the plain.

There is a variety of vegetation in this area. There are raised and woody savannas in the North. The meadows are near or on the mountains. Bit clear of the forest is also part of the vegetation of the area.

3.2 Historical background

The plain of Mayo-Baleo's history is marked by domination and slavery. It should also be noted that the history of the Pere before the 19th centuries is getting lost in the memory of elders that we are reduced to suppositions (Boutrais 1978:114).

3.2.1 Origin, settlement and Fulbe domination in Mayo-Baleo

One source has said that Peres at first migrated from Kano in Nigeria. After several migrations, they settled in Guenfalabo Mountain (Saidou Sarki Fada quoted by Sali; 1993:16). After some years they got down and settled in the plain. They are native of the area because nobody was there when they settled. They were organized into small villages scattered all over the plain and lived on agriculture. They had chiefs but they were much more occupied with religious affairs which didn't give them a real power over the population. They had no army for their protection. These two reasons facilitated some dominions. First, Kotopo people were the one imposing their domination over the Pere for a short time. At the beginning of 19th century, came this big movement of Fulbe all over the Northern Cameroon. It was Jihad- that is a "holy war" which was commanded by Ousman Dan Fodio, a young warrior who hailed from Nigeria. His mission was to impose Fulbe domination on the local people living in the area. Islam was also to be imposed on the inhabitants of the area as the right and only religion everyone could follow. In the plain of Mayo-Baleo, some of them who came from Mayo-Deo, chased the Kotopo away and settled in Kontcha. They in turn, came and imposed their domination on the Pere people located there at that time.

The domination Fulbe had on Pere was not violent. The Peres only had to pay homage to the Fulbes. For instance, it was the case that the political alliance that led the relations at that time in the plain consisted of the fact that Pere had to give Fulbe goods from their agricultural activities. It is said that:

La domination peule sur les Pèrè a effectivement eu lieu. Seulement elle s'est faite de manière pacifique résultant du compromise politique entre Pèrè et Foulbé . Il s'agissait alors d'une entente qui obligeait les Pèrè à verser des redevances coutumières aux Foulbé afin de les empêcher de leur déclarer la guerre. Ces redevances coutumières étaient basées sur la livraison des produits agricoles,

d'élevages et sur les prestations des services par les Père. (Hamadjoulde 1998:13).

With time, this alliance changed. Besides farm and breeding produces which the Pere had to supply their oppressors with, they were also supposed now to work on the field, at home, repairing or building the *lamido*'s (the traditional leader of the village. He is the equivalent of a chief in other cultures) and his councilors' (ministers') houses. The *Lamidos* is perceived as the representative of God in the midst of the people.

The situation became worse when Babbada Atikou became in 1940 the *lamido* of Kontcha (op.cit 1998:32). Children, men and women were captured and brought in Kontcha as slaves, some of them were sold in Nigeria in order to get the horses in return, beautiful women were taken away from their husbands because slaves don't have right to have beautiful wives. The oppression became worst each passing day. To reinforce and to mark their domination, the local population was given a new name which was *Koutine* meaning "dogs" in Fulbe language. Until now, even though the Pere do not like to be called by that name, they are named in some historical books and maps through this offensive term (De Latour 2005:5). They have created a difference among the Pere. Because those coming from Alme and Gadjiwan villages were *Guenfiine* which means "the Chief's slaves" and those from Mayo-Baleo village were called *Boofiine* who were "elder's slaves". These appellations nowadays bring some debates which seem to be creating division among the Pere. The *Guenfiine* think they are superior to *Boofiine*.

3.2.2 From the slavery to the freedom

When the French colonist came at the end of the First World War, the northern Cameroon was under the control of Fulbe. One of the politics the French colonization was to develop a very close relationship and collaboration between them and the local population with entire respect of their culture and traditions (Hamadjoulde 1998:60). Maurice Baudelaire who was the French colonist administrator at that time heard about the oppressions Pere people were suffering from and decided to take a trip there to have a look.

The evening Baudelaire arrived in Kontcha, a Pere woman named Dicko Yebe went to his place and asked to talk to him. She told him:

Le lamido Babbada Atikou detient captifs ma mère, mes oncles, mes frères et mes soeurs et mes tantes. Je viens vous demander de m'aider à obtenir leur libération aujourd'hui même. (Hamadjoulde 1998:67).

I need your help today to liberate my mother, my uncles, my brothers and sisters and aunts that Babbada Atikou had captured. It was astonishing for everyone who heard that because a woman at that time was not allowed to talk in public place but, Dicko dared especially talking about Babbada Atikou, what even men did not try to do. Baudelaire told everyone who had any of his family members as slave in Kontcha should let him know. The 22nd of April 1950, all Peres captured by Atikou were released. It was two hundred (200) people. Baudelaire left that with the liberated captives (op.cit 1998:71).

Ce samedi matin, après avoir vérifié que tout le monde était là , Baudelaire nous fit aligner. La foule composée en majorité des jeunes hommes et de jeunes femmes était nombreuse. Quand l'ordre fut donné de partir, nous marchâmes en file indienne et sortîmes de Kontcha. Aujourd'hui quand je me rapelle de cette sortie de Kontcha, je l'assimile directement a la sortie du peuple Juif d'Egypte, telle que raconte la Bible.(Bakari Etienne quoted by Hamadjoulde;1998:72).

Baudelaire gathered us that Saturday morning; he made sure that everybody was there. There were young men and mostly young women. When times came, we walked in line and left Kontcha. This walk out of Kontcha could be compared to the release of the Israelites described in the Bible. It was a walk towards liberty. Baudelaire sent Babbada in exile in Ngaoundere. The 23rd of the same year, Baudelaire organized a small conference in Gourwalti with some leaders of the Pere community in order to set a new socio- political organization of the whole plain.

3.3 The plain of Mayo-Baleo today

After some years, the plain was freed from oppressions. The organization of the society had changed. Two political systems led the whole area. We can speak about a more or less heterogeneous population with different activities but the most important and utilized is the agriculture.

3.3.1 Organization of the plain: Political organization and social environment

The plain of Mayo-Baleo after the conference of Gourwalti in 1950 has a new socio-political organization. The plain is divided into three main chieftaincies: Mayo-Baleo, Alme and Gadjiwan. They are independent from each other. Their organization and their structure are influenced by the Fulbe system. The leader of the village is the chief, in the quarters; there are Djaouro as chief and around the chief, some elders working in different domains. Both the Djaouro and notables are chief's close collaborators.

The plain is also governed by the modern administration. In 1981, it was a district. Two years later, in 1983, it became a subdivision with capital city Mayo-Baleo. It is led by a *sous-préfet*. He is the leader of the modern administration. Other representatives of the some domains such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and environment are under his authority. He attended the National school of the administration and the judiciary to fulfill this task. The presence of modern administration has brought a representative of the ministry of agriculture and rural development in the area. Both these modern and traditional political systems work in collaboration. A road is now built and connects the plain with Tignere (Capital city of the subdivision of Faro et Deo) and Nigeria.

Pere is native of the plain of Mayo-Baleo. That is why the area is also called "plain Pere" or "plain *Koutine*". One knows how people move from one place to another through migration. There are Gbaya, Mboum, Tchamba and Fulani living in the plain. Because the plain is an administrative subdivision, there are people coming from different parts or regions of Cameroon who live there for some time. They are teachers, administrators, soldiers delegates. Some people come from the neighbor Nigeria. The languages used for daily communication are Pere, Hausa and Fulani. The plain has not had access to formal education and so the use of the official languages in Cameroon, that French and English is very low. Nowadays, things are changing. Schools are built and the local population accepts and manages now to send their children to school. Hospitals and local market are provided in the major villages.

3.3.2 The economic life mostly based on agriculture

3.3.2.1 The cycle of agricultural activities

Agriculture is the main economic activity of the people in this area. Several reasons as explained below explain the prevalence of agriculture among the Pere people. The climate is favorable for agriculture. The dry season lasts for almost five months ranging from November to March and the rainy season goes from April to October. The length of the rainy season is an important factor for agricultural activities. Crops have enough water which helps farmers to get good harvest. Soils are also fertile. The accumulation of bits coming from massifs makes the soil fertile for agriculture (Boutrais 1978:107). From then, people start sowing maize, millet and groundnuts. One can see from that moment, a change in daily activities. The greetings, the talks all changed as people get busy with farm work. In the morning, on their way to the farm, one can hear people saying “*time has come again for us*”. At the first fifteen of April, there is drought which affects young crops. Some crops get to die because of the sun and the lack of humidity. In the next fifteen of April, rains come again and the activities restart. Middle of May it stops again for some days. By June the rainy season is definitely there. In July, rains are intense and regular and make the work being intense also. Rains from August to September are good for millet and the dry season from November to December allows the millet to get ready. Yams are grown from December to January and February. The peasants are conversant with the farming calendar. The harvest start in August mostly with groundnuts, then yams, maize and the harvest period end up with millet harvest in December and January.

