

Armed Violence and the Desecration of Traditional Authorities and Emblems in Anglophone Cameroon

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Abstract

Violence tops the chart of key Security challenges that have provided anxious moments to governments at local, national, and international levels in the 21st Century. While protests and other civic engagements are basic requirements for vibrant democracies and governance, armed violence from criminals and militia on various counts has not only multiplied but grown to impose new and quite exacting security concerns, especially for African countries already hunted by heavy debt burden, hunger, strife and other forms of troubles. It is easy to understand violence against the state or any other organized system as a response to poor governance and mismanagement since all of them combine to nurture or implant grievances in some groups and people but it is difficult to understand why armed groups will turn to exert violence on its own established traditional authorities and Institutions which they have held for long as custodians of anything that protects their wellbeing. This paper has a mission to examine how armed violence has desecrated and repeatedly toyed with both the traditional authorities (Fons, Chiefs, Lamidos, notables) and insignia that formed the nucleus of traditional private and public elegance in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon prior to and during the violent phase of the war of secession that has been raging the Cameroon political economy since 2017. The arguments sustained plus submissions of this paper are a product of scrutiny of the synchrony of data gleaned from primary, secondary, and other sources. After presenting the context of the study which critically engages the issues and background required for an understanding of the key matters in discourse, we argue that(a) the desecration or practice of violence on traditional authorities and their insignia in Anglophone Cameroon has destroyed the key elements of hope that bonded not only people but also the segments/regiments of the society together, (b) such macabre actions on indigenous institutions has helped and it is still helping not only to present the war as outrageously vain but also ruining the chances of the War adherents notably the Amba boys and those in their support structure to secure any worthy national and international gains thereby, recruiting so many traditionally-minded folks into the enterprise of hate for the armed rebellion. It is therefore a revisionist contribution and contention to the array of armed gangs presently tearing African states into further shreds and eroding repositories of traditional paraphernalia. We offer a relativist and cosmopolitan model based on African ethos and the Pan-African dream as the best approach possible to deal with problems both within the African governments and the armed groups rather than allowing the guns to speak for it is difficult to have a clean war even when the duration is just a day.

Key Words: *Armed Violence, Traditional Authorities, Emblems, Desecration*

Introduction

The Political, economic, and sociocultural disagreements circulating on governance (a form of State and sharing of the national resources) between the state of Cameroon and a disgruntled set of people of Anglophone origin, morphed into armed violence in 2017. In context, the signals for use of arms to press through demands or express profound discontent against the state of Cameroon by people from this problematic niche was not new to the Cameroon secret service and others out of the government circles.¹ Civil disobedience to protest against governance and a re-incarnation of the form of state with potent institutions of indigenous representation like the House of Chiefs had been the mantra of the civil disobedience led by the SDF in the 1990s. There was a form of muted violence by pro-SCNC² groupings with claims of secession in the 1990s but in Cameroon armed gangsterism remained, for the most part, a practice by Arm robbers.³ The leaders of the Southern Cameroon National Conference (SCNC) unconsciously succeeded to convince Cameroon state authorities that armed rebellion or War was out of the orbit of possibilities when they spared no opportunity to emphasize that the force of argument prevailed over any form of approach in their quest for a just representation or secession from the Cameroon state.

The twisting and political juxtapositions with their attendant consequences on the social fabric had little impact on the whole package of traditional hierarchies. Traditional authorities and their Palaces plus the paraphernalia that constituted their mythology and moral essence among Cameroon traditional-minded folks remained in glory thereby, charting the indigenous worldview of mettle and regard in spite of the pressures brought on them by the forces of change.⁴ The closure of the House of Chiefs in 1975 and the Presidential Decree of 1976 reorganizing these traditional authorities into grades kept these traditional galleries in some form of confusion rich with doses of speculation. All of these were efforts deployed to integrate such authorities and their emblems into the statist administrative mould but this barely scratched the surface of the foundation of worship of royalty and the religious essence of these authorities plus insignia because most of them especially in The Cameroon Anglophone regions remained relatively in grace or glory.

By 2017, Lawyers and teachers from the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon exploited educational and legal practices that ran contrary to the norms of things in Anglophone Cameroon to rally so many voices into some form of protest whose mismanagement both by the state and the Civil Society groupings turned into armed violence. As violence and anarchy ostensibly designed to force the government to bulge for a negotiated settlement raged on, most traditional authorities remained silent or at best intransigent. Interestingly, the new armed movements claimed from the

¹ Echoes of the possibilities of the use of arms to secure a new state from the Republic of Cameroon always circulated among the leaders of the SCNC movement and the Cameroon Government resorted to constant arrest and detention of suspects thereby constantly postponing than settling the problem. See David Kamid , “ Oku Rebellion”

² SCNC is a movement that emerged among the embittered Anglophones which sought to articulate the fact the West Cameroon state as formed during the 1961 arrangements was a state of its own and needed not to have been abolished in 1972 as president Ahidjo did. It was out to pursue all peaceful means to restore the state as it was but from the 1990s violence to secure that end started percolating into the movement.

³ Ssabou Isa has written profoundly on Armed banditry and Governments response in North Cameroon.

⁴ Humphrey Tatah Mbuy,(2021), *Fons of “Traditional Bamenda” and Partisan Politics in Contemporary Cameroon*,(Yaounde: Imprimeie de la CENC),p.17.

beginning to be out to revitalize traditional authorities and their institutions and this incidentally dragged so many traditional folks into the realm of confusion mixed with expectations. Little was it even perceived by these authorities that their silence and intransigence in the face of intense disorder was in a way yoking them to any form of benefit or loss that was to be the outcome. The silence again some sort of gave some vague blessings to so many young men hooded and mentored by the traditional philosophy to freely seek for recruitment as armed men.

By 2018, the Cameroon government started accusing the traditional authorities who by text were auxiliaries of administration, of working against the state. The accusations levied on these traditional leaders found space to blossom because violence and disorder from the armed groups was cooked up or fermented with the complacency or active supervision of some traditional notables. The attempts made by these authorities to control the action of these groups backfired and instead positioned them as targets of violence. The armed groups quickly gained a new consciousness that the power and might of their bullet could humble these authorities into submission and so the attack in most parts of these regions shifted to attacking such authorities. As indicated, this virulent attack on traditional authorities and everything or person in their support structure was new because prior to this age such authorities commanded an unmeasurable wealth of potency. From Scrutinizing data combed from primary and secondary sources complemented by interviews and electronic sources, this paper revisits how traditional authorities and the emblems faired and were venerated in Anglophone Cameroon in spite of the pressures meted on them change till the 1990s. It goes further to map out how their silence and collaboration with violent theology and action from architects of war and separation ignited violence not only against them but also against the dignified royal emblems and insignia that formed the basis of the veneration the local folks had for them. This strange dramatic twist to the norms of traditional elegance made previously dignified authorities and all their insignia to be assaulted, killed, kidnap, or effaced by amba boys with its accompanied forms of disruptions to patterns of power and loyalties.

