

**Rage, fury (violence) in the Games of Football in the Bamenda Grassfields of  
Cameroon, 1980-2005**

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**ABSTRACT**

One of the visible fallouts of European imperialism in the contemporary Bamenda Grassfields is football. From its introduction and popularization in England, football games and competitions became an endearing practice among rural and urban folks. This game strangely inaugurated streams of passions and sensation among African folks to an extent that it almost became a major source of long-standing conflict instead of impacting social fluidity and fascination that was its prime goal. From the analysis of data combed from primary and secondary sources, this paper examines the context of the rage and fury (violence) that unfortunately animated football games and competitions during the 1980s and 90s in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. It submits that (a) the context of the time, (b) the nonchalance of the officiating officers of most matches, (c) the opaque nature of match programming and (d) the accumulated grievances of ignorant match spectators plus (e) the weakness of the institutions that governed the games, combined to make acts of violence like - desecration of playing grounds-threats, fighting or beating of match officials after matches-refusal of some teams to participate in some competitions as well as open fighting during and after matches. From this it offers that despite the odds and violent social and political climate that characterized the politics of the Cameroon Grassfields today, football has undergone significant paradigm shifts through and within which peace and harmony now prevails which is a marked departure from the violence and sensation that accompanied football matches and competitions in the past. Indeed, a team spirit and collective civility has built a culture where defeats and victories are accepted with no qualms as determined by the match officiating ministers.

**Key words:** *Rage, Fury, Violence, football, Grassfields, Cameroon, New Deal Era*

**Introduction**

This study is a contribution in the dynamics both of the social and political elements that bind and occasions passions within states and nations like sports. It moves in harmony with what Pascal Boniface calls the Geo-Politics of sports (Pascal 2014) and agrees in details with the ideas contained in Lyman Towers, *Les Ideologies Politique*

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*contemporaines* (Lyman 1987). According to Eric dunning (1986), football hooliganism in a 'cover all'- sense includes inter –alia: forms of verbal as well as physical violence; the throwing of missiles at players, match and club officials and other fans, the vandalizing of club and private property, fist fights, fights involving kicking and fights involving weapons such as knives and even guns. According to Norman (2001) football hooliganism was an old age practice in Britain and various acts of violence were recorded by English football fans even out of Britain. In the early days of football practice, it had much adverse effect on the youth and one of them was death among youths in England since the game had no established rules at the time. This made King Edward II in 1349 to place a complete ban on football (Arnout and Dominik). They further say that football hooligans don't consider their acts as violent and should be regarded as normal people. Hooligans referred to one another as 'football lads' and they just occasionally 'fought for fun' (Arnout and Dominik 2016). Arnout and Dominik went ahead to pent the situation in Ireland to be like what obtained in England about five decades ago. Most fans from Britain travelled to Ireland to engage in football violence related activities. According to Torkfar (2011), another form of spectator violence in sports especially football is the verbal utterances that fans made on referees. These utterances in one way or the other greatly contributed to physical violence on football. Therefore football violence on the international scene is as old as the game football itself.

It sees the football games and competitions not only within the angle of leisure, advent, growth and impact but more on how the game as social element became central in defining relations, building alliances and disrupting old ones within local big and small communities of the Grassfields of Northwest Cameroon. It further opines that the fascination of the game among local folks made them to view victory as an anathema and as such, violence incidentally became a norm in both games and competitions. It is therefore a contribution to the different strands of natives' passions, reactions, adaptation, positioning and consumption of foreign goods, ideas and patterns of leisure as well as how out of the game grievances combined to produce agitations and violence in the games. The article has answered or provided the required muse to answer key questions (a) Under what circumstance(s) did rage and furry emerge in the football games or competitions within the Bamenda ecological niche? (b) How was this violence

manifested? And (c) What paradigm shift has the practice and perception of football undergone within the study area and time?