3.3.2.2 Different strategies to practice agriculture

The labour of the family has always been the basic man power of Pere farmers in the plain of Mayo-Baleo. Except the *sourga* which is a very old utilized strategy, there are some new ways that have been put up. The first strategy is the *vii fii*. It means that the farm owner rent someone who will work in his farm for some money. When he finds someone, they make an appointment and go together to the farm to have a look to the work the person is supposed to accomplish. After the portion of land to be cultivated has been visited, they set the price. They agree upon it and the day the worker will start and the day he might finish.

The second one is what they call *adasse*. This strategy consists of a very small group of persons who work on rotational bases among themselves. If today they work on Mister A’s farm, the next

time will be someone's turn. The person who is receiving the group members in his farm provides enough food and the nice one. That day nobody works in his farm before going to the *adasse*. The rule is that they start earlier and finish around ten o'clock, so that they have time to work in their own farm later. Before departing after the day's work, they set a day for the next person's farm. That is how they do it until they work on everybody's farm. These strategies are very recent, but, still, the *sourga* remains the most prominent source of labor in the agricultural setting of the people of the plain.

3.3.2.3 Management of the land

One cannot talk about farming or farmers without referring to the land. It's an important element in a farmer's life. In the plain of Mayo-Baleo, the management of land is closely related to the kinship which plays an important role in Pere people social life.

As mentioned already, the management of the land in the plain of Mayo-Baleo is closely related to the kinship. Peres do not buy land for purposes of cultivation. They use *ousang*. These *ousang* are the land that people after living there for some times have moved out to settle in another place. There are so many *ousang* all over the plain. People have been moving around for different reasons. The death of a parent, the impoverishment of lands, the scarcity of water or game, the attraction of the main villages, fire, flood or plentiful presence of snakes or case of adultery are the reasons which explained this constant movement of the population. Nowadays, these movements have stopped and people know where their grandparents lived many years ago. The *ousangs* are in other words an inheritance. Every family looks for the place where their grandparents lived to use the land either to build houses or for farming. In the village, people know one another very well; there is no confusion over the ownership or possession of land. They know which family or clan has been living there so one cannot claim that it is somebody else land. Let us take an example of a man who belongs to the *Degnim* clan. He will go back to a place where everybody knows his grandparents as *Degnim* had lived. He belongs to this clan and by virtue of that he has right to utilize it. But the use of the land is not without regulations. Accordingly one will have to liaise with the elders in making a decision as to who uses which land. The elders know the boundaries of the lands and so decide where each user ends to avoid conflicts over possession. In case of problems on boundary differentiation, it will be the elders within the family who is looked for to solve the problem. He can also be someone who lived

with his grandparents in that land and on his farm, one can hear him saying: “here was my grandfather’s house, this is where he has been buried, and over there is his wife’s grave”. Women for example, who get married in a different village, get lands through their husbands. Those who are not natives ask for the land from the *Djoaouro* of the quarter. At that time, the *Djaouro*, the chief of a quarter is the one giving the land because he knows which ones are unoccupied that people don’t utilized or the family has moved away. There are also some cases where someone who is native and have very big land, can share it with someone who needs and asks for it. Land has not been a crucial problem for the local population and for foreigners.

The plain of Mayo-Baleo after some years of oppression, has found its stability and freedom. Pere people as local population keep practicing agriculture according to their climate and the agricultural cycle. Since the access to land is not much of a challenge, most of them are really involved and create new ways of dealing with agriculture.

CHAPTER 4

THE SOURGA AT THE HEART OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

This chapter presents us with the organization the *sourga* based on what I experienced I had with Innoua's household. It will also give a description of the various steps involved in the organization. Such issues as, the participants' as well as their roles in the organization of a *sourga*, are also handled in this chapter. It should however be noted that the *sourga* is categorized into different types as observed by this research.

4.1 Types of *sourga*

Though *sourga* is a common word to name this working party, it is categorized into different types. It is thus uncommon to see people asking of the type of a *sourga* to be held when they are invited for the occasion. It is claimed that the criteria for determining the different types are basically the number of people who represent a household on a particular *sourga* as well as the duration of the *sourga*.

4.1.1 *Ang sourga* and *Tong iro*

One type of *sourga* that is identified in this work is the *ang sourga*. In the *ang sourga*, the work starts between 8:30a.m and ends around 2 p.m. The Farm owner, when he organizes this kind of *sourga* expects one person from each household. The workers rest two times before they end up with the work. It is the expectation that food and drinks be provided by the farm owner for the participants.

With the *tong iro*, people start working at 7 a.m. and end around 4 in the afternoon. Usually with this type of *sourga*, two people from each household are expected to attend the *sourga*. For instance if one is invited for a *sourga* of this type, one ensures that two people from one's house go to represent the household. The participants usually rest twice. As usual of the organization of *sourga*, food and drinks are served at the occasion.

These two types mentioned above, are however by nature very small, yet they are loved by participants whenever they are organized.

4.1.2 *Velem fum*

This is the biggest type of *sourga*. It is also called *mante fum* or *Gaya*. This type of *sourga* is what is captured in my film titled: “Work of Pleasure, a *sourga* working party in Mayo-Baleo, Cameroon”. During this kind of *sourga*, the whole household is supposed to attend the event. An invitation of someone therefore implies the participation of the entire household. Work will usually start at 6 in the morning to 6 p.m. with three breaks. All at the *sourga* are served with food and drinks. The work is accompanied with music and songs.

When someone organizes a *velem fum*, he can decide that he wants to *peri yule*, literally to “give the head” which means “to assign the authority”. The farm owner assigns someone the responsibilities of taking care of the *sourga*. One being assigned a responsibility, means inviting people for the *sourga*, and being the person who should work more than any workers that day.

When people work, they can stand up for a while to rest before continuing. However, it is usual for the person who is the “leader” of the workers stand up to take rest. He rests only during the break. Some qualities are expected of a leader at the *sourga*. He should for instance belong to a respectable, well known and large family. The more one is loved by people, the more they come to help on the occasion of the *sourga*. The calibre of family a chosen leader belongs to, can affect the number of people who come for the *sourga*. When one is made a leader at a *sourga*, one’s extended family (parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents) would do all within their means to be present at that *sourga*.

Among the Pere, it is an honor to a family when their family member is made a leader at a *sourga*. Thus when is chosen as a “king” of such a *sourga*, injects some amount of respect into one’s family. It is something to defend, to preserve and make prosperous their clan. At the end of the day, the farm owner shows some appreciation to the leader. This is usually in a form of gifts to the leader. The appreciation is also extended to the parents of the leader. In most cases, the gifts are in general clothes.

The farm owner can choose an adult to be responsible of his farm that day. He can also decide that the person can be a teenager or a child of seven (7) to ten (10) years old. In this case, the father of this child is very concerned. This is because the father of such a child would be expected to act on his child’s behalf. This position of being a leader at a *sourga* has among the

Pere, being the reserve for men and women never handle such responsibilities. One possible reason for this might be the gender, since the Pere do not generally assign some kind of responsibilities assumed to be demanding, to women.

4.2 A study of case: an experience of Innoua’s *sourga* in Mayo-Baleo village

In order to have an insight of how the *sourga* is organized, we will follow one of the Innoua’s *sourga* that took place in the middle of July. During my fieldwork, I lived in Innoua’s compound with his family. I followed them not only on their *sourga*, but also on the occasion of other peoples’ *sourga* organized during my stay in the field. It might be important to notice that, it is Innoua’s *sourga* which was captured in my film.

4.2.1 Who is Innoua?

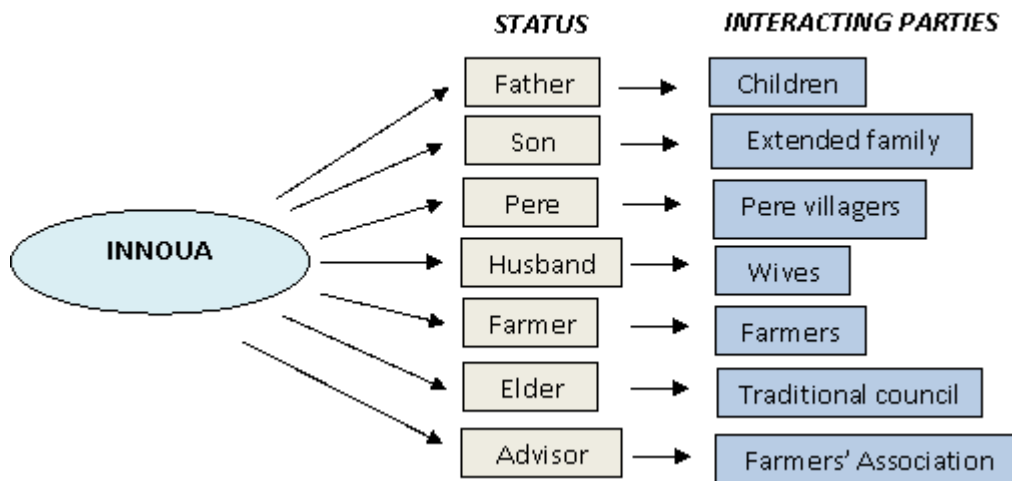


Figure 1: Innoua status and people with whom he interacts

Source: Made by the researcher



Figure 2: Innoua thanking people at the end of his *sourga*.