Traditional Institutions in this Niche Prior to the Reign of Violence

Traditional authorities and emblems in Anglophone Cameroon were sacred by their very nature and those who were vested with such anatomy of power were usually held in the highest of esteem by the local folk and the colonial administration. In the Cameroon Grassfields, the institutions were centralized while at the coast, they were decentralized. Traditional rulers of the Grassfields went by a myriad of titles and a noted few were *Fons* or *Foyn* and chiefs. In the Southern forested parts of this niche like the Bakweri and Bakossi areas, the traditional authorities were mostly called chiefs. Nkwi and Warnier held that traditional authorities all over Africa were accorded godly characteristics and powers. They were held in the same realms as ‘divine Kings’ who were all all-powerful and were endowed with the affidavit of life and death over their subjects as was obtained in medieval Europe.⁵ Deep into the colonial era, most African still struggled to opine that all African traditional rulers kept esteems which were tantamount to the European 15th and

⁵ Chilver E.M.,(1967), “*Paramountcy and Protection in the Cameroon: The Bali and the German, 1889-1913*”, in Prosser Gifford and Wn Roger Louis (eds.), *Britain and Germany in Africa*, (Yale University Press, 1967),p.13. Also see similar submissions in Jb/a(1967)2, No. 11088, Review of the Development of Local Government, p.12.

16th-century monarchs.⁶ In fact, the belief that Traditional authorities acted as intermediaries between the dead and the living and that the success of each individual was directly linked to his/her allegiance to the traditional hierarchies was still firmly implanted in the hearts of even schooled, Christianised, or Islamised African folks.

As glorified individuals held by their folks to have been appointed and enstooled into function by the gods and the ancestors, Grassfielders mystified traditional rulers by holding them not to be mortal and fallible like ordinary humans. They were held in all esteem to be always right and the gods and ancestors alone held the office of judgment to any of their actions. Fons, chiefs, or Lamidos were compared to the Moon that could in African parlance go missing only to be found in the new personality and such, all of them wielded automatic worship. In cases where any of them went missing, tradition recommended that everyone in the community was required to shave their hair since the Fons or chiefs provided a father figure to all living souls within the deceased communities. Throughout the mourning season, all the males were not allowed to put on their caps. All these were to show respect to the transcended *Fon*. *Fons* acted as the political and religious leaders of the society. There were certain rituals that only the traditional rulers could perform on behalf of the whole tribe. This was because they were middlemen between the living and the dead and the only life link between the people and the gods of the land.⁷

The authorities who were believed to be immortal were shown much respect in the Grassfields. Indigenes no matter their rank or class in society were not permitted to shake hands with the *fons*. In all private and public interactions, fons were addressed venerably usually using the second person plural. This was to show respect to the whole tribe as the *Fon* represented the whole tribe. According to Ta Nformi Fandomsg⁸ in the Tikar Fondoms and in the Mbum tribe for instance, a male was not supposed to appear before the *Fon* without a traditional cap on his head as a sign of respect. These traditional rulers had other emblems which they used to rule the people. These were sacred societies that played very vital roles in the daily administration.⁹

The Southern Part of Anglophone Cameroon Equation

In the coastal and forested parts of Anglophone Cameroon, the chiefs made use of traditional institutions like the *Nganya* amongst the Bakweri, the *Muankum*, and *Ahon* amongst the Bakossis were lavishly employed in the traditional economy to buttress the elegance of traditional authorities.¹⁰ Though traditional authorities mostly ran along the lines of segmented or decentralized structures, these authorities and anything within their support structure still commanded a lot of respect and regulatory societies were there to ensure they function well. These

⁶ Perham, Lugard, (1970) *The year of Authority 1898-1945, vol ii* (Collins 1960); M. Crowder & O. Ikime (Eds). West Africa Chiefs (University of Ife press, 1970).pp.15-18.

⁷ Beier, Ulli, ed. (1966), *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths*, (London: Heinemann),pp.55. Also see Tembo, Mwizenge,(1996), *Myths of the World: Legends of Africa*. (New York: MetroBooks).

⁸ Interview with Fandong

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See graphic development of these ideas in Victor Julius Ngob(1972) *Abrogation of Federalism in Cameroon 1972*, Ahistorical Analysis (Limbe :, Design House) and in (1990), *Constitutional Developments in Southern Cameroons, 1946-1961: From Trusteeship to Independence*, (Yaoundé: CEPER).

regulatory societies were sacred and their role in society was very strategic. They ensured the respect of indigenous laws and institutions and meted out punishment on violators plus those who were recalcitrant in the society. Membership into these sacred societies was limited to the male folk and as a matter of fact, the men who formed the nucleus of such institutions were those considered to be 'strong and acerbic. With this, those considered to be weaklings were never initiated or offered membership into these sacred societies. For a man to be considered strong he was supposed to fulfil certain conditions in society, for instance, be a warrior, be brave, and be ready to defend society at all times along with being a title holder amongst others. This kind of feeling surrounded traditional authorities with a lot of strong men who readily provided a strong bastion for recruitment into the armed confinement when the age of violence inched in since the beginning of the crises in 2017, protecting the palace and protecting the Anglophone people were presented by War mongers as one or same mission.

Potent Traditional Emblems in Anglophone Cameroon

There is a complex paraphernalia stocked by traditional authorities both to buttress and enhance their authority in Anglophone Cameroon. In truth, traditional authorities are held by their indigenous folks to command power beyond reproach but this power and authority over animate and inanimate things rest on the paraphernalia of things that sustain such thinking which we refer to in this study as emblems. The glory of any of this authority is sustained by the regard folks ascribe to these emblems. There are variations in the elegance and types of these emblems not only according to authorities and niches but also according to traditions but all of them convey messages of respect not only from folks within these niches but also beyond.¹¹ A sorted few of these emblems will include the palace which is the abode of the authority, the leopard skin, the royal spear, the shrines, and all the sacred places that formed the palace economy. The role of regulatory society is to ensure that such emblems are kept sacrosanct as held by tradition.

Some of these sacred emblems of authority in Anglophone Cameroon are the leopard pelt, the staff, and traditional caps that the chiefs and *Fons* used. The leopard was equated to a human being in the society and there was a belief that the *Fon* could transform into a leopard. The Leopard had the status of a human being in the chieftdom and therefore the *fon or chief* had exclusive rights to the pelt of a leopard when it was killed by whoever in the community. Such a person was decorated and honoured as a warrior. The leopard skin was usually put on the throne while another piece was placed on the floor for the *Fon* to put his legs on or any chair that the *fon* sat on. Therefore, it moved as the *Fon* moved, this was a sacred emblem, and not everyone was permitted to touch it or step foot on it. It was variedly called the Grassfield. In Mbum and Kom, it was called the *Kabra and Gvi Nyam Abo*. In these communities, it was so sacred that it was believed that any mortal that

¹¹ Henry Kam, Kab, (2017), "Converting and Disputing the Role of Traditional Cultural Institutions in Cameroon's Cross River Basin, 1916–1961", *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* Vol. 5 No. 2): 267-287. Same ideas but for other parts of Africa are vivid in Carolyn, Logan, (2008), *Afro barometer publications: Traditional Leaders in Modern Africa: Can Democracy and the Chief Co-Exist?* London: Pengium Books,).