### **The Geo-Historical Antecedent and Locals' Perception of Football**

The Bamenda Grassfields lie within the broad zone of old forest clearance which is between latitude 4 and 7 north. The area has non forested rocky slopes with exposed ridges (Chombeng 2014). The Bamenda Grassfields is the present day North West Region of Cameroon. This area was administered as an integral part of Nigeria by Britain during the colonial rule that lasted from 1922-61. Their Nigerian connection made the football game to be introduced there with many aspects of the game's practiced copied from Nigeria. This of course included the aspect of violence in the game. The area is densely populated with hard working and anxious youths whose social intercourse with globalization and technological development has nursed in them a very raw passion for leisure and innovations. The area is hub of people of different ethnic origins who share a common culture and ancestral links. This ancestral links made the different people to always want to dominate others and show a kind of superiority complex. This was copied and practiced by those football stakeholders who were usually violent. In no specific order the area is made of the Tikars constituted by groups who occupy the present day Boyo, Bui, Donga Mantung, and parts of Mezam, Menchum and Ngokitunja Divisions.

The rest are the Ngembas, Chambas, Effick, Mborroros, Hausas and others who all have claims of different migratory history and settlements. This background brought about the spirit of domination and of not willing to accept defeat to be common. As a result violence was inevitable when teams from such backgrounds played matches. The Tikars all have centralized systems of traditional administration or politics where the power to control people and resources revolves on a central traditional administration referred generally as the Fon. This made the people to think that victory in football matches should only rotate amongst certain teams, making it impossible for them to accept victory and practice fair play. Some few have a mixed system which alternate between a loose confederations of family heads. Curiously, all the groups within our study area have all congregated themselves into some form of centralized system of administration where the rule of the traditional authorities was highly venerated. He doubled as the political head and religious leader as mediator between the ancestors and the living. In most cases the Fon was

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referred to as the only living ancestor. In this area a majority of the people practiced polygamy as a type of marriage and this has seen the population increase over time (Nkwi and Warnier 1982). Polygamous settings in the Bamenda Grassfields were often characterized by rage among co-wives that extended to violence among siblings who were always at logger heads. Thus, a majority of the people came from backgrounds where violence was common and so they easily extended it into football matches.

**The Advent of Football and other Alien Fascinations in the Cameroon Grassfields**

European imperialism and other alien practices swept through African traditional societies introducing alien practices that were perceived, accepted or rejected for varied reasons. African response to alien Cultures and practices from Europe was not uniform across the board because a lot of differences existed on the natives' perception of such practices and how that appealed to their material cultures. While the colonial agents used coarse methods to cause African folks to adhere and practice some of the things that were required to sustain their colonial economy, others simply appeared attractive to local folks and therefore a local rising desire to get involved. One of such attractive practices that at first formed patterns of leisure for colonial administrators was football. Like other forms of collective sports and singing, football represented far more than a game to the local folks especially the youths who were affected by such alien practices in a myriad of ways.

The effects of these passions on youths have witnessed alternating patterns right from colonization and inched forward through urbanization and rapid technological growth. The historical and geographical links which the youths of our study area shared with neighboring countries imbued in them an exacting feeling of fascination and anxiousness to swallow any new ideas from there almost wholesale (Ashutantang 2020). This explains why Grassfielders' addiction to formal or informal participation in football almost became an exceeding adventure of anxiety which none of them was prepared to occupy the backseat. The people of the Grassfields especially youths loved the football game for a number of reasons. Featuring high on the locals' fascination to the game was the fact that; it was more of a sort of wonders to many within the local milieu. It was not only exciting but crudely astonishing to see men run and even fight behind the ball viewed by many simply as an inflated balloon. The local folks tinted perception of the game made

those who excelled in it to be seen with rising admiration. Grassfielders in their different niches and ethnic units got charmed by the elegance with which colonial administrators exercised themselves in their yards or fields with the ball. Throughout the colonial period football remained essentially a prestigious game of relaxation placed within the limit of the colonial agents who used it alternatively to fight boredom. In areas like in the Bamenda Grassfields where the administrators entertained intimate social links with the population the love for football grew rapidly because most youths were often invited to join the colonial administrators during football exercises.