Source: picture taken by researcher

Innoua is a 52 year old man living in Delwalti, one of the quarters of Mayo-Baleo village. He is married to Koumbo and Soubado, first and second wife respectively. Innoua has two younger brothers, Balami and Aboubakar. They live together with him in the same compound. Balami has two wives also, whilst Aboubakar has one wife. Besides, their father aged 90 stays with them. Figure 1 above, gives Innoua's status sets and the different people he interacts with. It allows us to see what values Innoua seeks in different domains of his interaction with other people either who live in his compound or outside his compound. Innoua as the head of the compound receives every morning some of his relatives who come to greet him. On this visit they can talk about some family issues such as children behavior that affects the image of the family. His position as elder in the *lamido* court gives him a respected position. This status maximizes Innoua's chance to have more people attending his *sourga*. According to him and some testimonies I got from his wives, his *sourga* has always been successful because of the number of people who participate for varied reasons. When rains start with his series of *sourga*, some people in the village ask when Innoua's turn will be.

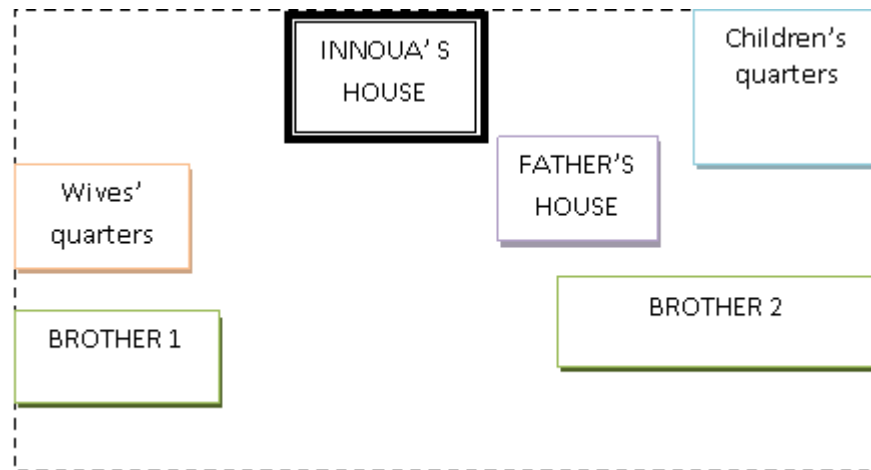


Figure 3: Innoua's compound

Source: Made by the researcher

- Brother 1: Innoua's first younger brother's (Balami) household**
- Brother 2: Innoua's second brother's (Aboubakar) household**
- Wives' quarter: Innoua's wives (Koumbo and Soubado) house**
- Children's quarter: Innoua's children yard**
- Father's house: Innoua's father house**

Innoua's compound is divided into three households: his own household and his younger brothers' households. A mutual and complementary life governs the relationship within the three households. They share food. Each household makes food and gives some for men who eat at the main entrance of the compound. Women eat together in the wives' quarter which represents Innoua's wives yard where I stayed. I shared the food together with them. At each dinner, there were three different bowls.

After everybody has eaten, there comes the time to rest. They make a kind of summary of the day, prepare seed for the next day, they make such plans like where on my farm to grow what among others. Sometimes, Balami or Aboubakar, join the ladies to talk with them and ask a help like *"what do you thing I can grow in this side of my field? Do you thing if I grow groundnuts for exemple in that place will be fine?"* They assist one another in different situations. For example when it comes to someone's *sourga*, they give their support by helping brewing local beer, carrying stuffs from home to the farm.

However, the *sourga*, is not the only unifying force of the compound. They also decide to make an *adasse* that is limited to members of the compound only. In planning the household *adasse*, they are careful to avoid conflicts with other *sourgas* within the quarter.

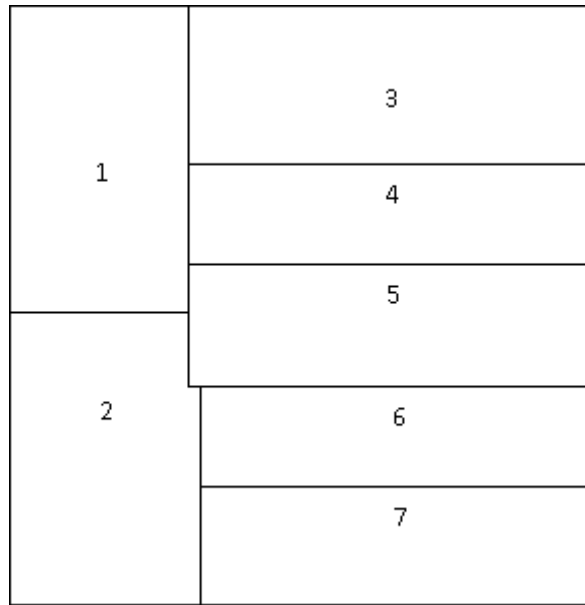


Figure 4: Innoua’s household fields

Source: Made by the researcher

- 1 to5: Innoua’s field**
- 6: Soubado’s fram**
- 7: Koumbo’s field**

Innoua and his brothers use *ousang* to farm. It is a big area close to the river Mayo Dinti. It is far from the village. It is more than five kilometers and is an hour’s walk from home. Their farms are in the same area. Women’s farms are near their husband’s farms. Innoua claimed that, the size of his farm with his wives is about four hectares.

4.3 Innoua’s *sourga*: organization and implementation

Before the *sourga* takes place, there are several things which Innoua as the farm owner, together with his household would have to do.

4.3.1 Announcement

It was during a *sourga* of another person that the day of Innoua's *sourga* had to be set. Everybody was sitting under the shade of a tree having a break after several hours of work. The *Wambye* is one of the collaborators of the Sarki Nouma. He is the one in charge of announcing anything that might happen during a *sourga*. He stood up and said: "*Thank you to all of you who came to work in this farm. To welcome you and to enjoy the break, the farm owner offers us two pots of Kunu (light Pere's traditional beer), two bowls of Kure (tick porridge made from maize or millet) and a bowl of Gule (kind of cake made with groundnuts paste). He wants the Sarki Nouma to give to his subjects.*" The food was distributed by young men. After the meal, the *wambaye* shouted again to attract peoples' attention and said:

We should not think about today because we have already started the work, we should rather think about the coming days. Abasse's wife will brew the beer on Saturday and her Sourga will take place on Sunday. Innoua Bigaoula will brew beer on Monday and Tuesday will be the day of the Sourga. May God allow us to reach those days. That's what elders want me to let you know.

Innoua did not hide his emotion that day. He said: "*I was eager to know when my Sourga will take place. Thank you for given me that opportunity.*" Moreover Innoua was smiling as he expressed his gratitude.

At the moment the *sourga* was announced, all people who were present were already invited. That was an official announcement and this seemed good as it did not conflict people's schedules. Back at home, Innoua had sent Oumarou, his grandchild several times to his elder sisters, brothers, nephews, aunts and uncles to inform them about his *sourga* on the next coming Tuesday. This was an invitation and as expected they relatives informed will be there. Moreover, those who were present during the "official announcement" will somehow talk about it when they returned to the village. The village is small which facilitates the spreading of information very quickly. I remember I went with my informants to grind the germinated millet when someone asked if it was for their *sourga*. That is one of the ways to show how news is spread.

4.3.2 Preparations

One month before the announcement, Innoua had started to prepare himself. He took out three big bowls of millet which are equivalent to 100 kilograms from his loft. The millet has been soaked, germinated and dried within two weeks. The germinated millet is ground and used as yeast to brew local beer.

The *sourga* of their husband was also their *sourga*. They should give all their best to contribute to the success of the event. Koumbo and Soubado asked their neighbors, friends, to come and help them to pound millet. Balami and Aboubakar's wives joined them in this task. Some neighbors, Innoua's relatives and friends came to help too.