stepped on it became crippled, apart from the servants who were anointed and specialized for such services.¹²

As indicated earlier the palace which is usually the abode of the fon was itself an emblem worthy of respect. Nkwi and Warner describe the palace to be more like villages than compounds comprised of royal quarters, the living quarters of royal wives, quarters of main regulatory societies, and the living quarters of the *fon* which was usually built closer to the graves of the ancestors.¹³ This was a good arrangement to show the sacred nature of the palace which was the headquarters of the Kingdom and as such was regarded as a symbol of authority. In the palaces, movement into certain areas within the palace was restricted to some particular group of people especially the members of the different cults that usually constituted the palace cosmology. Movement into and out of certain sacred parts of the palace was conditioned either by rituals or some form of initiation whose moral essence and limit of power could only be justified by those grounded on African mythology or metaphysics. As the custom or norms demanded and in other to keep the respect for traditional authorities and emblems in glory transactions at any inner cult of the sacred institutions were kept purely within the reach of members.¹⁴ Core or peripheral members of Palace sacred cults were not supposed to voice out the inner transactions to non-initiated members worst of all to women. It was even forbidden for children and women to be curious about events or resolutions reached during sessions of sacred meetings.¹⁵

The Issues of Violence in Traditional Institutions Contextualized

The extent to which violence from armed groups on traditional authorities has desecrated African venerated institutions and sacred traditions cannot be wholly grasped except in the context with which such entitlement emerged and evolved placed into a general context. This section specifically attempts to place these traditional authorities and the emblems within their support structures within the specific historical and sociological context. As earlier indicated above, the potency of Traditional authorities and their leadership in Africa stretched right to the time of human creation. Long before contact with European merchants, African societies had woven highly strategize systems of administration which made their system truly robust and sophisticated. These complicated systems existed in different forms of governance that defined and coordinated all aspects of traditional life in all pristine African Kingdoms. African traditional Kingdoms were traditional institutions that were built around the values, traditions, and norms of the African worldview and extant power. These structures and the personalities that incarnated them took care

¹² Ubink, J.M. and J.F. Quan,(2008), *How to combine tradition and modernity? Regulating customary land management in Ghana*(Accra, Pegium House ltd) and read these ideas in *Sharma, K.C(1997)*. ‘Mechanisms for involvement of traditional leaders in the promotion of good governance’. Symposium on Traditional Leadership and Local Government.

¹³ Warnier, J.-P., (1985), *Échanges, Développement et Hiérarchies dans le Bamenda Pré- colonial (Cameroun)*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH).pp.28-9.

¹⁴ *Gada-Asmeron-Legesse,(1973) Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, (FreePress, Macmillan Publishing Co,),p. 53.

¹⁵ *Paul Nkwoji Nkwi*, Cameroon Grassfield Chiefs and Mordern Politics, *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* Bd. 25 (1979), pp. 99-115 (17 pages) Published by: Frobenius Institute

of the social, economic, and political needs of their people.¹⁶ The people who manned these structures were called traditional authorities and they carried venerated titles that made meaning to each kingdom. The most notable of these were *fon, mfoi, moon, fua, for, Chief or laid* in the grass fields.

They were well noted for the preservation of peace, customary legal adjudication, custodians of tradition, and preservers of ancestral lands in their Societies. Their roles also extended to religious functions as they defined and supervise all forms of worship and were generally held by local folks to have been able to keep a life link between the living and the Death. Edward Bovill and Hallett Robin provide engraving details that lend credence to the fact that many West African kingdoms had rulers with enormous wealth, organized judicial systems, and large armies before the 15th century. The submissions offered above were reinforced by other fine scholars on African traditional institutions like Evans Pritchard and others when they maintained that pre-colonial societies ranged on a continuum from largely acephalous societies with loosely linked and regimented lineage systems to extremely hierarchical societies with militarized forms of kinship or chieftaincies. Traditional authorities in African politics and development constituted a strong force that the post-independent political elite could not afford to ignore.¹⁷ They had an organized judicial system that agreed in detail with African cosmology/ philosophy that exercised elastic functions over their subjects and the different spheres within their areas of control. Such Kingdoms were completely the product of African people, resulting in centuries of political and organizational skills and experience.¹⁸

African pre-colonial chieftaincies and all of what traditional administration and leadership entailed were therefore instrumental in the trade, politics, and civilization of their communities. By the time European merchants arrived on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, many advanced civilizations had risen and collapsed while many more were flourishing. Emphasizing on the sterling effervescence of the Kingdoms of Western Sudan, Mwanamutapa, Zimbabwe and the Kanem –Borno Caliphates will do the justice of repositioning palpable great African historical examples of Kingship and indigenous Institutions. Though variations existed in the forms of structures that were part of the traditional administration and governance in the Northwest region of Cameroon most of them were patterned in the likeness of the great West African Kingdoms. There were for the most part centralized agencies where power and authority were bestowed in the shoulder of a single hereditary head who wielded enormous power. Royalty in the Cameroon grass fields was therefore in high glory during precolonial times as disruptions and contradictions to this established order of doing things were never contested by anyone let alone toying with anything that lay within its

¹⁶ *Bongfen Chem Langbee, (1984), "Southern Cameroons Traditional rulers and the Nationalist Movements, 1953-1961, in (Africa Zamani Vol 10, pp.10-12. Also see similar ideas in Fisiyi, C.F.(1995), "Chieftaincy in the modern state: An institution at the crossroads of democratic change" Published in Paideuma, pp., 42- 44.*

¹⁷ *S.K.B Asante, (2012 "Chieftaincy, Non-partisan Good Governance and Development in Ghana's Modern Democracy," in Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities through African Perspectives, vol. 1., eds. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho (Accra: African Books Collective,), pp.,109-110.*

¹⁸ *Legesse, Asmerom. Gada: (1973) Three Approaches to the Study of African.9 (New York: Free Press,), p.44.*

network of sustainability in indigenous societies. With virtually no limit to royal effervescence everything that operated within such fringes of power was allowed to flower and blossom and most local folks considered it a privilege to serve and protect such confinements more so because everything that lay within its network were ascribed spiritual or metaphysical powers.¹⁹

The case of the Forest region of Cameroon was in a way different from what existed in the Northwest region but this difference came more from the form of government than from the attachment local folks had for their traditional Institutions and authorities. In most parts of Southwest regions, notably amongst the Banyang, Ejagham, Bafaw, Bakossi, and Bakweri, Chieftaincies operated in a more decentralized form. Such Institutions were organized in several different villages made up of many families. Like almost everywhere in Africa the size of the population and the area the commanded had little to do with the veneration indigenes accorded to such offices and the personalities that ran them. As representatives of the gods and everything hooded by ancestral philosophy chiefs had sacrosanct powers and so many regulatory societies were either created or incidentally emerged to ensure or enforce wholesale respect of traditional orders. The July 12th, 1884 Germano-Douala Treaty between the Germans officials and Douala Chiefs indicates the power of the chiefs in Cameroon like elsewhere in Africa over their territories.²⁰ On account of their essence to the mission of control and administration, the Germans like other colonial authorities found it useful to integrate native chiefs (traditional authorities) to provide anthropogenic and even political linkages on issues of grave concerns like trade and politics. All of this was driven by a pointed aim of having the hands and hearts of willing traditional authorities in the enhancement of their colonial mission. Prior to the signing of the 1884 treaty, the British had established positive contacts with the Douala Kings and King William of Bimbia along the coast of present-day Limbe which made them to harbor a lot of admiration for British annexation.²¹ In the game or business of wooing the native's agents and agencies to the colonial dreams and aspirations most of the colonial agents notably, Britain succeeded to raise the colonial mission to the heights of a religious dogma within a colonial principle of governance which they called the Indirect Rule. At such blotted heights the British struggled throughout the entire period to cause the Fons and the indigenes under their custody to worship the programmes as presented as this largely paid off, especially in areas of strongly centralized traditional polities.²²