The missionaries who were in touch with the youths spared no effort to get the willing youth's involved in different kinds of football games that required lesser numbers of players than those of standard games (Njomo 2020). Just like the colonial agents, participating in football games required not only skills but also temperaments that were not inculcated overnight. It required a high percentage of civility and playing attires which were supposed to make those participating in the game different in morals and esteem. The idea of a distinct outfit in official games as well as the fact that the youths involved had to abandon home chores and spend time practicing rendered the whole exercise costly for most youths and parents who were more overwhelmed with matters of basic survival like food and shelter. When the need for games and competitions became gravely necessary, the Catholic, Baptist and Presbyterian missionaries provided the playing attires that were summarily pants, boots and sometimes socks for some youths to engage in football practices. This made them to appear among their peers much more like human beings from a planet diametrically different from the earth thereby attracting admiration and envy from their peers who were not privileged. The fascination for sports, games and other alien practices that fell out of the traditional cultural patterns most of the time failed to gain admiration from some Grassfields parents. Most of them were raised in a world of hardship and hard rules where leisure if any kind was limited within the confines of dancing, singing traditional songs and participating in lodges and elastic forms of cults that prevailed in the traditional economy prior to the percolation of any foreign practice. Drowned in this the introduction of alien practices like football ran counter to their taste and pattern of prestige.

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The admiration and fascination that came and went with formal or casual participation in football games among the youths really just scratched the surface of Grassfielders' traditional psyche. The people's ignorance about the value of sports and leisure economy that was of exceeding glory among the colonial administrators and other alien agents and agencies in the Grassfields made them to class all of that within the realms of idle deeds reserved for the weak, thoughtless and stubborn children. In fact, from Independence right up to the 1990s, Grassfields parents in their numbers still considered those who loved and ventured into football as lost cases for in their minds, football was classed along with schooling as a tricky scheme designed and developed by the colonial agencies for the lazy, stubborn and the outcast people of the society as earlier said. Indeed, football like Christianity, schooling and other chores from the alien realm of thought or way of life always represented far more than the sort of front view reading by the ordinary local folks within the Grassfields milieu. By any reckoning most of the alien practices had to do with exceeding transformations of the mind spirit and outlook of those concerned. The British in executing the task given to them by the Mandate Commission of the League of Nations and later, the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations; opted to use a colonial policy of indirect rule. According to the policy, the British colonial government governed the people according to their traditional African political organizations which they wanted to preserve (Ngoh 2018, 146-147). In their accounts on the elements of a History for the Western Grass fields, Nkwi and Warner further argue that the policy advocated for the creation of native treasuries where fines, fees, and one-third poll taxes were paid. The divisional officer governed the area through chiefs. These chiefs received stipends most especially the paramount Fons of Nso, Bali Bafut and Kom (Nkwi and Warnier 1982, 217). Again, Nkwi and Warnier further argue that even though Cameroon became a German protectorate by 1884, most of the country remained predominantly under the control of native chiefs this included the Grass fields. The chiefs of the Grass fields continued to manage their affairs without undue disturbances. This went on till 1901 when the Germans thanks to the visits of Zintgraft established a hold over the region (Nkwi and Warnier 1982, 213).

On November 4 1982, Ahmadou Ahidjo Cameroon's President since independence resigned and without giving reasons for his abrupt resignation, he called on all

Cameroonians to place their full confidence in and give whole-hearted support to his constitutional successor, Paul Biya (Fanso 2017, 361). Two days after Ahidjo's resignation Paul Biya took over the helm of affairs of the Nation. In his address he swore to continue with the policies of his predecessor but would inject those policies with rigor, integrity and moralization as Fanso notes (Fanso 2017, 362). This was thus the birth of the new deal era under Paul Biya. Thus according to the new deal administration, rigor meant the condemnation and rejection of 'irregularities, lateness, laxity, wastefulness and irresponsibility'. It was also the installation of 'rigor, life quality, productivity and efficiency' into national activity. Integrity and moralization meant the condemnation of the 'misappropriation of public and private funds, corruption, fraud, or illegal acquisition of wealth and moral depravity' (Nghoh 2018, 292). Cameroon witnessed some socio-political developments in the early stage of the New Deal era which affected football game and directly or indirectly contributed to rage, fury and violence in the practice of football competitions in the Bamenda Grass fields.