The day before the *sourga*, they would have to brew *Kunu* (light Pere's traditional beer). Women in the compound were the first to arrive. With time, other women joined them. Two big pots on the fire and women were carefully looking after it. Some of them were occupied with the preparation of lunch; whilst others fetched water. In short everybody was busy. Koumbo and Soubado were coordinating: do this, don't do that. The atmosphere was enjoyable despite the work. They occasionally teased one another, told jokes, and children cried around.



Figure 5: Day of brewing beer: Putting beer in the *tego*

Source: picture taken by the researcher

Some people already started making plans for the *sourga*'s day, others made plan or tell what they will bring to sell the next day. Gourds are collected and washed. Koumbo and Soubado collected some plates from other ladies because the ones they had would not be enough for the event. Boys helped women to collect *Tego* (special pots to keep things like seeds, water or beer).The beer will be kept in it to get ferment. More than 10 *tego* has been filled that day. Brewing beer took an entire day.

Innoua had decided to organize a *Velem fum* and at the same time he *peri yule*. He had chosen a boy of 15 years old to be responsible of his farm that day. Innoua as farm owner, he brewed the *Fum*. Before 6 in the morning, he was already on his way to the farm. Fire woods had been collected the day before by his children. Water had been provided for him. Within two days, he had been dealing with this all important organizational task. He had made two big pots of *fum*.

4.3.3 Climaxing the *sourga*

Since Innoua's had *Peri yule* for his *sourga*, the workers should go early to the farm to start working. Men of the quarter gathered the day before the *sourga*, after dinner, to set the time they would leave. They agree upon 3a.m. as time of departure. I heard in the household how they were talking of need to be time conscious to avoid lateness. They gathered and left for the field. At 4am on the day of the *sourga*, they were on the farm. At that moment, people were not allowed to talk somehow. If someone had something to say he murmured. The researcher in her quest to unravel the reasons responsible for the silence at this moment discovered that the moment is assigned religious value by the Pere people and is accorded so much respect. This explains why talking is not allowed at this moment of the *sourga*. They chose one person who would start the work. That person should be someone who is assumed to have "luck". It means that if he starts, then people will work a lot without getting tired; people will not fight but enjoyed the day. When that person was chosen, he gave the first blow of hoe and then the others followed and the *sourga* has started. This step is very silent. The belief then is that the success of a given *sourga* could also be determined by the "luck" of the person who is chosen to start it.

Innoua as farm owner did not work that day. He did not hurry to be in the farm earlier as workers. At 5:30, Koumbo and Soubado were on their way to the farm with everything they will

need there. At 6 musicians were already there. Innoua arrived when workers were about to leave for their first break.

Soubado and Koumbo were busy in front of the *boukarou* (small house built on the farm for purposes of resting and preparation of food. At 6 the first women joined men to work. During that first break, they had breakfast together. Since Men came earlier to the farm, their wives brought something for them to eat. During the first break, only drinks were served. Elders gave some orientations and advice on how to work together.

Women were cooking. Those who were weeding were doing it. Musicians kept playing music for them. Men and women worked together. There was a first group who was ahead in the work. The second group followed the first one. The third group was doing a kind of verification of what the first two groups have done. If by weeding, some grasses have been left behind, they removed them. People kept coming. Then time had come to have the second break. People ate and drank silently. The silence was interrupted when the *Djaouro* came. Musicians played music to welcome him. When they were about to go back for work again, the young men gathered around the *Lawan* and he said: “*Soukabe lamido*” (subjects) and they answered “*yaaa*”. They went back again to work for almost two hours. When they were leaving for the third break, the *Wakili* told people to look for leaves for elders and to escort the chief (the young boy of 15 years old). The boy was carried on someone’s shoulder. Men, women and children followed him with songs and dances. They put the leaves on the ground and laid him on it to rest. This was done as a sign of respect for the position assigned him on the occasion.

After this small ceremony, comes the *wambaye*’s turn. Women with leaves in their hands sung and danced to offer a good seat for them. Women chose two ladies that they decided to greet ceremoniously. Men were watching how things were going on Innoua also. During that break, the cola nuts were offered. The *Djaouro* who was present said some words to encourage people to always work together. Innoua thanked people for everything they have done. They went back to work for the last round when it was four o’clock. They worked and ended up at half past five. It is time to go thank some special people. *Wakili*, *Kofa* and *Sarki Nouma* were those to whom they gave these special thanks through dances and songs. Women were making “hurrah!!!” Some of the songs sang on these occasion are of historical importance. Some songs may for example

remind people of the past, great men and women who once lived but are no more. This can sometimes send sorrows down some people notwithstanding the fact that the occasion is basically expected to be a joyous one. I saw during tears coming out of the *Sarki Nouma*'s eyes.

The day ended up with dances in front of the *boukarou*. They offered beer to elders of various clans present since such people are treated with specialty. That day, people weeded the whole farm and they increased the size of the field. There were more than 50 people who attended the *sourga*.

4.3.4 Participants in the *sourga*

When one looks at people during a *sourga*, one cannot know who is who, and who is doing what. They are all mixed together but are not the same consequently, have different objectives. There are some small categories of people persons who play some roles in the organization and the implementation of the *sourga*. These categories can be divided into two groups.

4.3.4.1 The *Sarki Nouma* and his collaborators

There are some people who have a specific roles and functions. They are the *Sarki Nouma* and his collaborators. They form a kind of “committee” in the organization and the implementation of the *sourga*. There is not a committee which is in charge of every *sourga* in the entire village. Every quarter has its comity and defines their ways of doing. Every quarter has a leader called *Sarki Nouma* who is in charge of every farmer living in that area. He has the authority upon them and he is the one who sets the committee in charge of defining and organizing the work. In Delwalti, the quarter where Innoua lives, every farmer has an opportunity to organize two times his *sourga* before the end of the rainy season. He has around him some people helping him to coordinate these tasks.

- *Wadjiri* and *Galdima* are the *Sarki Nouma*'s vice. They have kind of same role as *Sarki Nouma* mostly when he is absent for some reasons.
- *Kaigama* is the person in charge of organizing rejoicings during the *Sourga*.
- *Wakili*, he arranges everything during the *sourga*. He makes sure that women hurry up to make food; he is the one who looks for and arranges the place where people will rest during the break.

- *Sarkiya*, he acts as a mediator in all levels.
- *Wambaye*, is the person through whom people offer during the *sourga*; that is, if someone brought something to share with everybody, he gives it to the *Wambaye* and he will present it to everybody. He is the one in charge of introducing people and making of announcements on the occasion of *sourga*. He works in collaboration with women that is why he always receives greetings from them.
- *Barde*, is that person who does not scared in front of any situations that might occur during the *sourga*.
- *Makama*, someone who during the *sourga* shows the area to be cultivated. Before the day of the *sourga* arrives, he gets contact with the farm owner who shows him the area he is expecting people to work on it.
- *Siroma*, is like a *Sarki Nouma*'s son. He is the successor.
- *Azia*, is always with women when they are brewing beer or cooking. He has control over everything related to the kitchen.
- *Sarki Mata* is a female version of *Sarki Nouma* that is a woman who acts in a capacity of a *Sarki Nouma*. This woman is the leader of all women who deal with farm's work.
- *Kofa* is the person who takes people to the *Sarki Nouma* after the work.
- *Sarki Fada*, is the one who distributes what has been offered during the *sourga*.
- *Lawan*, is the person who looks after people when there are working. He is the one reporting to *Wakili* that people need something for example to drink.

All these roles and functions are assumed by only men. It is only the role of the *Sarki Mata* that can be assumed by women. To be member of the committee, you have to be chosen by the *Sarki Nouma*. He has an idea of everyone, his family, attitude and behavior. In this committee, they don't need lazy persons but those who are responsible and hard worker. I saw young people of 25 and sometimes less, being part of the committee. It means that not only adults who have the opportunity to be part of the committee.

4.3.4.2 Among participants

People coming to the *sourga* do not have the same motives. There are some who are called “*waari*”. They are those who come just to eat, drink sing and dance. They don't worry at all of

work. Enjoyment is what they are worried about. This kind of people are not invited, they invite themselves. Anyway, they are always welcome because the *sourga* is not only for work.

We have those people who are invited but don't cultivate. To recognize them, one should just look at the way they are dressed, like people going to the party. Those people are Innoua's sisters, brothers, ants or uncles. They might be also his wives relatives. They come just to take part, to see how things happened and to represent their various clans. When they come, they brought with them some money for Innoua. It is an extra support they are providing him and it is a clue to show their love, encouragements. It is also a sense of appreciation to the fellow the efforts put in organizing the *sourga*. They want to tell Innoua how much they are proud of him being a real farm owner. I saw a lady who brought a bowl of cooked meat which tastes good with beer as I was told by the people who had tasted it. In fact, some of them come to help cooking, fetching water.