The success of nationalist politicians in their independence movement thus depended on the support of chiefs, especially the paramount fons, because most colonial agencies saw these traditionally venerated individuals to be capable of spreading the required charm of obedience on native folks whose cooperation was needed in whole for their colonial project to rage on. Indeed, native voices and participation were also desperately needed by the elites to use as worthy bargain against the Colonial agents or agencies. It was in this logic of things that, the Grassfield chiefs and their entire traditional apparatus were recruited and used in full to perform capital roles during the British Southern Cameroons independence struggle. Practically, this was done by reasserting their precolonial power in the issues that found to be relevant to traditional thinking or competence along with their integration mostly as customary authorities into modern state processes. With this

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *Austen, Ralph A. (1992) "Tradition, Invention and History: The Case of the Ngondo, Cameroun." in. Cahiers d'Études Africaines 32, pp., 285-309.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

consciousness, the various nationalist political movements in the Southern Cameroons, such as the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), and Kamerun People's Party (KPP) pushed for the active role of chiefs in independence.²³

This explains why it became almost unthinkable that chiefs could be completely pushed to the hind when most African territories became independent in the 1960s. It was this understanding of the importance of the Chiefs that ignited the unwavering support of the British colonial administrators to the idea of the House of Chiefs that operated like the House of Lords in Britain. In all, a House of chiefs was seen and upheld by all as a real representative body of traditional rulers and so frantic attempts were made for such an institution to be carved out in British Southern Cameroon after Independence. As witty power brokers and possible vote banks, most politicians co-opted and pulled those chiefs into politics even without doing the needful of orientating them on the basics of the European style of governance that attached a high prize to the practice of democracy.²⁴ Like old governors on new roles traditional authorities requested by the emerging post-Independent Political Elite to rally their people to the project of nation-building which intrinsically differed in form and content from the traditional government that had been their thing prior to the encroachment of colonial project. To match words with actions, the southern Cameroon political elites worked in harmony with the traditional authorities and in the process created the Southern Cameroon House of chiefs which went operational in 1960. Sitting for the first time on September 5th, 1960, the High Commissioner J.O Field who was in charge of this area on behalf of Britain had the opportunity to put the role of the House of Chiefs and the traditional authorities in perspective. In his address, he stressed its historical importance and went further to put it straight that they were not only useful to political parties and politicians but were hired into the full service of being the mouthpieces and the first agents of any administration in their respective communities.

By 1961, the process of Southern Cameroon's struggle for statehood ended with the territory, joining the French part of the territory to form the Federal Republic. President Ahidjo drew inspiration from traditional chieftaincies which was a norm in British Southern Cameroons to obtain the fundamental principles of an African democracy necessary for national political development. Besides its democratic foundation, chieftaincy was needed to protect intrinsic traditional values such as humane living of which the chiefs are depositories. He took the option of co-opting chiefs into the political and administrative structures of the state as a means to ensure the effective integration of chieftaincies into the administrative machinery of the state not as a parallel force but as an integral part of the Administration.²⁵ At the initial stage of the federation, Ahidjo was largely tolerant of traditional authorities. Above all, he allowed the federated states of

²³ Peter Geschiere, '*Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing chieftaincy, French and British style*', *Africa* 1993, 63(2): PP: 151–175.

²⁴ Henry Kam Kab, 'Converting and Disputing the Role of Traditional Cultural Institutions in Cameroon's Cross River Basin, 1916–1961', *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* Vol. 5 No. 2 (2017), pp., 267-287.

²⁵ Ideas about borrowing or hiring such forces to integrate in the governance mould are developed in details by Eric Yeyun in his Ph.D Thesis on Chiefs /Traditional Rulers in Politics, forthcoming. Also see other detailed developments on this in Georg Lutz/Wolf Linder,(2004), "Traditional authorities and local governance", (University of Berne, Institute of Political Science Switzerland) and Paul Nchoji Nkwi,(1979), "Cameroon Grassfield Chiefs and Mordern Politics", in *Paidenma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* Bd. no 2, pp., 99-115, published by: Frobenius Institute

West Cameroon to handle chieftaincy matters in their own way until such a time that the federal government would find it necessary to step in and regulate its activities. As inscribed in the Federal Constitution, the House of Chiefs of the Southern Cameroons shall be maintained but reserved the right to determine its powers and functions to the West Cameroon State was both a legislative and power broking institution. Thus in October 1 1961, the SCHC became the WCHC with regard to its role, powers, and duties it followed the same pattern as the defunct SCHC. Thus, in conformity with the disposal of the Federal and West Cameroon Constitutions, the WCHC was created and went operational in April 1962. It became the Upper Chamber of the West Cameroon State, which became a bicameral character that was not the case in East Cameroon. This statutory recognition gave the chiefs of West Cameroon the opportunity to assert themselves and contribute to the edifice of nation-building by participating in governance and in the decision-making process of the emerging state.²⁶ The cancellation of the Federal Republic in 1972 came along with the eradication of the West Cameroon House of Chiefs but this had little to do with the native's veneration of such personalities and offices. Even in some parts of the South West Region when the notion of these offices and the persons incarnating them was not very firm, they continued to exercise widespread powers, and locals and strangers looked up to them for anything wrapped in the traditional philosophy which included peace.

Decadence and Road to the Age of Violence

As indicated above, the area alternatively currently referred to as the North and South West Regions of Cameroon was and is still a hub of established renowned traditional authorities and emblems which were lavishly used by the British in administering the people during their colonial rule that lasted from 1922 to 61 and by the emerging Post-colonial elites from 1961 and anytime forward. The attempts made by different political regimes of Cameroon since independence both to usurp the traditional elegance of power and authority over their respective spheres of influence only scratched the surface for the veneration of such agencies and the individuals in their support structures remained exceedingly in glory up till 2015. The Chieftaincy Reorganization Laws of 1976 profoundly demeaned the elegance enjoyed by royalty in Anglophone Cameroon but this had little to do with the people's respect for their chiefs, *fons*, or kings. It was only in the 1990s when the chieftaincy agency and the agents that ran the offices came under attack by the forces of liberalism that pluralistic politics ushered. The rebirth of multi-party politics and other vents of expression were fuelled by skyrocketing hard times and this caused people to question not only the central government but almost all of what tradition represented. In the first place, the excitement triggered by these new developments sent some traditional authorities to side with the opposition parties notably the SDF though most of them continued to play public neutrality.²⁷ It should be stressed here that there is a general unwritten code that traditional authorities are naturally supposed to be neutral, especially in matters of politics but, this new era of liberalism offered far more than temptations for these natural leaders to stand indifferent.