The New Deal package unleashed by Paul Biya sounded promising to many a Cameroonian. There was hope that the sections of the Cameroon societies that were left unattended to under Ahidjo were going to have their moral, financial and political accounts adequately balanced. There was euphoria about the promise of the installation of rigor and Grassfielders in their number were anxious to wallow in these new tidings of abundance. Under Ahidjo teams and football competitions had grown to be a norm and most important celebrations were always graced with football matches. From the yards of faint rejection football had grown to take local color in the Cameroon Grassfields. Tribes, Villages, Schools and other institutions used football to establish their hegemony. Such developments created a sense of local veneration to victory and anything out of that was simply not seen as an outcome or accepted with rage and fury. With the hegemonic feelings, Grassfielders always wanted to dominate others and hardly did they accept defeat this therefore, led to rage in football competitions especially when one team was defeated. Apart from the national football championships, school games, the mini interpool competitions and the interpool competitions, there were community shield that were organized by wealthy men in the society. There were also holydays football tournaments which individuals or some corporate bodies organized as part of their corporate social responsibilities.

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**The Context of the Rage and Fury (violence) in Football**

The New Deal era in the Cameroon political evolution spans roughly from 1984 to anytime after the year 2000. For the sake of clarity this paper has taken the upper limit of the new deal era to be the year 2005. This era is unique to the Cameroon political progress in ways uncounted. A sorted few of this uniqueness is the change of leadership at the helm of the state (Ahidjo to Paul Biya) which as indicated, closed many avenues to those who were favored by Ahidjo's leadership and was anticipated to open so many opportunities to those who were left stranded within the corridors of power in spite of their struggle to join the ruling cartel. The shift of power went beyond a simple transition from one person to the other. To Christians who are in the majority in Cameroon the change represented a fluid transition of power from a ruthless intolerant Muslim to a free-minded meek and efficient Catholic Christian. To the politically minded others whose crux was in the center and South regions, it entailed a happy shift of power from an ailing autocrat to a civilized cultured individual who was imbued with astonishing qualities in the art of administration. The educated lot saw this transition to mean the veritable arrival of a sound politician who could provide an atmosphere of liberation for all to emerge and contribute their fair share in nation building without the use of force as it was the case under Admadou Ahidjo. This change meant very little to the local men and women who were not only preoccupied with daily businesses but also engaged in improving their farm produce following the Green Revolution that Ahidjo had inaugurated in the 1970s. At best, they wished and prayed that such happy fortunes should continue to take shape and blossom under the new person whom few were interested to know much.

As expected Paul Biya in his book Communal Liberalism assured the minded board of opinions that great tidings were on the way within the realms of what he called the New Deal. To match words with actions multi-party system of governance was reborn in 1990s following the December 12 presidential decrees which brought on tour a reconfiguration of many institutions producing anxiety and expectation from for so many. An unfortunate outgrowth of this era which became a sort of night mare to the expectations of the people was the outbreak of the economic meltdown known in Economic jargons as economic crisis. The economic crisis was in no way the making of the government of Cameroon though political pundits who were feeling abandoned or pushed to oblivion in the