The last category is those who are workers and at the same are at the *sourga* for commercial reasons, that is for such people, their presence is two-fold. Such people are able to sell some items on the occasion. I for instance, saw a man selling cola nut, and watches during the different breaks. Some women were selling cooked meat, and other traditional dishes. There were traditional doctors (herbalists) selling medicine.

It is within such atmosphere as described above that Pere farmers in the plain of Mayo-Baleo organize their agricultural work through the practice of *sourga*. It is seen that the description that, organizing the *sourga* involves various stages and preparations on the part of the one calling the *sourga* as well as the people who will be attending the occasion.

CHAPTER 5

SOURGA AS PART OF THE ECONOMY AND THE CULTURE OF PERE LIVING IN THE PLAIN OF MAYO-BALEO

This chapter is aimed at investigating the importance of the *sourga* in the life of the Pere people. The economic and cultural relevance of the *sourga* as discussed in this chapter is based on my experience of the organization of Innoua's *sourga* and also on some other *sourgas* that took place during my stay on the field. It is undisputable, that the *sourga* constitutes a crucial aspect of the cultural and economic life of the Pere farmers. Since we know that the plain of Mayo-Baleo has moved from the subsistence economy to the market economy, I will put the *sourga* in the center of this transition and see how the dynamics of the *sourga* can be understood in the different aspects of Pere farmers' life. In other words, it would depict the *sourga* as a means that allows the local population to find a place within the market economy. It would also investigate how the Pere culture is manifested through the *sourga*. Thus, it is to look at the *sourga* within the context of culture and economy of the Pere people. For this reason, the chapter will be divided into two main parts. The first part will focus on the economic idea that is rationalized in the practice of *sourga*. The second one will be on the social relevance of *sourga* to the life of the Peres aimed at finding out the extent to which the *sourga* shapes the identity of the Pere people.

5.1 The economy in the *sourga*

Considering the economy as a social field, I would like to see the extent to which through the practice of *sourga*, the plain of Mayo-Baleo relates to the outside world. Within this social field, I would establish the relationship between the *sourga* and the economy. I would look at the dynamism that might exist within the field by looking at how the local population deals with the practice of *sourga*. It would in other words, depict how the economic life of the Pere farmers is organized around the *sourga*.

During a *sourga*, people gather, work, eat and drink together in an atmosphere of party. The food and the drinks that are offered are for free. The preoccupation here is to seek if the *sourga* is just a pleasure of offering and working together without getting anything in return. An important

feature of the *sourga* that comes to mention in this direction is rationality. Once the *sourga* is an exchange, there is inevitably an element of rationality in it.

Rationality refers to the use of logic to ascertain likely consequences (ends) and how one should achieve those things that are valued (means). (Cropanzo and Mitchell 2005: 879)

In other words, there are some motivations and also some ways to use in order to get the need since this need varies from person to person. According to Barth, individuals in their interactions seek values. These values are not only material-oriented such as goods; money, the fields, but also, abstract things like respect, power, and relationships just to mention a few. To maximize these values, choices are made. Talking about these two characteristics of values, Barth argues that:

I hold that these values are empirical facts which may be discovered- they are not an analyst's constructs, but views held by the actors themselves. They are views about significance, worthwhileness, preferences in/for things and actions. I have represented them as being initial to items and sequences of behavior- they are the criteria by reference to which alternative actions are evaluated, and on the basis of which choice are exercised. (Barth 1981: 49)

5.1.1 The cost of organizing the *sourga*

The organization of a *sourga* has some financial implications on the farmer. This is because the organizer will need some money to buy stuffs that he is not able to provide himself such cola nuts, spices, meat, to grind an important quantity of germinated millet, yet are crucial for the materialization of the organization of the *sourga*. Aside the need to buy these items; one will also be expected to have things as millet, and maize. One should have enough surplus of millet for the previous year in his loft for the occasion. Where one does not have enough, then there will be the need to buy those things as well so as to provide enough food for the participants. This is an important aspect of the *sourga* because among the Pere, a man's respect within the society can be determined by the extent to which he is able to provide the workers on his farm with enough food on the occasion of his *sourga*. Innoua gave me an estimate expenditure each farm owner

might have while organizing each three types of *sourga* as presented earlier in chapter four. Organizing the *ang sourga* might coast 4000 francs, the *tong iro* coasts 8000 francs and the *velem fum* is almost 20.000 to 30.000 francs. These amounts are not accessible to everyone. Some farmers are not able to save these amounts of money after they sell what they have harvested the year before. The amounts quoted above are seen as a substantial amount of money within the study area where most of the occupants do not earn much income.

There is another social field that emerges here in order to explain how farmers handle expenditures that might occur during the organization of the *sourga*. An example is the kinship as social field I talked about in chapter two. Owing to the fact that the Pere society is basically communal in nature, relatives usually come to the aid of an organizer of a *sourga* to ease the financial burden that may come in the wake of organizing a *sourga*. The support relatives provide for the organizer of a *sourga* is to cover such expenditures. Uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, that is to say, members of the extended family bring their support. As soon as one will know that one of the clan members is organizing a *sourga*, there is no need to remind or to tell one what one has to do. Some family members can give millet or provide flour as a help and indicator of solidarity. Some can brew beer, make some special food or give some money. People are so closed and tied to one another that, the farm owner organizing the *sourga* expects more from his relatives than from others. It is usually said that, if anybody family's members do not help, who will do it. Accordingly, any kind of support should start within the clan not elsewhere.

There is thus a strong correlation between one's economic ability and the possibility to organize a *sourga*. Though there could be a need for a *sourga* on one's farm, financial discrepancy could render such a need impossible. If one organizes a *sourga* and workers do not have enough local beer to drink or enough food, it will be considered as a mark of failure. Such issues easily become public topics within the community. Anytime that such a "failure" in organizing a *sourga*, people would not want to attend for fear that they may not be well-fed. The ability of the organizer to feed the people is also important because the belief is that when people are not well-fed; their working potency can be affected. Nobody will have strength to work on an "empty stomach". To work during a *sourga* requires a lot of energy. That is why; it should always be

ensured that enough food is provided for those at work on the farm. But although one may see the *sourga* to be expensive, the benefits are valued since one needs the labor force on one's farm to ensure good harvest. It also helps one to enlarge one's farm which consequently gives one respect within the society. It should be remembered that it was earlier mentioned that the size of one's farm could be a source of respect for one in the Pere society.

5.1.2 Benefits derived from the *sourga*

As soon as one has the need to organize a *sourga*, one can invest to have the work done. No matter how much one spends to do it, one knows what there will be some benefits as well. There is a lot of calculation behind it. Innoua at the end of the work the day of his *sourga* said:

I am happy, I am happy today. The work of my land is finished. Thank you.
(Innoua work of pleasure: 2008).

To the Pere man, the thought that his work on the farm is done is a big relief. The whole field has been weeded and the size of the land has been increased. So Innoua should be happy because he can expect from that a good harvest. He had two hectares of field where he grew maize, two hectares and a half of millet and one hectare of groundnuts. After harvesting, he got eighty (80) bags of maize, twenty five (25) bags of millet and ten (10) bags of groundnuts. Each bags weight one hundred (100) kilograms. He asserted to be very happy of what he got. The labor of his family and some close relatives is enough to have the work done. He will keep it and try to distribute it between consumption and the commercial market. This year in the local market, a bag of millet and maize cost seven thousand five hundred francs (7.500) and a bag of groundnuts is about twenty three thousand francs (23.000). His wives Soubado and Koumbo got six bags each of maize, five of millet and two of groundnuts each. Innoua and his household and some relatives will not consume all these bags of millet and maize. Most of them will probably be sold. I assume that with the eighty (80) bags of maize, twenty five (25) bags of millet and ten (10) of groundnuts, fourthy (40) of maize, fifteen (15) of millet and seven (7) bags of groundnut will be sold. For annual benefits, Innoua is supposed to get more than 500.000 francs which are not bad compared to the average farmers who get below this estimated amount. With this amount, he would pay scholar fees of his children, solve health problems, take care of his wives by buying clothes for example, participate in some ceremonies that might occurs within the

extended family such as marriage, naming ceremonies. But still, according to the living standards in his household and also in the whole village, Innoua might not spend half of the total amount. For a farmer living in the plain who uses the familial labor and old techniques of farming, this is much.

5.1.3 Rank, power and hierarchy

The respect people get from their ability to increase their farms and offer enough food and drinks to people attending the *sourga* can affect one's position within the society. The respect one has is not only determined by the size of the farm, but the respect also comes from the how regular one is able to organize a *sourga*. When one organizes a *sourga* then one is seen as a hard worker, that one is a "real" Pere. That might lead one to a position as a *Sarki Nouma*, who is the leader of the farmers. A leader as generally known is not supposed to be a lazy person, but someone who knows how to handle farming activities skillfully. Since Pere people categorize others based on their ability to farm and insure their life through farming, the more respect one has and the more consideration people in the society will have for one. The respect and the position do not only go to the individual but to his clan since the Pere society is a communal one. If a prestigious farmer belongs for example to the clan of *Degnim*, because of him, anybody belonging to that particular clan shares that respect and is seen as a hard worker too. In other words, it becomes all *Degnim* issues.