Biya's ascension to office as president plus his visit to the Northwest and Southwest regions sent conflicting signals to traditional authorities and their entire paraphernalia. In Bamenda, Biya

²⁷ Cosmas Cheka: "Traditional Authority at the Crossroads of Governance in Republican Cameroon, Africa Development" *African Journal* Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, 2008, pp. 67-89 and Joseph Takounga, (1994), "Chief Johannes Manga Williams and the Making of a Native Colonial Autocrat among the Bakweriof the Southern Cameroons, *Trans African*" in *African Journal of History*, Volume 23. p. 9-31

received the distinguished title of the ‘Fons of all fons’ and was symbolically initiated into the sophistication/mystification that Fonship or traditional endowment entailed. Certainly, this lavished sort of beatification pushed Biya to declare Bamenda (meaning the whole of Northwest Region) as his second home. The same or even higher scale reception was granted to Paul Biya in Buea who used that chance not only to rub shoulders with the many traditional authorities but also to assure them that ‘he was born a Cameroonian in Cameroon and shall leave and die in Cameroon.’ Though Ahidjo seemed to master traditional rulers more than Biya he had never been that endearing to them to them publicly. These visits though intended to drive home the ideals of the New Deal system of Government made most of the Fons think that their time to freely mingle in politics was at hand or at worst, near. Fons of the Northwest from that visit hence, held Biya not only as the head of state but more as a fellow colleague and therefore hoped to make worthy gains in the newfound camaraderie or friendship. It was in the Spirit that they sought to create associations of Fons hoping to use them for political positioning at any given opportunity. Even with the verdict of tradition forbidding traditional authorities from mingling in party Politics, most fons of the Northwest proved quite eager to combine both traditional and political offices if any could come their way. The election of Fon Agwafor III of Mnakon as 1st vice president of the CPDM was a basic contemporary example of the motivation of Fons to belong in political governance.

The New Democratic Era and Fortune of Traditional Authorities

The New Deal came with alternating democratic overtures all of them having a distinctive toll on the fortunes of traditional authorities in Anglophone Cameroon. The Liberal democratic age combined with the souring economic slumps to fan resentment against the state which was used wholesale by the rising political parties notably the SDF. The fate of the traditional authorities and the people’s regard to them however differed slightly between the chieftains of the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon during this season. The Chiefs of the South West whose population far outnumbered those of the North West region saw in the new twist of things an occasion where they could use the administration notably the DOS and the governors to their advantage. At a time of skyrocketing economic crises, it was possible for most chiefs of the South West to connive with the administrative authorities notably the DOS and the willing politicians to sell land even when that failed out of their sphere of responsibilities. In most of cases, these traditional authorities entertained frictional relations by the agents of alien governance. This explains why Fons, Chiefs, or Limidos, or simply, traditional authorities in Anglophone Cameroon mostly stayed quiet or unwillingly supported the SDF party and its civil disobedience rhetoric when these opportunities came up. There was a form of disregard for Fons who demonstrated open love for the CPDM or the Cameroon government in the 1990s but these individuals and their emblems were still generally helped as ‘no go’ zones for a larger majority of natives. Throughout the 1990s there was no attempt made to vandalize any traditional authorities in the North West even in cases like Oshie where royal succession disputes were too current

The case was of preservation or protection of traditional authorities and their emblems were not very different in the Southwest region which was eternally gripped by problems of land caused by the impartiality of traditional authorities. Although exposure to change or modernizing factors had unconsciously beaten the respect for traditional authorities out of shape in the Southwest

region traditional authorities still had their place in the hearts of many. Just like in the case of the Northwest region no traditional authority faced any open violence or form of despise. It is therefore worthy to note that the 1976 Laws that graduated chieftaincies into grades and classes and the consequent modifications in the 1980s and 90s opened the face of opened erosions of the power and offices of traditional authorities but the fear of what those people and offices entailed in traditional cosmology was still so deeply engraved in the heart of people within this niche.

The Road to Dwindling Fortunes and Violence on Traditional Authorities

The colonial pattern of administration and justice plus its social elegance had its toll on the traditional norms of behaving especially on the regard and comportment of traditional authorities but the peoples' allegiance or willingness to keep these authorities and their emblems intact remained high. There was therefore a symbiosis of power and administration between the agents and agencies of traditional administration and those of modern governance.²⁸ In these developments, royalty in all its ramifications still had its way among local folks. As earlier indicated, the most noticeable open attack on chieftaincy within this area of study remains that of the *Fon* Simon Vugah II of Babanki who was dethroned by mob action and was later burnt to ashes in full glare in 2004. The people of Babanki Tungoh are said to have tolerated so many misdeeds meted on them by this fon who certainly banked on the overwhelming support he had from the Cameroon government to rage havoc in that Fondom. This macabre scene of full-glare popular arson on a traditional authority did not seem to inaugurate any new phase of complete disregard for traditional authorities in our concerned political niche as the record of such violence, remained scant. The only noticeable pair of arson that came close to that of Babanki was that of the *Fon* of Bamali. Royal feuds and other squabbles caused the people of Bamali in the Ndup plain of the Bamenda grass field to attempt to eliminate their *Fon*. In fact, in the Month of May of 2004, an angry mob invaded the Palace and ransacked all lodges right into the Fons private chambers that were hitherto, considered a no-go zone. After chanting songs of War and determination to eliminate the *Fon* sensed the danger and used some loyal royal guards to vacate the Palace leaving the throne empty. To this, must be added the array of disgrace encountered by Fons like that of Balikumbat whose obsession with power recorded no contemporary equal in the grass fields following his imprisonment on account of killing a political rival. Out of this, royalty in Anglophone Cameroon still entailed a broad range of issues with the key of them being the people's respect or veneration of public morality, dignity, and cultural pride offered by it.

Great regard and veneration of traditions and the practices therein permitted traditional authorities in, and other royal notables to build beautiful palaces and transformed some of their annual festivals into serious touristic attractions. With modernization, the Royal spear and different forms of the royal spear were given their honour by folks of this niche almost automatically. It was through this that the Bafut *Fon* Abumbii II was able to build his museum to earn an international reputation and the Ngonso festivals of Nso People metamorphosed a form of modern

²⁸ Ayoade, John A.A.(1985), "States Without Citizens: An Emerging African Phenomenon," in Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (eds) *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*. (Boulder: Westview Press), pp. 100-118. These very ideas are also graphically expressed in Beattie, John. (1967), "Checks on the Abuse of Political Power in Some African States: A Preliminary Framework for Analysis," in Ronald Cohen and John Middleton (eds) *Comparative Political Systems: Studies in Politics of Pre-Industrial Societies*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967

wonder that sustained the pride of the Nso people. Through this traditional diplomacy was reinforced and social cohesion among ethnic units flew with no trace of ambiguity.²⁹ With this again, any authority who acted on behalf of the tradition was seen to be someone of wit and it was easy to resolve crises. All these good tidings witnessed a tragic effacement upon the birth of the violence growing from the ambazonia War that inched in from 2017

Violence and Desecration of Traditional Authorities and Emblems

Like a storm from the wild blues socio-political and economic grievances that have animated the passions of folks within this niche took a turn for the worst in 2017 as groups of boys mainly mentored and sponsored by Cameroonians of these regions resident in the Diaspora resorted to armed assaults on established institution all of them having a brandished aimed of cutting off this part of the country to form their own which they branded as Ambazonia.³⁰

The Age of Violence and the Implication of Traditional authorities and their Palaces

The outburst of violent discounted and various forms of protest by radicalized and aggrieved populations contingents of Anglophone Cameroon had little or nothing to do with the desecration of traditional authorities or their offices. It was rather projected in the violent propaganda that such authorities and their offices will have their dignity restored. Such tantalizing claims and promises tempted some traditional authorities to see the ambazonia war as a worthy project capable of landing them on heights of comfort hitherto unthinkable.