consumption of the beatitudes of the New deal worked hard to place the blame entirely on the Cameroon government. The economic malaise brought about austerity measures which forced the government to close up some of its Para-public agencies like WADA (Wum Area Development Authority) and MEDINO (North West Development Authority) in the Cameroon Grassfields. The closing up of these agencies rendered a lot of people jobless thereby setting up schemes of frustration and bewilderment among the local folks. As if the situation at hand was not bad enough, the government was still forced in this stabilization scheme to do extensive salary review through and within which salaries of civil servants were reduced by slightly more than half of their earnings. With this in play, the private sector which depended largely on the public humor and cash flow to survive found itself on a serious dilemma. Matters at all levels further negotiated a turn for the worse in 1994 when the Franc CFA got devalued. The devaluation technically increased the cost of living by more than 2/3 which further accentuated both the unemployment and anger against the state.

The joint effect of all of the above issues that ran counter to the expectations of Grassfields in particular and that of Cameroon at large was that people in their majority lost faith not only in the institutions of state but also on those who were governing it. The hatred for the state became alarming and pushed a lot of people to fringes of the society where acrimony of all sorts was germinated. It became exceedingly difficult for those who lost their jobs in the towns to adapt and even those who had their salaries fundamentally reduced were at the same height of anger and rancor against the state. The situation was gravely intense among the retrenched lots in the Grassfields. Idleness and frustrations born out of the scheme of these austerity measures caused most Grassfields folks who never anticipated such tragedy to negotiate their survival from the logic of charity and humanism whose duration could not be promptly measured. The disadvantaged many got indulged in a litany of therapeutic practices like profuse drinking, gambling and drug abuse which they thought could place them within the hinges of liberation.

### **Fermentation of Violence and its extension to Football**

On May 20<sup>th</sup> 1972, Cameroonians all voted through a referendum to change the form of state from Federal to Unitary. The nation erstwhile known as Federal Republic of Cameroon became the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984, the new deal

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administration under Paul Biya proposed some constitutional amendments which affected the nomenclature of the state. As a result the name of the state became known as the Republic of Cameroon. This amendment however went through successfully despite the attempted resistance from some Members of parliament like S.T. Muna, Fon Angwafor III and Joseph Chongwain (Nghoh 2012, 297-299). The adoption of that new name for the country raised tension and rage amongst the Anglophone Cameroonians including those in the Bamenda Grass field. This anger was due to the fact that Cameroonians from the North West and South West provinces as they were called regarded the move as assimilation. To them it was regarded as assimilation because both Cameroons reunited in 1961 as equal partners. This was because Republic of Cameroon was the name French Cameroon adopted at independence. Prior to the change of name there was much tension already existing on the social landscape of Cameroon with the failed assassination attempts on the life of the head of state. The frustrations that came along with the feeling of being assimilated brought about rage and fury on the football field. This was due to the fact that fans and supporters exploited the least opportunity to pour out their anger on football stakeholders. Therefore, much violence was recorded in the football milieu in the Bamenda Grass field. Rage and fury might have gone unnoticed in football competition if the First and \second Division matches were not played in Bamenda town and the rest of the Grassfields. The same holds for Cameroon Cup matches. As indicated the change both of the form of state and the name imposed a feeling of inferiority or being cheated amongst the Grassfields folk. They were in serious want of occasions to make their voices heard and football organized at national or regional levels provided lots of the needed vents. It soon grew to become an anathema for any visiting team to win the teams of the Grassfields in their home pitches. Winning in their slanted philosophy mean injecting another blow to a people whose identity and culture were carefully being enveloped. From 1990 till 2005 the Grassfields at the regional level produced teams like CAMARK Bamenda, PWD Bamenda, Kumbo Strickers and others who competed well. These teams could have done far better than what was obtained if local support in terms of sponsorship was adequate. The general poverty and mounting frustration destroyed the fan base of these clubs. Instead of getting discourage simply to withdraw their support to these teams, most of their supporters still came to watch matches loaded with accumulated grievances.

With already anger ridden mindsets the Bamenda stadium became an atmosphere of an enraged each time any of these team were playing.