The fact that one attends other people *sourga* can accord one respect in the society. Innoua as an elder in the village walks around in order to attend other peoples' *sourga*. If Innoua attends others' *sourga*, it means that Innoua does not perceive himself as being superior to others. In this context, equality should be valued if not, one will not have people coming to one's *sourga*.

However, there is some rank which imposes respect and consequently generates an important manpower while one is organizing the *sourga*. An example is the case of the *Lamido*, the chief of the village. As a chief, he is beyond everybody in the village. He also organizes the *sourga*. When he does, almost the whole village attends. This is a responsibility that the local population should fulfill. All the elders working with him should be there. Because of the respect people must have for him, they should be there as a matter of compulsion. It is the chief's *sourga*, consequently it is everybody *sourga*

5.1.4 Circulation of goods

Goods that Pere farmers produce are both for their consumption and commercialization. The way the goods move varies in different level of scales. It moves from within the plain to other places. In other words, it is through it that one can see how the plain is connected to the outside world. There are two big movements that explain how things are organized and how they happen.

The circulation of goods in the plain of Mayo-Baleo has two main movements. The first and important one comes from Tignere, located at seventy kilometers from the plain. According to what the Pere farmers produce each year, the delegate of agriculture represents the plain as being “the feeder’s udder and the attic of the tray”. Traders come from this small town every market day. All categories of farm produce such as: millet, maize, groundnuts, yams among others are brought to the market. Sometimes, negotiations are made at home especially when comes that time where farmers do not feel comfortable to sell their goods either because the price is too low or they feel like not having enough for consumption. At that time, traders go from compound to compound to look for goods and buy. It might also be that, one has a lot he would like to sell. Together with the trader, one makes an arrangement that, every market day, he will take this number of bags of specific goods. Then, the goods cannot be brought to the market before being sold. After the market day, traders have their cars full of different goods. They drive up to their home towns. They sell them in the town or sometimes, it is brought to Ngaoundere, the capital city of the province.

According to the circulation within the country, one should also notice it is not only the traders from outside the plain who buy things to retail somewhere. In recent years, there is one car owned by one Pere trader living in the village of Mayo-Baleo that goes to Ngaoundere, the capital city of the Adamaoua province. In that city, there are some Pere people who live there for different reasons. They send some money home for their relatives to buy some goods and send to them through that car. It is cheap and for them it is a way of being consumers of goods from their home village. Most of the time, goods sold in the local markets in rural area are cheaper than they are in town. This is because when traders, come to buy, they expect to get some profit from what they have bought.

The second movement comes from Nigeria. The goods there move from Kontcha to other localities in Nigeria. They come quiet often since they are not too much involved in farming. People living in Kontcha for example mostly cultivate tobacco. They have small fields of maize or groundnuts. After the harvest, they almost do not think about familial consumption. They prefer to sell the goods and get some money. From that money then, they buy goods for consumption. This is what makes this part of the area vulnerable to famine in most cases. The closest town to the plain of Mayo-Baleo in Nigeria, most of the times suffer from climatic problems. Oftentimes, they have fewer rains for crops and this hinders good harvest. For that reason, the plain of Mayo-Baleo flies to the help of this people. All these fluctuations have made all the local markets in the plain of Mayo-Baleo important not only for the local population, but also for the people living in the outside world. For that reason, most of the goods produced by the local population are sold in the market. Women also sell cereals, but most of the time, they grind it into flour and take to the market for sale.



Figure 6: Local market in Mayo-Baleo Village

Source: Picture taken by the researcher

5.1.5 The *sourga* and some changes

The way people look into the *sourga* nowadays has brought some changes. One does not need to farm before getting money through the *sourga*. Earlier, I had pointed out some categories of

people who attend the *sourga*. There are those who are there to run some small businesses whilst on the farm. Cola nuts, some traditional food and medicine, some items such as clothes, watches, and jewels are sold during the *sourga*. Traditional foods are women's concerns and goods such as cola nuts, clothes are business most of the time ran by men. For instance, if women noticed that, during the previous *sourga*, people needed much of a particular food, they make a plan from that and bring it to the next *sourga*. The day women brew beer; one can hear them revealing what they intend bringing to the next day to sell at the *sourga*.

Ndotti pointed out that in the past, they had common farm. Women didn't have their own farm. Today, women are entrepreneurs. They have their own farm and organize their *sourga*. It is not only women who attend women's *sourga* but men as well. The *sourga* of the women is not different from those organized by men. They provide everything as any farm owner organizing a *sourga* would do. Innoua's wives, Soubado and Koumbo have their own farms. They have organized a *sourga*. After the harvest, each of them got six bags of maize, five of millet and two for groundnuts. After calculation, these ladies are supposed to have more than one hundred and twenty francs each. The search of the benefits in the *sourga* has made people develop strategies to earn some money from it.

Both women and men understood that, they can maximize the opportunity to get money while there is an important gathering of people. Women for example know that, some nice and delicious traditional meal will interest people who are working to enjoy it either with beer or with the *Kure*. It might give them more energy to work and also to enjoy the moment with great food. By organizing their own *sourga*, women want to show how entrepreneurial they are. They realize that, they have some needs that they would like to satisfy. These women are one's sisters, aunts, mother; they have to contribute for any relatives' marriages, funerals, naming ceremonies among others. All these issues require money. They don't have to expect everything from their husbands and they know that they cannot get as much as they want if they have to expect everything from their husbands. They have found their way to be financially independent. This is something new nowadays in Pere's society. One can understand how the market economy has only pushed people to increase their production or the size of their lands or organize many

sourga, but has influenced the relationship in the household and also brought some dynamism in a sense that, women begin to feel capable, and work towards great realizations and initiatives.

5.1.6 *Sourga*, favorable strategy for the market economy

Barth talking about individuals making choices argues that:

The most simple and general model available to us is one of an aggregate of people exercising choice while influenced by certain constraints and incentives (Barth 1981:34).

In the plain, everything that the local populations grow is “cash crops”. Though some farmers grow more crops that are expensively sold in the market, still what they really need is the man power. And to get it, several new strategies such as *adasse*, *vii fii* have been put up, however, the *sourga* remains the most patronized. Nowadays, it is somewhat difficult to claim that the *sourga* is a social gathering. They say that, one benefits more than one spends. Friends and relatives come to help and make one has an opportunity to accumulate wealth and this should be reciprocal. These are the conditions and the choices anyone who wants to accumulate wealth through farming must go through. The choice they have made has moral constraints. One who has organized his *sourga* and does not want to attend anybody else *sourga*, is reducing or destroying another opportunity one would need to organize another *sourga*. In other words, no one will attend one’s work if one did not work in return on other people farm. Barth using the functionalist perspective to explain what canalize individual’s choices said that “*society is a moral system*”. The choice individuals make is influenced by the society which generates some constraints and obligations. The *sourga* has been institutionalized. Through the organization of the committee, one can see how these constraints and incentives are reinforced. It canalizes these constraints and motivations Pere farmers have to set for the materialization of the *sourga*. They provide food for every occasion, work in return in one another’s farm. Then, one will always enjoy his *sourga* and people will do the same. Consequently, the better possibility one might have to get access to the marked economy to accumulate wealth.

In the past, that is, during the period of colonization, the plain of Mayo-Baleo was almost cut off from the rest of the other part of the country: there were no roads and people were very limited in

their movements as there was no good means of transport. But, under the French colonization and after the oppression, Pere people have been victims, a road has been created from Tignere to Nigeria. This allowed the area to come out of its isolation and to facilitate the circulation of goods. People are now able to travel with ease more than it was before. They get into contact with some new ideas of how to deal with agriculture. Some new techniques are acquired. They get into contact with some new ideas of how to deal with agriculture. Some new techniques are acquired. The use of herbicide for example has become common among these farmers. However, its use seems to be a preserve for a certain class of farmers; that is those who are financially established. It is thus seen as a luxurious mode of farming for most of the Pere people. The Pere people are also gradually shifting from the use of manual methods of farming to the use of sophisticated farm implements. For instance it was found out that the two tractors allocated by two outstanding agriculturalists in the area, help the local population but the prices to get the work done with the tractors is quite expensive for most of them. It is thus uncommon to see most of them use tractors on their farms. And people want to have big farms and several of them in different places in order to get good harvest and more income. The more one weeds the crops at the right time, the more one has the possibility of getting a good harvest. For example, if someone has two hectares of field where he has cultivated maize, he should make sure that he weeds it twice before they get tassels. This is very important and determines most of the time the quality and the quantity of the harvest. The only way to solve it is to have access to an important manpower. To bend down, using hoe or machete is not an easy task. It is time-consuming and requires a lot of energy to have the work done. With the *sourga*, it is done quickly and one has time to rest.