The armed groups counted on the support of the local population to fight and win the War against the regular Cameroon army and all if not most of these people were under the custody of the traditional authorities who went by different names like *Fons*, *Chiefs*, *Lamidos*, and other notables. From the start these armed militias were in their spirit and determination very convinced that there were engaging in the shortest War with a clearly defined outcome which was unique in kind. Anger, drugs and sustained radicalization gave them this sort of piped audacity. This overzealousness enabled these groups to claim that they were ready to fight and defeat not only the Cameroon military which they regarded as a colonial or occupying force but also to have the affidavit of defeating everyone, structure or idea that ran counter to their dreams and aspirations of creating a new country. Strangely, the planned armed aggression led by *amba boys* before long turned towards the destruction of anything valuable both under the custody of the government agencies and the traditional authorities.

The War and Desecration of Authorities and Emblems

Their mind-set of the Ambazonia War or reckless violence as crafted by some Anglophone diaspora through the traditional and social media encouraged recruits into the armed militia to place their confidence on a chain of mystic practices better appreciated within the realm of African metaphysics and traditional religion. As custodians of everything that tradition entailed, these warlords or War merchants erroneously thought that the Fons and their palaces were the

²⁹ Read how this work out in details in Confidence Chia Ngam "Kom Leadership in Its Regional Sub Setting Circa 1864-2005: A Study in Power Diplomacy within a State of the Cameroon Grassfields (Yaounde: Ph.D thesis 2013),pp.27-9.

³⁰ See Confidence Chia Ngam (2023) in "War for and War Against the Separation of Anglophone Cameroon" in *Review Africain de Droit et de Science Politique* ol XI, N° 32, Spécial - 1e semestre

epicenters of African mysticism and that all the palaces could serve as hiding grounds or headquarters where all War businesses could be planned and executed. Without seeking the opinions of Fons, the armed militias relied on the automatic support of the traditional leaders. In doing so they harboured no doubt that all traditional mysteries hidden in the palace will be theirs as the full scenes of the War were to play on. The armed groups and those in their support structure at home and abroad were quite impatient with anything that seemed to discourage armed aggression on the state and all its institutions.³¹ Hard times and political bandwagonism had pushed most of the royal notables plus title holders towards the Cameroon government where some form of co-optation and its accompanied compensation provided the much-needed therapy to survive. A good number of these traditional agents were schooled and politically inclined and were not ready even for the sake of pretense to abide by the tone and content of rancor alive in the messages of War that were on the menu on every lip, especially in the rural areas where the knowledge of state creation had mean apprehension. The gains that were to come upon separation as presented by those advertising the War project mostly residents in foreign countries also appealed to some members of the inner chambers of the traditional sanctuary like Kwifoyn thereby creating camps within the systems.

Membership into Kwifoyn was guaranteed and graduated most of the time on moral probity and for members to fall prey to the project of War that ran counter to the mission of peace became a difficult puzzle for some of the fons and chiefs to deal with. Most of the fans were either too slow to convince those who abandoned palace servitude into the War enterprise and as such the palace economy and politics of administration virtually went into some form of a trance. This nonchalance did not immediately pose a problem because it was not yet clear to the Fons and other traditional agents that the issuing violence was going to bring their palaces into the center of Ambazonian targets. For these reasons most of the Fons and chiefs elected to stay mute. The mass departure of boys including even some princes to offer themselves as recruits in the War enterprise though without the approval of the Chiefs or fons initiated a bad bent for the survival of royal elegance in Anglophone Cameroon. One thing that the fons and chiefs of our study area failed to understand was that by allowing their subjects to take orders of violence and incitation of hate from strange people and execute them wholesale, they were incidentally pampering monsters to grow beyond their ability to bear.

In all, radicalization and phony promises were on the rise to seize the moral authority that the traditional authorities wielded or commanded. This control or direction of command to local folks incidentally slipped into the hands of people with doubtful conduct which the Fons and chiefs could not able to handle at any time.³² This is how the warlords in the diaspora wrestled and usurped the space of issuing instructions and orders which was formerly occupied by traditional leaders and handed them to enraged people who had been brainwashed to join the War. With the power to dictate the tempo of comportment of their native folks virtually gravitating away from the Fons through consistent radicalization, traditional authorities turned out to be seen

³¹ From 2017 all self-proclaimed ambazonia leaders laid various claims on the peoples right not only to own but to exercise full control over their traditional institution. It was in this rhetoric that they warned all traditional authorities not only to remain loyal to the ambazonia project but to demonstrate complete disregard to anything coming from the direction of Cameroon government. Such calls are available on all the various amabazonia online platforms.

³² Doubtful hands because this new leadership glorified war and separation through force and again because most of them were had little regard to respect or method on how to go about their War business.

as mere toys whose survival was pronged on the mercy of the amba boys and their instructors abroad.

As auxiliaries of the government administration before the mass outbreak of violence, Fons and chiefs were also upheld as the custodians of values of peaceful co-existence amongst folks from far and near. These leaders, therefore, had the responsibility to step in and put order the moment it became clear to them that the Ambazonia movement was negotiating the wrong road for their native folk. It was their attempt to provide moral lessons to the Amba boys or control their actions that landed the chiefs in trouble with the Ambazonia fighters and their leaders in the wild. The ambiguities of the armed gangs inched forward with the possibilities of securing a new state and shifting to unknown yards. With this on a constant rise, the armed gangs continued to rage havoc amongst local folks disrupting institutions, structures, and taboos that were in the worship of tradition and in the process, shifting the traditional authorities by brute force and intimidation to the hind. The Ambazonia leaders in all their preaching and sloganeering, glorified violence and were all sure that even some complacent traditional leaders will find their war project absurd and turn away from the struggle in some near future. Sure the charisma that such authorities still carried in spite of the erosion of most of their powers by the state and drugged militias plus their war leaders went on a provocation trail of most of the fons. It became not only strange but gravely banal seeing and hearing Sons and daughters who were nurtured and made concrete in these traditional niches going arrogant virtually insulting or casting aspersions and curses on traditionally respected persons like the Fons and chiefs. These were the early signs of violence because going dirty on the Fon and expecting to order him and the institution around were tragic labels unheard of in the history of their policies.

