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Catherine Baroin

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"What do we know about the Buduma ? A brief survey"

Catherine BAROIN

Résumé

Les habitants du Lac, les Boudouma, sont souvent mentionnés dans les publications scientifiques qui portent sur la région du lac Tchad, mais ils n'ont pour autant jamais fait l'objet d'une étude socio-anthropologique approfondie. Cet article donne un bref aperçu des principales sources d'information disponibles à l'heure actuelle sur ce groupe humain encore mystérieux.

Abstract

The people of the Lake, the Buduma, are often mentioned in scientific publications pertaining to the Lake Chad area, but no thorough socio-anthropological study ever was focused on this peculiar and somewhat mysterious group. This paper will try to review the main information sources which are, to this day, available about the Buduma and their language.

Introduction

Any social scientist working in the Mega-Chad area has heard about the Buduma, the inhabitants of the Lake Chad islands. Many authors, over

the last hundred and fifty years, have provided some information about them, and thus sources for Buduma studies are numerous. Yet the scope of these sources is limited, and much of it is second hand information. As M. Krings and E. Platte rightly state, “To date, non concise ethnography of the Yedina exists except for a couple of papers by Konrad [...], summaries of data [...] and notes in early and later travel writings [...]” (2004:21, footnote). This general lack of reliable information is still worsened by the fact that many of the existing documents are, moreover, not available in public libraries¹.

One main reason for this lack of information about the Buduma is the fear they caused among neighbouring people. They used to be extremely efficient raiders, dashing out from the lake waters at night, taking back cattle and people on their reed-boats and disappearing into a frightening natural environment where no mainland dweller ever dared follow them. This is why potential explorers or scientists were long deterred or prevented from visiting the Buduma.

Until today, the Buduma thus remain an enigmatic people and it is to be hoped that this scientific void may soon be filled. The task ahead, however, is not easy. It will need extensive linguistic abilities, due to [200]

the Lake Chad’s position at the crossroads of four states, which were formerly colonized by three different European powers. Sources therefore are written in three different European languages, let alone the local language or languages which have to be mastered for fieldwork. Much travelling is also necessary, not only to the Lake and its surroundings, but also to search for historical sources which are scattered about many libraries and archives in Europe and Africa. Extensive and lengthy fieldwork among the Buduma, another hard task ahead, will be indispensable in order to crosscheck, complement, and update old data, in view of conducting a thorough study of the Buduma’s past and present

¹ Such is the case, for example, of two major ones : Walter Konrad’s and Martin Verlet’s.

way of life and mores.

Apart from stressing need and urgency of such a study, this paper will briefly comment on the main sources available, and then it will sketch a short presentation of the Buduma, stressing the specific nature of their environment and their adaptation to it. Important changes will also be outlined with regard to environment and political and socio-economical situation. This will result in some questions about Buduma economic and social life today and what it may become in the future, obviously threatened as it is by the Lake's ongoing desiccation.

1 – Sources on the Buduma

First written sources about Lake Chad Basin history are Bornu manuscripts written in Arabic. Unfortunately however, most of these sources were lost during the XIXth century, and those which remain, hardly mention the Buduma. Earliest available information about the Buduma, therefore, mainly originates from the first European explorers at the beginning of the XIXth century.

Frederick Hornemann, who travelled to Murzuk in the years 1797-1798, is the first European *mentioning* the name Buduma in his journal, which was published in 1802. It takes more than 20 years before the first European traveller actually *meets* Buduma people on the lake shores: such is the case of Dixon Denham, who gives a short description of them in 1824. Later, in 1850, Adolf Overweg is the first European to *explore the islands* coming from the western shores of Lake Chad. But he dies early and leaves short notes only about the Buduma. More precise descriptions are brought by Heinrich Barth, who visits Borno and the lake shores between 1851 and 1855. Several others follow: Karl Moritz von Beurmann in 1862, Gerhard Rohlfs in 1866, and Gustav Nachtigal in 1870-1872, who visited Borno and the lake shores. He provides detailed information about the Buduma, but fails to visit their [201] islands because of his close ties to the *Shehu* of Borno, who was on poor terms

with the Buduma.