The spectators in their numbers anchored no possibility of defeat at home by any visiting team and as such resorted to the macabre practice of always beating up the match officials or even some of the players and coaches when the match was not in their favor. Violence of a veritable sort became the order of the day during each march in the Mankon Municipal Stadium that served as the only pitch for Division one matches at the time. The love for football made some of the ignorant poor and excited spectators to think that the political losses could be handled by forced victories by their teams. Indeed those who played and officiated any matches in this Stadium have scary memories of the rage and fury of the spectators. On several accounts spectators invaded the field to demonstrate their discontent towards the arbitration of the match or to beat up both the players for not living up to expectations. On several accounts also, the stadium was suspended from hosting matches but the behavior of the spectators hardly changed more so because most of them wallowed in the illusions that they mastered games far better than any other official.

One of such episodes occurred in 1983 during a Division one match between PWD Bamenda and TKC Yaoundé. The host PWD was threatened by relegation and thus fans did not come into the field with a mindset of being defeated. In course of the match a TKC player dribbled past the PWD goal keeper this forced a die heart PWD supporter rush from the crowd and deviated the ball and prevented PWD from conceding a goal. Not prepared to see the home team defeated and relegated, more supporters invaded the pitch and disrupted the match. Security forces managed to get the players and officials out of the stadium as the situation became incontrollable. The violence ensued and supporters of PWD went rioting around the city and security forces tear-gassed them in a bid to bring the situation under control. The violent fans proceeded to burn down the Mobile Wing Police station at Ntarikon.

In fact, the display of violence through storming the pitch, intimidation of the homologation teams and thrashing both of visiting and home based players soon became a common feature of football in the Grassfields as the practice took a turn for the worse in the hinterland. The need to maintain intra, inter village and tribal hegemony pushed

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local spectators of matches to weary of any kind of defeat. Matches between neighboring villages, quarters and communities hardly went on for the required ninety minutes' duration without intermittent disruptions and violence from spectators and players as well. Matches with evidence of violence were just a sorted few. For example matches between Belo and Njinikom teams hardly ended without internal and external disruptions.

It was not only the spectators that animated the whole length and width of violence in the Grassfields as players, referees and other officials were also involved. The first quality of a good player should be his ability to accept defeat and the spirit of caring with even his opponent both within and out of the pitch. At some professional level like the First division matches this was obtained though not in full but the case in the hinterland of the Grassfields was a lot different. Football players in the rural zones of the Bamenda Grassfields suffered from multiple complexes which all moved in the direction of violence fermentation. In the first place most of them were just makeshift players who mastered mostly just the physical aspects of the game and not its rules. Secondly most of them were overwhelmed with the ambition to emerge as epic local heroes and so cared so little about their future in football or what their violent action could bring to them. To add to this should be the fact that some of them had their fortunes in football dictated to them by some persons with spiritual insights whose expertise in the art can best be judged and sentenced by gurus of metaphysics or African science. This entire complex worked in harmony to make the players aggressive both during and after matches. Players in this category showed no signs of exercising restraints and most of the time mistook their opponents for enemies.

### **Football Violence Rooted in the Economic Hardship**

Cameroon had a very stable flourishing and prosperous economy in the early 1980s. The glorious years in that decade did not last long as the new deal regime witnessed a major economic backlash. From the 1987, the economic crisis that had been crippling economies hit hard on Cameroon. There was a general fall in the prices of agricultural products on the world market, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed some conditions on Cameroon. Internally, the crises were caused by extravagance on the part of government officials, embezzlement, and drain of capital (Ngoh 1996 299-300). Faced