In any case, these self-imposed or appointed impostors³³ had convictions whose relevance could only be justified in their newly acquired war philosophy. It was these convictions that nurtured in them the boldness to prepare their fighting squads against such eventualities. To keep the fighters in the enterprise of war in spite of the fading hopes these new barons were indoctrinated to understand that in War even your parent who is or joins the enemies automatically becomes your enemy because he/she could order your killing at any possible time. If armed folks could be given the mind muscle to be ready to kill their parents should they go against the norms of war then, the desecration of any traditional stuff could just be a sort of walk in the park for him or her. Indeed, this did not happen but regularly became a norm as many pro-amba persons and even some members of Kwifoyn in all the polities of Anglophone Cameroon upheld no restraint on going mean or denigrating traditional authorities each time they found these agents going contrary to Amba norms of things.

. This unconditional support for amba and every facet of their destructive scheme gained fame and gave courage to the fighters to exert enormous violence on personalities and institutions that were

³³ The list of these impostors is quite long but prominent among them who variedly referred to the Fons are their own were Ayaba Cho Lucas from Mankon in Norway, Christopher Anu Fobene and Tapang Ivo from Libialem ,Samuel Sako from Buea all in the USA ,Mark Bereta from Nso in Belgium,Ndong Daniel from Bum in Hongkong,boh Herbert from Kom in the USA as well as Tasang Wilfred ,Abdou Karim,and Ayuk Tabe who shuttled between Cameroon and Nigeria. There is however a deal of contrast on the positions these individuals arrogated themselves with. While others see them as leaders a lot more see them as mere opportunists who saw the government intransigent as a gap gap to cave in and cause confusion for personal gains.

hitherto, considered sacred. The radicalization of armed gangs to the yards of high criminality in 2018 enabled them to defy all orders and incantations of traditions and kill, kidnap, and molested traditional authorities in full glare. It was through these kinds of doctrines that Fons and chiefs gradually shifted into the prime targets of amba violence since most of them were not ready to condescend to yards of taking instructions from boys who are their subjects

Evidence of Violence and Desecration of Traditional Rulers and Emblems.

Evidence of violence and desecration of traditional authorities and royal insignia in Anglophone Cameroon can be segmented into three types divided into two periods. The first period is any time before 2017 by the enraged population and the second period is after 2017 which saw violence and desecration from the military and Ambazonian militia.

Pre-2017 Semblance of Violence and Desecration of traditional authorities and Emblems

Anglophone Cameroon, traditional authorities had exclusive rights over indigenous properties such as land, and ancestral artefacts amongst others, and therefore it was their duty to ensure they were well protected. In trying to execute these duties some traditional authorities overstepped their rights and responsibilities which landed them into trouble with their subjects and consequently ended up desecrating traditional institutions. A case in point was the saga between the indigenes of Kedjum keku (Big Babanki) in the Mezam Division of the Northwest region then North West province. In 1991, *Fon* Vugah II of this village went into crisis with his subjects who accused him of sexual abuse on his subjects, selling cultural artifacts and land to one of Cameroon's business tycoons *Alhadji* Yusuf Danpullo (Ayeah 2005 Issues of farmer-grazier problems later erupted between the latter and the indigenes of Kedjum Keku. In 1994, a decision from the Governor of the Northwest province following reports from the Land Consultative Commission ordered Danpullo out of the land upon payment of a compensation of FCFA 50.000.000. Unfortunately, the business tycoon never respected the Governor's decision (Mbunwe 2006). Seeing that the *Fon* had overreacted though as a traditional authority, the *Kwifon* regulatory society banned him from entering the village by pouring libations. This again proved the disciplined nature of Indigenous institutions which the *Fon* as a person was not above. This led to the enthronement of a new *Fon* in 2004 against the provincial administration. On January 2005, indigenes of Kedjum Keku arrested the dethroned *Fon* whom they accused of sneaking into the palace accompanied by one of his wives. This was against the decisions of the *Kwifon* institutions. Mob justice was meted on him till death when the forces of law and order intervened and took away his mortal remains. This incident sent shocking waves across the Bamenda Grassfields as was the first case of violence against traditional authorities. The desecration of such an office had serious moral and spiritual effects on the land and the indigenes.

Post 2017 and Military Violence and Desecration of Traditional Authorities and Emblems

The frenzy of War, and violence with the intention of disrupting established order and structures were presented with apt excitement to the Anglophone folks and communities both in Cameroon and abroad by the enraged self-proclaimed leaders of the amba war resident in foreign countries. One central unfortunate project that inconsistently rocked the War mantra was the urge to make rural and urban communities of the Anglophone ecological niche gravely ungovernable. Logic and plane common sense were enough to warn the traditional authorities who were custodians of

order and peace in local communities that the un governability preached by the Amba leaders and worshiped by the multitude of brainwashed folks was going to destroy the very soul of the philosophy that kept them as glorified individuals. The failure to identify from the start that recklessness towards the state needed just time to face the Fons who in the symbiotic power sharing echelons that was already a norm in most African societies only helped to pamper violence.

The veritable desecration of royal insignia from 2017 did not come from the direction of Ambazonian armed groups. The amba publicity made on all forms of established media that they owned or control everything that tradition carried in Anglophone Cameroon made the Cameroon government security apparatus to place a special focus on these areas. The suspicion gained ground when it repeatedly became clear that these traditional authorities were keeping or entertaining very cordial relationships with the amba leaders abroad. Of interest is the fact that the state counted on the traditional leaders to take alternative measures to calm down the enraged and furious groups but when it became clear that there was no solution in sight from these natural leaders the state decided to take those who refused to collaborate in their claimed peace building initiatives as hostile agents or agencies of state disintegration. It was in this spirit that the governors of the North and South West regions of Cameroon summoned the fons, chiefs and Lamidos to their offices in April 2017 and gave warnings plus threats if they were found guilty of any collaboration or collusion with the amabazonia state destruction scheme. The communiques summoning these authorities was made public and Amba leaders tried and only succeeded half way to both convince and threaten the traditional authorities not to attend the meetings with the governor. The amba War leaders covered long distances to make to make the traditional authorities to understand that in the norms of things Anglo-Saxon tradition kept them in realms higher than that of the governors who in their insightful language were prepared to ride on them as if they were their horses. With this, it was going to be debasing and a sort of conspiracy for them to yields to such condescending appeals from the governors of the two Regions.

The traditional leaders who failed to attend these meetings and to participate in national events were from then hence seen to be accomplices to the state destruction projects while those who attended and participated in any state organized events were seen by the Amba agents of violence as enemies to their state crafting project through War or violence. It was in this guise that state armed men systematically ransacked the Bafut Palace in April 2018. The Bafut fon even before the Crises was a subject was stunned silence was forced to give the military free access to every area that they suspected in the Palace and at the end some of the Fons servants were arrested and taken away for questioning. Similar raids were conducted in all the Palaces or royal hoods that proof hesitant to cooperate with the government in fighting against amba. Cases in point that were victims of such merciless raids included the Palaces of Bangolnad, Baba 1, Bafanji in the Northwest regions wherein sacred shrines were visited and suspected hoods set ablaze. In the Southwest Regions the Governor was more virulent on the chiefs he found or suspected to be pro amba. On a comparative basis traditional authorities of the Southwest region were more cooperative than those of the North West region and so with the exceptions of a few threats from the administrative authorities by the military were not as rampant. However, there were military raids in Tinto, Akwaya, Lewoh and Lebang in the Manyu and Libielem where amba sentiments were suspected to be very strong.