Shortly after 1900, when the colonial powers reach Lake Chad and conquer the region, three scientific missions provide some more knowledge about the Buduma. The British mission, *From the Niger to the Nile*, gives interesting but limited information about them (Alexander 1908). The French report, *Documents scientifiques de la Mission Tilho (1906-1909)*, published in 3 volumes in 1910-1911, includes a chapter on the Buduma by Landeroin (vol. 2: 310-338). At the same time, the *German scientific mission in Central Africa (1907-1908)* leads to the publication of 8 volumes by A. Friedrichs, Herzog zu Mecklenburg, between 1911 and 1927. This publication supplies further detailed information by E. Heims (1923, vol. 6-8, pp. 153-234)². In 1918, French author G. Bruel presents his voluminous study, which includes descriptions of Buduma shields, reed-boats and economic activities (1918: 230, 239, 253, 292).

Of subsequent studies, four main sources have to be mentioned: Robert Bouillé's *Les coutumes familiales au Kanem* (1937) presents some scattered information on the Buduma and other ethnic groups and their social and daily life. About fifty years later, Walter Konrad is the first anthropologist to study the Buduma in 1954. His work was published in German in the 1950s and early 1960s; unfortunately it is hardly available outside Germany³. Konrad's publications include basic anthropological data about fertility and ancestor cults, marriage, circumcision, wedding and birth as well as oath ceremonies, inheritance regulations, some songs and tales, *etc.* Albert Le Rouvreur's *Sahéliens et sahariens du Tchad*

² The English translation, dated 1913, is a shorter account in two volumes which hardly includes any information about the Buduma. Unfortunately, I could not get a copy of the original German version.

³ I am much indebted to Gisela Seidensticker-Brikay for providing me with the English translation she wrote of Konrad's work, which is yet awaiting publication.

covers a wide range of peoples and contains a rather superficial description of Buduma customs and economic activities (1962: 219-239). Shortly thereafter, in 1966, sociologist Martin Verlet wrote an extremely well documented 6 volumes report on fishing in Lake Chad, which today is unfortunately almost out of public reach⁴. His study enabled him to gather much data on the Buduma, but most of those remained unpublished, except for a short article in 1967.

[202] Much later, in 1990, geographer Christian Bouquet's outstanding study, *Insulaires et riverains du lac Tchad* (2 vols.) deserves mention. To my knowledge, this is the most complete and reliable recent study on the Buduma and neighbouring groups. It also entails a very detailed bibliography on the Lake Chad area, which will be an indispensable basis for further scientific studies of the Buduma.

2 – Who are the Buduma : a short presentation

The meaning of the name « Buduma »

It is generally agreed that Buduma is an exonym. It is considered a Kanembu/Kanuri name which translates as “people (—*ma*) of the grasses (*budu*)”. Another possible interpretation is suggested by C. Bouquet (1990, I: 162), who links Buduma with another word *budu*, which means gratuitous in Kanembu. But H. Tourneux, in 2002, sets some doubt on this folk etymology: “Why should this name relate to high grasses, or dry grasses, he writes, when these people live on floating islands ?” (Seignobos & Tourneux, 2002: 42). This question is taken one step further by another linguist, E. A. Awagana, the latest specialist of the Buduma language.

⁴ I am indebted to the CIRAD (Montpellier) and to Claude Arditi in Paris for kindly lending me these volumes.

According to his yet unpublished hypothesis, the root *budu* could stem from a Kanuri word which means « to swim », hence Buduma would mean « the people who swim »⁵. This obviously makes more sense than previous interpretations, but it will probably take a long time and debate before this new etymology eventually takes the lead. But let us now turn to another question which is also a matter of debate, namely the following: Who are the Buduma ?

Who are the people referred to as Buduma ?

The Buduma, as mentioned above, are Lake Chad islanders. But which ones ? There are in fact two main different groups of people living on the Lake Chad islands. The bigger group lives on the northern islands and the other on the south-eastern ones.

The northern islanders are usually considered as Buduma proper. They call themselves Yedina and speak the *yedinami* language, which belongs to the Chadic phylum and is close to Kotoko. [203] According to Lukas (1939) ‘*yedi*’ or ‘*yade*’ is the name for Lake Chad, and *-na* is a suffix meaning ‘son of’ in Kanuri. But ‘*yedi*’ could also come from ‘*gedi*’ which means “the East”, and Yedina would then mean “the people from the East”.

The other group, the Yedina’s south-eastern neighbours, speak the same language and share a fairly similar way of life with the Yedina. They are therefore often considered as belonging to the Buduma group as well. But they are usually referred to as Kuri. It is therefore necessary, when the name Buduma is mentioned, to ascertain which people the author or speaker is referring to: either the Yedina alone or to the Buduma in a broader sense, *i.e.* the Yedina plus the Kuri.