with this, Cameroon turned to the IMF for help as earlier mentioned. Thus the IMF's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) had to be implemented on Cameroon. These measures included the reduction of public expenditure removal of public subsidies, dismantlement of public sector, privatization and devaluation among others (Konings 1996, 245). The crisis had serious impact on the economy of Cameroon which brought suffering and misery to citizens and the nation at large. As a result of the crisis government projects proposed or started in the boom days of the new deal era were either suspended or abandoned as a result of financial constraints. The economic crisis greatly affected football practice in the Bamenda Grassfields because the stakeholder were limited in finances to organize befitting competitions this often led to violence because at the end of most competitions the participants were frustrated as the promised rewards by the cup donors or most shield organizers were nowhere to be found thus violence easily erupted. It was also a tradition in the Bamenda Grass field that fans/spectators paid a token for gate fee to access the locally fenced playgrounds to watch matches. Also, teams needed money to register into competitions and get license and other logistics for players to participate in the competitions. The difficulty that came with acquiring funds during the period of economic crisis only resulted to violence in football competitions. This was because some fans/spectators forced their way into the locally fenced playgrounds while some teams insisted on participating in competitions without being registered and with unlicensed players. As a result, most cases of violence were recorded in football competitions during the late 1980s and 1990s in the Bamenda Grassfields.

### **The Wave of Multi-partism and Civic Unrest**

The New Deal government inherited a single party system from the previous government. Ahidjo successfully implemented a single party in the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1966. He convinced West Cameroonian politicians to dissolve their parties and on September 1 1966, the Cameroon National Union (CNU) was. The coming to power of Paul Biya and the setting up of the new deal regime saw the birth of a new party in 1985 in a CNU congress in Bamenda. The new party was named the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and president Biya was elected as its National chairman. In the late 1980s, there was a political revolution which is also known as 'the wind of change'. This wind that led to disintegration in the Soviet Union affected many African countries including Cameroon though Cameroonians resisted it from the beginning (Ngho

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2018 338). One of the effects of the wind was the reintroduction of multiparty politics. This resistance was visible even in the ruling CPDM party as its supporters and sympathizers marched through the country in denial to it. Despite this, the national chairman of the CPDM party in a radio/TV address on April 9 1990 went ahead to advise them to be prepared for multiparty politics (Ngoh 2018 339). Bamenda the chief town of the Bamenda Grassfields at this time had a tensed socio-political atmosphere and it was under this condition that one of its inhabitants launched the Social Democratic front (SDF) political party on May 26, 1990 in Ntarikon. The launching led to the death of six persons and many injured (Ibid 339-3340). The atmosphere in the Bamenda Grassfields at the time thus became much tensed and this was the same scenario in the football playgrounds during competitions which led to violence. The government passed Law No.90/055 of December 1990 which provided for the formation of political parties this gave way to the birth of many more political parties. However the SDF party remained the dominant party in the Bamenda Grassfields.

One of the tools used by opposition political leaders to resist the New deal regime was the call for civil disobedience. These acts were also referred to as operation ghost towns by which, strikes were organized to close shops and offices and halt transportation attempting to turn cities into ghost towns. The aim was to deprive the Yaoundé regime of tax revenue and forcing them to introduce new reforms. The exercise began in June 1991 and took place in major cities like Douala, Bafoussam and Bamenda (Robert 1991). In course of this civil disobedience, some lives were lost in confrontation between the military and the disgruntled civilians. The ghost town operations saw shops closed and no transportation this brought father economic hardship as some people lost their investments as they attempted to violate the civil disobedience and operate (Ibid). The atmosphere was very tensed during the periods of civil disobedience and this contributed to the rage and fury that was felt by football stakeholders in the Bamenda Grassfields and as a result it was but normal that there should be recorded acts of violence during football in the Bamenda Grassfields, a region that was badly hit by the operation ghost towns.

### **Manifestation of violence in football in the Bamenda Grassfields**

When the game of football was introduced in the Bamenda Grassfields, elements of violence were recorded with its practice. This was during the numerous community organized competitions and so in the New Deal era news of acts of violence in football competitions was not a strange phenomenon. Varied types of violence were registered in football competitions; fan/spectator based violence, player-player based violence, player-match official based violence, fan/spectator- player based violence, fan/spectator- match official based violence. The reason for such actions could generally be grouped to fall broadly under indigenous components, institutional undertone, and match management instances.