Amba Violence and Desecration of Traditional authorities and Emblems from 2017

The reasons and context for amba rage and fury leading to veritable violence and desecration of all the facets of royalty have been treated above in distinctive details but practical cases of violence demand our attention here.

In the northwest region, the Fon of Nso and so many of his subjects became victims of the virulent attack and blackmail not only because he was an open pro-government person with an overarching CPDM party militancy but also because he spared no effort in making his subjects to know that the ambazonia project was a pipe born dream whose end was well in sight. The Fons open stance against amba attracted the rage of many members of kwifoyn and other royal sacred cults who were seeing the amba project as an icon of redemption. This situation was the same for princess and princesses who did only harbour long grievances against the Fon but were also fooled to see the Fon as a blackleg or enabler. To give the Fon of Nso and by extension many of his contemporaries a sufficient bad name several framed stories were cooked up and shared in public places about the Fon. Both the cooking up of stories and sharing of such messages were in themselves violence and desecration of royalty for never in the history of the grassfield has such a great pawn be mated on a high profiled traditional authority. For these reasons and many more the Fon became a victim of so many threats all of them coming from Sons of Nso virtually instructing him to make openly declare his willingness to support amba or be lynched or deposed.³⁴ Continuous threats and frictions in the palace made the Fon to abandon the Palace for some years and his absence from the Palace out of some kind of duress only go a long way to explain the decadence of royalty on account of violence.

The violence that pushed the Fon of Nso to vacate the Palace had several of its equivalences throughout Anglophone Cameroon. Interestingly most Fons of this geographical niche had roles and positions out of the jackets of royalty. In the Northwest the exception of Fons who never vacated their places were few but in the Southwest where chieftaincies could be bought, virtually all the Fons had intricate state assignment to render chores which amba was not ready to tolerate. By 2022 virtually all the fons of the Northwest had undergone some kind of kidnap from amba boys or witnessed a sort of torture. The Fon of Oku a powerful traditional base in Bui Division was kidnaped and kept in isolation for more than a week, the Fon of Mbesnaku in Boyo Division was also kidnapped and molested by amba boys and the same fate followed the Fonn of Mejang in Boyo division. The Fon of Kom was also kidnapped for hours while the Fons of Bambili ,Bambui and Babanki were forced to relocate to Yaounde and other safer places. The relocation of fons gave the amba boys the effrontery to only to rage havoc on the local folks but also to both usurp and disrupt intricate established hierarchies. With both the conspiracy and complacency of pro amba royal notables amba got access to some sacred lodges where their interiors were eroded and some of the stuff taken away for fortifications.

On November 5th 2021 the paramount Fon of Nso HRH Sehm Mbinglo of was abducted by a group of separatist fighters in the neighboring Ngoketunjia Division on His way home to Bui alongside others including a prelate who was later realized without the *Fon*. After spending 5 days

³⁴ Franklin Verla a son of the Nso soil resident in the USA inflated himself with enormous royal connections and knowhow and in this ego went virile and wild in issuing lethal threats not only against the Fon but whoever royal notable who could be identify as standing against their war bid. Rev father Jumbam Gerald also join him both in supporting anything went in the direction of War as well as running down any project that went in the direction of restoring normalcy.

in captivity, the *Fon* was released but worthy of note was the fact that some subjects of Nso marched to Ngokitunjia, demanding the release of their *fon* (Azohnwi 2020). This was a show of respect for the *fon* and a way to salvage the institution from desecration. The abduction of such a traditional authority was a high level of desecration given the fact that he represented the whole tribe and whatever treatment meted on him was meted on the whole society. During his period in captivity, desecration was obvious because of the lack of the emblems that moved with such a figure and his conditions of habitat were equally questionable. Directly or indirectly, such an act of desecration had effects on the traditional authority and on the subjects.

On December 9, 2021, the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) web published a news article reporting the abduction of the *Fon* Yakum Kevin traditional ruler of the Mbaw Yakum people also known as Bamalang. This was another stain on the image of traditional authorities which greatly devalued them. The *Fon* doubled as the vice president of the North West Regional Council. An office that caused the separatist to condemn him because his neutrality was questioned. The abductors who whisked him from his palace requested a ransom of FCFA 20.000.000. For over 11 months, the where about of the *fon* was still unknown. Traditional authorities in the Anglophone region suffered untold ordeal.

In the southwest region of Cameroon, traditional institutions and emblems witnessed violence and desecration just as their counterparts in the North West region. On February 13, 2021, three traditional authorities of Esoh-Attah in the Lebialem division were murdered in the market square and their lifeless bodies were dropped in a nearby stream by *Amba* separatist fighters. This was reported by the Cameroon Tribune online on 17 February 2021 (Cameroon Tribune, 2021). The separatist accused the chiefs of disobeying their orders and participating in Regional elections which took place in December 2020. In the same light, the people of Ngongo village in the Southwest region equally saw their traditional institutions desecrated. This was when the chief of the said village chief Johannes Ekebe Niongo was murdered by secessionist fighters in January 2018 who accused him of collaborating with government soldiers against the *Amba* separatist fighters (Bone 2020). The use of violence on the traditional authorities was done irrespective of the place or zone of execution. In Lebialem, the authorities were executed in a market square (a public place). A similar case of public execution by armed secessionist fighters was in Ekondo Titi, Ndian Division when Chief Esoh Itoh, supreme chief of the Balondo people was pulled out from a church service and shot dead. The chief was the president of the South West chiefs Conference and former board chair of the Pamol plantation. This gave his executioners more grounds to meet violence on him on grounds that he collaborated with the government against the wishes of the separatist fighters.

Conclusion

Traditional authorities in the Anglophone region were natural rulers and so the people could not do without them. In the wave of armed violence in the region, these natural rulers, auxiliaries of the Cameroon administration were found between the deep blue sea and the devil. The secessionist fighters accused anyone in the region who did not sight with their agenda as a sell out or a black leg. So too were the traditional authorities, whom some served in the Cameroon civil service and so their cases became more complicated in the sight of the *amba* boys. Many of such rulers had to leave their villages and seek safety elsewhere. In this light, their conspicuous absence from the

villages did not speak well of the indigenous traditional beliefs and the work of Administration was in the hands of regent chiefs who did not rule exactly as the natural rulers chosen by the gods should have. Therefore the absence of these rulers in one way contributed to the desecration of traditional emblems because there were certain rights and rituals reserved to be carried out only by such authorities. The effectiveness of such institutions in the absence of the traditional authorities was found wanting. On the other hand, the traditional rulers faced much pressure from the government in the wave of armed violence in the region since 2017. As auxiliaries of the administration, the ministry of territorial administration constantly put much pressure on the traditional authorities who had escaped their villages for safety to return and contribute to a return to normalcy. For fear of the unknown, many of these traditional authorities could not return to their villages.

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