The matter is complicated further by the fact that the name Kuri itself may refer to different groups (*Documents scientifiques de la Mission*

⁵ I am indebted to H. Tourneux and E. A. Awagana for this information.

Tilho, II: 311). According to M. Verlet, who studied the fishermen of Lake Chad in 1964-1965, the Yedina are called Buduma by Kanuri, and Kuri by Kanembu (Verlet 1967: 191).

Besides, Kuri is not only a name given to people. It is also the name of this well-known local cattle breed with very strikingly thick horns, a white robe and no hump, which is specific to the entire Lake Chad area. These cattle are one of the earliest groups of African cattle and extremely well adapted to their semi-aquatic lake environment. This breed is also called “Lake cattle” or “Buduma cattle” and it is bred not only by Kuri and Yedina, but also by Kanembu on the northern shores of the Lake. One should mention that contrary to widespread belief, their horns are no help to them when they swim, as they keep them out of the water. Cattle with very large horns are indeed poor swimmers (*Atlas d'élevage du Bassin du Lac Tchad*, 1996 : 88-90).

For the sake of clarity, the word Buduma will further be used in its restricted meaning, and refer to the Yedina alone.

The origin of the Buduma (Yedina) people

The Buduma (Yedina) seem to be a very old group of people, but precise information about their history is scarce. According to Y. Urvoy, they stem from an mixture of refugees from the lake shores (1949: 46, 62). Their legend of origin is reported, in more or less detail, by several authors. It is a rather arresting story. It entails a number of interesting mythical themes that explain some basic features of Buduma society : 1) why the Buduma are refugees living on the lake islands, 2) how they relate to the Sao, and 3) how they came [204] to associate millet cultivation with cattle breeding, and brought some specialized craftsmen to live with them on the islands.

The story starts with a mistaken levirate, which forces the Yedina's ancestor to hide on Lake Chad islands: he married his elder brother's widow, as he thought his brother was dead. But the elder brother

eventually came back and the *levir*, the Yedina's ancestor, had to flee. The poor fellow was hiding on the Lake Chad islands, living on fish, when he saw a calabash drifting eastwards on the lake waters towards him. This calabash was full of millet, which made this man wish to meet the millet cultivators it came from. He jumped into the calabash, drifted back westwards, and landed on the western shores of the Lake. There he met the millet cultivators he was looking for, who were the legendary giant Sao. He married a Sao woman and, later on, took her with him to his brother's place, in order to get his share of cattle. Thereafter, with his wife, cattle, and a few craftsmen (potter, smith, weaver and hair dresser), he settled again on the lake islands and remained there.

Buduma traditional economic activities

This legend elucidates a number of Buduma characteristics, mainly with regard to their economic resources :

- Predominantly, the Yedina are cattle herders: their ancestor was a herder before he had to flee to the islands
- They learnt agriculture from the Sao
- They claim that the Sao are their ancestors on the female side which, from a linguistic point of view, makes sense since the Yedina language belongs to the Kotoko group⁶, and the Kotoko people themselves stem from Sao ancestry.
- The Yedina know fishing, but they do not value it. Fishing merely was a makeshift resource for their ancestor when he had to hide on the islands. Fishing indeed, before it developed under colonial rule, was a despised activity left to slaves and smiths (Bouquet 1990, I: 385).
- Some basic skills are borrowed from neighbours and left to specialists: pottery, cotton weaving, smithing, hair dressing.

⁶ Oral information from Henry Tourneux.

Other sources of income are hardly mentioned in the legend and yet [205] played an important part in the Yedina's economy. Such is the case with raiding. It used to be one of their basic activities and in precolonial times they were much dreaded for it. Raiding for cattle and slaves in lake-side villages at night and fleeing back to their islands on their reedboats was what they were known for, which was an easy task since the villagers had no ability to go after them.

Yet raiding was brought to an end with colonization and the Yedina had to develop new economic resources. Over the years, trade came to play a greater part. Fishing intensified after new fishing techniques were introduced and new markets for smoked fish were developing in Nigeria (see below).

Yedina social life

Yedina are a very independent, mobile, and anarchic people. They live in small scattered villages and divide into many patrilineal groups, which often fought each other. Their chiefs have but little authority. Due to their long-lasting isolation, they converted to Islam slowly, partly and late, *i.e.* around the beginning of the XXth century (whereas neighbouring Kanem had converted to Islam 800 years earlier!). The most precise information about Yedina social life is found, with 20 to 30 years time of distance, in R. Bouillé (1937) and W. Konrad (from 1955 to 1969).