The use of the simple farm equipment and relying on the family labor is not enough to cover the work of their farms. Some extra man power is needed to fix the problem, thus the organization of the *sourga*.

5.2 Sourga in Pere's culture

Talking about culture, Geertz shares the views of Weber and so argues that:

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun I take culture to be those webs (Geertz 1973:5)

Considering the *sourga* as this social gathering where people exchange labor, food, drinks, thoughts, we can look at the *sourga* as a way for Pere community to live their culture and to show their identity. Britt Kramvig argues:

In the practice of everyday life, gift exchange becomes a way of visualizing basic recognition and appreciation of the humanity of the other. Objects, values and symbols become the material employed in the creation of a local, collective self-perception that transcends ethnic boundaries. (Kramvig 2006: 176).

Even of importance in considering the *sourga* as an important aspect of the social life of the Pere people is the fact that the people usually located on the farm during a *sourga* are not all workers. In as much as it serves as a source of labor on the farm, one can also find in the *sourga* some relevant aspects of Pere social life. It is for instance, the belongingness, identity, and the reproduction and transmission of culture.

5.2.1 Emergence of identity and belongingness in the *sourga*

The working party does not only exist in the Pere society. Some of the peasant societies have similar working party though the mode of organization and activities involved are different from those of the *sourga*. Considering the fact that this current thesis is not doing a comparative study between the *sourga* of the Pere and similar working party that exist among the peasant communities, this issue is not taken further. In the plain of Mayo-Baleo, the *sourga* is a matter of belongingness and identity within the work. Innoua told me: “we *organize the sourga because we want our relatives to come and help us*”.

Many years ago, it was the fact that the villages within the Pere people were basically made of clans; that is each village was made up of a clan. The first idea in organizing the *sourga* at that time was the mutual aid. Through that mutual aid, there was a promotion of the unification within the clan which was actually the village. It was one of the way people could gather, meet, drink and enjoy being together in an atmosphere of celebration. That was why; local beer made from millet was brewed and shared. Dances and songs characterized the lives of the people on that day. It has been embodied in Pere people. According to the Pere culture, it is not all dances and songs that are permitted at anytime of the year. Each period of the year has particular dances

defined by the activities people have at that time. During the *sourga*, it was songs and dances based on agricultural activities that were sang. It was songs and dances of celebration which were appropriate for the situation. People knew that all the songs and dances would not affect their production. This explains why it constitutes an important aspect of their agricultural life. It has been an element which shows their belonging to the group, because one who attends the *sourga* is recognized as one of the society. Consequently, one can be identified as Pere, by virtue of the fact that one attends the *sourga* when it is organized.

Nowadays, this idea of identification and belonging is also part of the implementation of the *sourga*. The first group of people one expects when organizing a *sourga* is one's extended family. The presence of the extended family as mentioned earlier communicates to others on which clan one belongs to. The extended family comes to help in the different tasks such as cooking, brewing beer and even to work on the field. Some gifts such are extra foods are offered and distributed and shared. Kramvig commenting on Lien's studies argues that:

The distribution of food is an expression of belonging and community. Food strengthens unity within the group and simultaneously marks the boundaries of group membership to the outside world. (Kramvig 2006: 179)

In other words, the food either provided by the farm owner or the extended family establishes solidarity among membership of the community and consequently reinforces the belonging to the community. People do it because for them, it is a best way to strengthen relationships. For Pere people, one cannot receive a gift from an unknown person. One should have something in common with the giver that allows them to make such an exchange. Talking about the *sourga*, one can see how the exchange of food is utilized as a strategy to bring people together. The local beer made from millet for example has most of the time been something that brings people together and entertains some social relationships. One knows that no one would come to work with an empty stomach. For this reason, enough food and drinks are provided to the extent that some participants even get some to take back home.

In Scandinavian civilization, as in a good number of others, exchange and contacts take place in the forms of presents; in theory these are voluntary, in reality, they are given and reciprocated obligatorily (Mauss 1990:3).

These exchanges either of food, drinks, labor or gifts though show the belonging, identify individuals in their relationship has some obligation in it. One should in other way pay back what one has received. This obligation might be because for everybody to know the meaning of the exchange, or the feeling one can get from receiving a gift, one should have something in return. In other words, one should experience it to know what it entails. In the *sourga*, for everybody to experience it, the committee steered by the *Sarki Nouma* has his role to play in this sense. Someone who attends one's *sourga* has rights to organize his own and people should and will come. The *Sarki Nouma* and his collaborators will ensure that these obligations are effective. It is "you give me and I give you" kind of philosophy.

Innoua, as an elder of the village has a status of a respectable personality in the society. Despite that position, he still attend others people *sourga* not as a *waari* but as a worker. Very few times during my stay in the field, I saw Innoua not attending a *sourga*. It might happen that if he had an emergency such as funerals, or a trip, then, Innoua sent either one of his sons or his grandchildren as his representative. By doing so, it means that somehow, Innoua has carried out his duty. Depending on the kind of *sourga* and the person organizing it, his wives attended it in rotation. Each time that Innoua's household is involved in a *sourga*, he would check out who is going and who is not.

5.2.2 Cultural transmission through *sourga*

Many years ago, the *sourga* existed and nowadays, it still going on. Talking to workers during Innoua's *sourga*, the *Galdima* of Dewalti, said:

Have fun; do not get angry with one another. You should rather say, let us work and drink. But I don't like fight and anger.(Galdima Work of Pleasure :2008)

One understands how the stability and peaceful relationship is valued amongst the Pere. The education is given to the people, how to behave, what is allowed and what is not. Several times during my fieldwork, some people were very angry because of some attitudes that they found not

respectful to elders. It was at the end of the *sourga*. Workers were going to give their special thanks to the *Sarki Nouma*. While they were moving to one corner of the farm to the place they were about to do it, some people jumped over the place where the *Sarki Nouma* was sitting. This was to most people, a mark of lack of respect which they should condemn. He was yelling at people for them to understand his pain. Some elders admitted it but asked him to be patient. Respect was taught and at the same time, peace and stability are promoted, brandished. The *sourga* could then be seen as a platform to educate people especially youngsters, what is culturally accepted and what is not accepted within the society

5.2.3 The reproduction.

The *sourga* could be seen as a reproduction of the past and as such the culture of the Pere people. One of the characteristics of Peres' social life is their attachment to rituals, which forms an important aspect of their religious life. They are believers of the traditional African religion and so believe that, the power of their dead ancestors still have an influence on them. This belief has been injected into the *sourga*. One clear example of the religious importance that has been attached to the *sourga* is the silent moment that is observed at *sourga* just before the work starts.

This moment of silence is called *vii peri*. It is a very respectful moment and always demands complete silence from the participants. People are silent because they are suspicious about one another's powers. They accordingly use that moment to pray for protection. In an African setting, the belief that one's spiritual power can impact negatively on the success of others calls for constant prayer. The moment of silence at the *sourga* (*vii peri*) is then used to pray for the success of the *sourga*. They are careful about those people who have witchcraft and nurture bad intentions either to hurt somebody or make that person not to work much. They also believe that, within the spiritual realm, someone can turn into a snake to harm anybody on the farm. The occurrence of any misfortune will impact on the efficiency of the *sourga*, accordingly the moments of silence is taken to pray for the success of the occasion and pray against any misfortune that may impact negatively on the *sourga*.

As mentioned earlier in chapter three of this work, movement to the farm is done in secret. This is for the fear that any "wicked" person within the community could harm them. Accordingly, there is usually absolute silence as they journey to the farm. The silence characterizes the *sourga*

until day breaks. Music and noises start when the sun is up in the sky, then people can see if there is a danger coming.

All rituals Pere people organize cannot take place without dances and songs. The music they play is a form of enjoyment. However, it also carries some meanings. Men, women are really into it. The songs are varied depending on the occasion. There are for instance, songs for war, ritual and of harvest. During Innoua's *sourga*, people were giving thanks to the *Sarki Nouma*; it was accompanied by dances and songs. People were raising their hoes and hands, jumping in front of him. He was standing there, raising his hands to give back his thanks to workers. But in the midst of this joy and celebration, tears came out from his eyes. The music brought out some memories of the past. The music is not only for memories but also can also serve as a means of directing people to the farm where the *sourga* is taking place. It is a mode of communication. One can just listen to drums or songs, and that can lead one to the farm on which the *sourga* is taking place.