In recent times, Lake Chad's dessication seems to have brought important changes into Yedina ways of life. Such is the case at least for the southern groups who "have acceded to the dominance of the Kanuri tribe, inter-married and use the Kanuri language readily" (Sikes 2003: 348). But significantly enough, the same author, in 2002, could get no direct information from the northern Yedina groups. As she mentions, "answers to my own questions have mainly come from a *new generation* of lake dwellers" (Sikes 2003: 347). The same observation transpires from M. Krings and E. Platte's (2004) well documented book, *Living with the Lake*. Pertaining to recent social developments, it mainly deals

with this new generation of lake dwellers and entails two pages only about the Yedina (pp. 21-22).

However, Krings and Platte underscore the very strong symbolic opposition which, up to this day, is at play in mainland people's imagination: these cultivators see a basic difference between themselves and their own social space of the settled territory on the one hand and the Yedina on the other with their raids and their magical powers, which are associated with their mastery of the lake, a space they conceive as wilderness and realm of spiritual forces and [206] wild beasts (p. 22). This symbolic opposition is one of the main reasons why the Buduma have long been and still remain a very isolated people, and why their specific culture remains widely unknown and out of reach. As late as 1990, they had but little access to formal education (Chesley & *al.* 1990). It is therefore appropriate to outline the specific nature of the natural environment Buduma are associated with and their way of adapting to it.

3 – Lake environment and Buduma adaptation to it

Why are the mainland dwellers so afraid of the Lake? Why do they conceive it as a space of wilderness, realm of spiritual forces and wild beasts? The fact is that living on islands, *per se*, as opposed to mainland territory, is quite a peculiar and unique situation in this region. But the Lake Chad islands moreover are different from ordinary islands that consist of earth and stone. Lake Chad islands are either low sand islands or, more often, unstable reed islands, floating and drifting in an ever-changing maze. They are more or less immersed in an immense swamp, depending on the level of water that changes constantly according to season and year. No doubt, mainland farmers would consider it dangerous and unsettling.

The more so as these islands are a heaven for parasites and biting insects, swarms of which assault any animal or human being, especially at night. This mere fact would understandably dissuade many a lake-side dweller

from daring to venture onto the islands. This plague is also responsible for widespread diseases and high mortality rates, both in animals (40 % in young Kuri stock, according to the *Atlas d'élevage du bassin du lac Tchad* 1996:88) and in human beings, for the latter as a result of malaria and bilharziosis mainly. The disquieting nature and insalubrities of the Lake Chad islands are thus ample reasons why lake-side cultivators would prefer to keep away from these islands and leave them to the Buduma.

Buduma, for their own part, have long adapted to this inhospitable environment by developing three skills: swimming, navigation, and protection against mosquitoes at night.

Firstly, the Buduma developed a swimming technique, using *ambach* floats. *Ambach* (*Aeschynomene elaphrowylon*) is a small aquatic tree, the wood of which is twice lighter than cork (Berhaut 1976, V: 31; Seignobos & Tourneux 2002: 17-18). The technique is well described by Talbot (1911, photo) :

[207] « Each house owned one or two *ambach* floats –great logs of the wonderful *Herminiera elaphroxylon* wood- ... [which] are roughly shaped in the form of a shark, curved upward at the one end, which is carved with a rude head, and narrowing off to a more or less straight point at the tail. On these the Buduma of both sexes lie, and swim almost as rapidly as they could run. Should a man be « wanted » for any reason [...], he can swim as fast as most canoes could follow, and if he succeeds in reaching one of the many islands, he has only to throw his float over his shoulder, and run across to some spot on the other side, whence he again takes to the water, and is lost to pursuit. » (Talbot 1911 : 246).

The second indispensable skill is navigation. Until the end of the XIXth century, Buduma used two types of canoes. The first and most efficient one is a wooden canoe made by the Kotoko, the second is a reed canoe which they make themselves. They traded the first one for 8 or 9 slaves until the end of the XIXth century (*Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho*, II: 335) and these boats are probably the ones G. Nachtigal refers to when, in 1872, he witnessed Buduma use of light boats made of *phogu*

wood (*Herminiera elaphroxylon*) (Nachtigal, 1974-1987, IV: 15). But as raids stopped with colonization, Buduma could not any longer get slaves to trade for boats and from then on, they only used their own reed boats (*Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho*, II: 332). The *fogu* or *ambach* wood, which the Buduma call *marea*, was then merely used for poles to navigate the reed canoes (*Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho*, II: 335).

The reed boats are usually called *kadai* (or *kadagay*, according to C. Bouquet, 1990, II: 407). They are made of local papyrus bound together with cords, with the prow pointing up. They are still made nowadays and can be any size, up to about 6 m length and 1,5m width. They can carry rather heavy loads, such as several cattle (Sikes 2003: 131).

The third technique, which the Buduma developed to improve their living conditions on the lake islands, is a shelter for protection against mosquitoes at night. They made a light circular frame, just big enough for a bed, which they covered with a tightly knit mosquito-proof mat, the edge of which was dug all around into the sand (Talbot 1911, photos 4 & 5).

4 – Historical changes

These traditional skills, which the Buduma developed to adapt to their natural environment and which have been described by early observers at the beginning of the XXth century, should not convey a [208] static view of these islanders' way of life. Important changes occurred over the last century that need to be briefly outlined. Some of these changes are in direct consequence to environmental conditions but most of them result from human causes, or a mixture of both.

The natural environment depends on the ever-changing level of Lake Chad, both in the long and the short run. The lake level is obviously one

of the major reason for changes in the local human environment. In the long run, alternation between arid and humid periods, leading to decrease or expansion of the water surface, has always been a major feature of the Lake Chad area.

The Palaeo-Chad, 55 000 years ago, was a huge sea extending as far as Ahaggar and Tibesti to the north and Adamawa to the south. Some 35 000 years later, after a succession of numerous arid and humid periods, the water covered a much reduced area, called Mega Chad, which stayed more or less the same until 7000 years ago. Then it slowly started shrinking further, although it went through many more arid and humid periods. The trend nowadays is to a further decrease of Lake Chad and a further lowering of its water level. But climate is no longer the only reason; the human factor also plays an important part as we shall see below.

But the level of Lake Chad not only changes in the long run, it also changes constantly over very short periods, both on a yearly and a seasonal basis. There is a considerable difference between good years, when the rainy season is plentiful, and bad years (years of drought). In 1906-1909 for example, the *Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho* describe a situation when the lake level was extremely low. It has kept changing ever since. It was very low in years of drought (such as 1973, 1984, 1992) and became increased again in good years, such as 2003 for example. Besides, seasonal changes are very important with higher water levels in December and January and lower levels in July and August. Buduma way of life is adapted to these changes, family members switching from one economic activity to the other depending on season and water level.

Besides these necessary permanent adaptations to the natural environment, Buduma also had to adapt to political changes, which had far-reaching consequences on their daily lives. The first of these changes, at the turn of the XXth century, was colonisation. It led to enormous social disruptions in the area, due to the mere fact that it imposed peace

when insecurity had formerly been the rule. As regards the Buduma, it cut short their major source of income, namely raiding. Before colonization, they had two basic sources of income, herding and raiding. They raided the villages on the lake [209] shores (the west coast especially), most often at night, then fled swiftly back to their islands where nobody dared venture after them. Their main booty was cattle and slaves, the latter being employed as labour for despised activities, such as cultivating and fishing (*Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho*, II: 317; Bouquet 1990, I, 397-398). Fish and milk were the staple food of the Buduma but they also traded butter and fish for millet or clothes from Borno. Another source of income was Natrona, which Buduma transported from Kanem across Lake Chad and sold to coastal villagers in Borno (*Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho*, II: 318, 325, 336). For this purpose they not only used their own reed boats but also wooden, Kotoko-made canoes, which they traded for slaves. As colonialism put an end to raiding, the Buduma had to develop alternative sources of income. They intensified their fishing and trade activities, mainly with Borno, exchanging more Natrona and fish for other goods such as cereals and cotton fabrics (*Documents scientifiques de la mission Tilho*, II: 334, 337).

But the most significant economic changes came with the spread of new fishing techniques, between 1925 and the 1950s, a technological revolution which is well described by Verlet (1966, 6 vols) and which led to an enormous rise in fishing activities. The main stages of this history of fishing will be outlined here, since Verlet's report is inaccessible to the English-speaking reader.

Before these changes, former Buduma traditional techniques were enough to meet their needs, as fish was very plentiful in Lake Chad. They fished with two types of harpoons, depending on the size of the fish, or with wide-stitched nets made of *Calotropis* fibre (Verlet, 1966, I: 104-105).