In short, the *sourga* is this combination of insurance of economy and the life of culture. It is suitable to make a place for these Pere farmers in the market economy. There is an adage that, a group of people without culture is a dead one. The *sourga* also insures the life of the Pere culture which is an important element of the existence of a group of people of an ethnic group. The *sourga* remains useful in Pere socio-economic life.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of what has been discussed in the previous chapters and also to present my main findings.

This study has been an investigation of the *sourga*, a source of rotational of labor among the Pere farmers living in the plain of Mayo-Baleo. It was discovered that the *sourga* is an essential aspect of the agricultural life of the Pere farmers. The study is carried out in a context where the plain of Mayo-Baleo is in the period of transition from the subsistence to the market economy. For that reason, the concern of the study was to investigate the purposes for which the *sourga* is utilized, what are the changes the *sourga* might have gone through and also see how these are changes related to the general socio-economic life of the Pere.

In the plain of Mayo-Baleo, there are some new strategies such as *adasse, vii fii* which are set up to deal with agriculture work but the *sourga* remains the main strategy among them. The *sourga* remains the most important way which Pere farmers in the plain of Mayo-Baleo organize their agricultural work for a mutual help. From May when the rainy season is intense, the farmers get ready to organize or to attend *sourgas*. It is a reciprocal labor exchange where people gather, work, eat, drink and enjoy local beer. It works on rotational bases. People organize it when their turn comes. It is a source of labor for everyone dealing with agriculture.

There are three different types of *sourga*. The first which is also the smallest one is called *ang sourga*. The *tong iro* is the second type of *sourga*. The *velem fum* is the third type of the *sourga* and the one I studied in this work. This type of *sourga* is the biggest one. During that one, the work starts at six in the morning and ends up at six in the evening. Within that one, the entire household of every invited house is expected to be in attendance. The implementation of this one depends on whether the farm owner has *peri yule* or not. If the farm owner has *peri Yule*, it means that the work will start between three and four a.m. The local beer is brewed some days before the *sourga*. When comes the great day, people work, eat, drink, dance and sing.

One should also notice that the organization of the *sourga* is not only a matter of the farm owner and his household. There is a *Sarki Nouma* and his collaborators who have control on some details taking place before or during the *sourga*. They are the ones who set the day for every farmer to organize a *sourga*. The extended family is also part of the implementation and the climaxing of the *sourga*. They provide some extra supports such as beer, cola nuts, money and others to the farm owner as a way of expressing their solidarity within the clan.

For many years the *sourga* has been practiced in the plain of Mayo-Baleo. In the past, it was the subsistence economy. The need of money was not intense but people were really involved in the practice of the *sourga*. It was mostly, a social gathering where people came together to help each other, to eat, to drink and to dance. The goods people got after harvest was for consumption and the surplus was for purposes of performing some rituals. As time moved on, the people have moved from the subsistence economy to the market economy. This transition has challenged individuals to set up some new ways to practice agriculture and to make some different uses of the *sourga*. In other word, it gives another connotation to the concept of *sourga*. Pere farmers by practicing the *sourga* found out that they can increase their agricultural production consequently it is a way to create a place for them in the market economy. People gather, work, eat and drink under the provision of the farmer whose *sourga* is being organized.

It was observed that the *sourga* is a very good source of labor for farmers to increase their farm sizes and also weed or make farms at the right time of the farming season. This consequently results in good yield. A good harvest determines the success of a farm owner because the more one has, the more he has the possibility to sell enough in order to get some money and meet other unexpected finances. There was this example of Innoua's production. He got a bumper harvest. A good numbers of bags of maize, millet and groundnuts have been acquired by Innoua. According to the price of goods at the market, Innoua is supposed to get more than five hundred thousand (500.000) francs. This is a lot of money according to the standards of living of the Pere farmers. It could have been difficult for him to get this amount if he had only to count on the family labor. Such a farmer can also get a better life style and can handle easily with life difficulties. It also gives him respect within the society. To organize a *sourga* request also the capability for one to do it. Each type of *sourga* has its own expenditures. If one does not have

means, it might be difficult for him to organize a *sourga*. The extended family of the farm owner brings an extra support to reinforce what he has done already.

This interest farmers are running after has brought some changes in the practice of the *sourga* and also within the society. The *sourga* has become a kind of market. The *sourga* has become a place where people sell some goods of theirs such as: cola nuts, traditional foods and medicine, jewels, clothes... It is also important to notice that, women are now organizing their own *sourga*, what has not existed in Pere community before. They have their own farms, brew beer, and invite people to work for them. After the harvest, the goods are theirs and they manage it as they like. These were in fact not common in the Pere society some years ago. Women, by organizing the *sourga* show their capability to achieve great realizations.

The creation of the road connecting the plain to other parts of the country and to Nigeria has made the search of profits very important for the local population. People can now move with ease. With this mobility, the people have had contact with new ideas. Some new techniques on how to deal with agriculture are acquired. The use of herbicides, fertilizer and tractors are becoming common though still expensive for most of the farmers to get access to. More and more, “cash crops” are grown in the area. Moreover, the roads have facilitated the circulation of the goods. Traders come from Nigeria and Tignere to buy goods in the local market because that’s the place almost all the goods are sold.

It was also observed that the *sourga* is an essential aspect of the culture of the Pere people. While the *sourga* is taking place, the culture of the Pere people is clearly manifested. People show their belongingness to their clan and even to the Pere community as a whole. In other words, the *sourga* is a reproduction of the culture. The people therefore construct their cultural identity through the *sourga* and this identity is transmitted from older generations to the youngest one. This contribute to the culture to remain alive as consequently gives them their identity as Peres.

The religious beliefs of the Pere are also part of in the *sourga* as it was discovered in this thesis. For instance, the moments of silence just before the *sourga* commences is seen to be a belief of the Pere people, in the existence of spirits or powers which others may have. This then calls for prayers and for protection against any potential powers or dangers as they work on the farm.

The *sourga* also gives a picture of one's rank within the Pere society. For instance it was observed that the popularity of one in the society determines the extent to which many people will attend one's *sourga*. It gives an idea of how one is respected within the society or in one's clan.

Moreover of the fact that the *sourga* is a combination of cultural life and the insurance of the economy, one should notice that the *sourga* remains as main and efficient strategy to insure subsistence and economy for the Pere farmers living in the plain of mayo-Baleo. The access to the man power remains the important and crucial problem for farmers of this area to increase the agricultural production which is an important element which allows their integration to the market economy. The *sourga*, which originated as a part of a largely subsistence based economy, has been transformed into an important social institution for securing a successful transformation of this agriculture society into a largely market based economy.

Nowadays, it is somewhat difficult to claim that the *sourga* is a social gathering where people enjoy being together and share their cultural values. Though these cultural values still accompany the organization and the implementation of the *sourga*, one could say that it is strategically used for another purpose: people seek the man power; the need of money which is increasing now has almost killed some cultural values people once protected. But still, these cultural values still make people come together. In other words, the cultural values are crucial in the survival of the *sourga*. Because no community can live without culture, the *sourga* will always be part of the socio-economic life of the Pere farmers living in the plain of Mayo-Baleo.

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GLOSSARY

A (Fulani words), B (Pere words), C (French words)

- Adasse(A):** New way of organizing farming activity mostly between very limited number of people which takes place on rotational bases.
- Ang sourga (B):** a type of *sourga*, it is the smallest type of the three types identified.
- Boofiine(B):** Elder's slaves.
- Boukarou(A):** Small houses built in the farm for purposes of resting or and preparation of food.
- Degnim(B):** Name of the Pere's clan
- Djaouro(A):** Leader of the quarter according to the traditional system in Northern Cameroon
- Fum(B):** Pere traditional beer whose alcoholic content is very high.
- Guenfiine(B):** Lamido or chief's slaves
- Gule(B):** Kind of cake made from groundnuts paste
- Koutine(A):** Dogs. It a derogatory name given by Fulbe to Pere people
- Kunu(B):** Pere's local beer which does not have much alcoholic content.
- Lamido(A):** It is a name of traditional chiefs in the Northern part of Cameroon
- Nkure(B):** Very tick porridge made from maize or millet flour. It is a main food of Pere people
- Ousang(B):** An abandoned land where a family or a clan had lived before leaving for another Land
- Peri Yule(B):** An expression which means to give authority to someone to be in charge of the Organization of a *sourga*.
- Soukabe lamido(A):** lamido's subjects
- Sous-prefet(C):** Administrative leader of a subdivision.
- Tego(B) :** Special pots to keep water, seeds or beer
- Tong iro(B):** Medium-size type of the *sourga*. Literally translated, it means two (2) hoes
- Velem Fum(B):** Biggest form of the *sourga*. Directly translated as "beer for fun"
- Vii fiï(B):** Literally it means, work for sale. It is a strategy where the farmer

Owner hires someone to work on his farm.

Waari(B): People attending the *sourga* just for the sake of enjoyment and not to work.