Around 1925 came the first technological change when the European-made, industrial hooks were introduced, through the Kanuri, to the Buduma, who soon started using these hooks on a large scale. For the following 20 years or so, they kept fastening them (or similar ones, which local smiths began manufacturing) to their own, locally made lines, which were made either of *Calotropis* fibre, local cotton, or *hyphaene* palm leaves. Fishing thus becoming more efficient, it also became a more common activity among the Buduma proper, who formerly had despised and left it to their slaves.

Ibo merchants introduced the second change around 1935. It pertained not to fishing but the preservation of fish, and extended the market to millions of consumers throughout Nigeria. These merchants first bought the traditional locally dried fish, but soon [210] they showed the Kanuri how to make *banda*, *i.e.* to cut fish into pieces and smoke it. Kanuri introduced this technique to the Buduma and as this new product met with considerable success, fishing in Lake Chad became highly popular, not only with the Buduma but with other groups as well, especially the Haddad from Kanem.

Other technical improvements followed. Around 1940, manufactured cotton string was introduced through markets in Nigeria. In its turn, it was replaced some 20 years later by nylon thread. Nylon, both cheap and strong, led to a genuine revolution in fishing techniques. It quickly replaced all other fibres for making fishing nets and lines (Verlet, 1966, II: 77-80).

Fishing on Lake Chad intensified yet for another reason. Motorboats, from 1946, took the place of Buduma reed canoes in the transportation of Natrona. This forced great numbers of those involved in this trade to give it up and switch to fishing. In the 1950s moreover, Buduma cattle suffered from unusually high water levels: many islands were flooded and pastures much reduced. This favoured the spread of severe epizootic diseases (in 1951 and 1954), which led to high mortality rates among the

Buduma herds and forced more Buduma people to resort to fishing for a living.

With wide markets and efficient fishing techniques, fishing in Lake Chad intensified so much that fish, which had been plentiful in the 1950s, is now scarce in Lake Chad. Only smaller fishes, if any, are now caught (Sikes 2003 : 274). This situation is worsened by the Lake's shrinking due to the 1970s and 1980s droughts. However, shrinking of the Lake also opens wide and new areas to herding and cultivation. It brings many new migrants to the lake floor, who involve themselves in rich recession agriculture (see Krings & Platte, 2004 ; Magrin, this volume).

The present shrinking of Lake Chad, however, is not only due to climatic changes; the human factor plays an important part as well. Water, which used to flow into the Lake, is now exploited for other purposes. The Shari and Logone rivers, which provide 95 % of the lake intake (Valentin, 1997: 18), are significantly reduced by the ever-expanding irrigation schemes along their banks (Wakponou, 2002: 184-185), whereas on the Nigerian side two large dams were built up-stream the Yobe river basin in Kano State, which “have reduced the flow [of water into Lake Chad] to insignificant levels near the lake itself (Blench, 1997: 143).

[211] As a result of these human and climatic interferences, the general trend today is further shrinking of the lake surface. This evolution seems to be unlikely to be reversed in the near future, and it cannot but increasingly threaten the Buduma's way of life, although evidence to this is hardly available. In those areas where water remains abundant, *i.e.* the northern archipelagos and the open waters of the southern basin, no important changes so far seem to have been brought to the Yedina's way of life : “It seems that [...they] still remain mainly distinct and thriving” (Sikes, 2003: 348). But such is not the case where lake islands have turned into open territory. The drying up of wide areas opened up new spaces that many herders and agriculturalists rushed into. New categories of people came to settle on these lake grounds (Krings & Platte, 2004),

which are a bonanza for these new settlers. New opportunities arise there to develop new forms of wealth. These opportunities not only benefit the newcomers but the Buduma as well, the former inhabitants of the islands who used to be there. The drying up of their environment forced them out of their long-lasting isolation and led them to mix with other groups, as Silvia Sikes witnessed in 2002 (see above). What she actually mentions is the Kanurisation of the southern Buduma groups, a process which functions through inter-marriage and adoption of the Kanuri language.

The former island dwellers may gain from this process in many ways, both from the economic and social point of view but at the same time, they give up their specific way of life and social culture. It is not unlikely, if the Lake shrinks further that more Buduma will be incorporated into the wider Kanuri group and lose, step-by-step, their specific identity. Buduma culture would then become a residual phenomenon in a very restricted area, and in the long run the Buduma people might disappear as a specific social group. Just like the Sao, their legend maintains they stem from, they might become a mere memory from the past.

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⁷ For a more complete list, see Bouquet 1990.

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