With regards to indigenous components, the Bamenda Grassfields had a strong centralized indigenous system of administration. This made the people to strongly believe in hegemony. This hegemonic system and belief of dominance made football fans not to easily accept defeat. As a result, when a team was defeated in a competition especially on home soil it wasn't taken lightly. This ignited vengeance and as a result they decided to retaliate the defeat through violent means. Thus it was difficult for the fans to exercise the spirit of fair play. As Agwa a retired footballer and victim of football violence puts it, violence either erupted towards the end of the match or immediately the match ended and at times was extended to the towns or the neighborhoods where the players and fans of the opposite teams lived (Agwa 2020). The Bamenda Grassfields is made up of many tribes and ethnic groups and in some football competitions, football teams were usually formed based on tribal links. In case where such teams participated in a competition and a match ended up violently the repercussions were usually far reaching. This was because the rage went beyond the defeat on the turf so the conflicting stakeholders had to revisit passed scores or clashes and set out to settle them through a fight. This was still attributed to the idea of hegemony as one tribe wanted to dominate and suppress the other in all aspects. Therefore, a football game was used to revisit and seek vengeance on political issues that were recorded by history.

Still as concerns indigenous components that led to violence in football competitions in the Grassfields, was the manner in which football teams were named. The nomenclature of a team alone was enough to create an enabling atmosphere for violence. In other to

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show dominance or create an atmosphere that would super impose fear on the opposing teams, football stakeholders decided to go in for nomenclatures that were frightful. Some examples of such names amongst others were red devil FC, bullet FC, wild tigers FC, dangerous shooting stars FC, angry warriors FC. From the name a pre-judgment could be made that violence was a possible feature in the match. The players wanted to defend these titles even in the fields of play and so at times there was much foul play which sometimes led to violence and match could end prematurely. In the case for example where a team was named wild tigers, the players will obviously have to be wild in their play style to intimidate the opponent and defend the title they bore.

One cause of violence in football competitions in the Bamenda Grassfields during the New Deal era was the comportment of fans or spectators. Many people especially spectators went to football playgrounds not with the passion to watch football matches but because of other factors. Some went around the field for economic activities, some went for emotional and social issues since football in the New deal Era especially after the brilliant performance of the Cameroon's national football team in the final phase of the 1990 FIFA world cup in Italy, football became Cameroon's legal opium as Ngoh notes (Ngoh 2018, 318). Before matches began some spectators had drunk much liquor and were already under its influence. With such a state, such a person was already a ready agent for violence. Pre-match debates and bets were usually visible around the field of play and therefore, those who lost in their bets easily got into acts of violence especially due to the tough nature of the economy at the time. Such fans wanted to use football as a means of making some money for survival. Pre-match debates and sarcasm greatly contributed to acts of violence in football competitions. Another visible element on the part of fans/spectators which brought violence was the chanting of provocative songs using violent languages to the opposing fans. This could be done by the team that was been led or was leading.

A zoom will be taken into a scenario that took place at the Presbyterian school field, Nkambe in 1996. The nature of violent acts that took place in this match was the spectator-based violence which was a common type in football matches in the Grassfields. This was violence due to spectator or fan's comportment. It was a community tournament

organized by an industrious elite from the area who preferred to be referred to as Awilo in public (Bongjo 2022). It was a quarter final match that pitted Binka red devils and Nansara FC. The Binka red devils were a visiting team while Nansara Fc was a home-based team in Nkambe where the competition was staged. It was a must win match between these two teams and at the end of 90minutes, the Binka red devils won the match thanks to a late controversial penalty awarded to them by the central referee, Mr Nformi Isaac a physical education instructor at the time was accused of poor refereeing and haven received bribe from the red devils. These were basely accusations from supporters and team of officials of Nansara FC. The match witnessed interruption from angry fans that began throwing objects such as stones and stick in to the pitch and utterance life threatening utterancies to the central referee and players of Binka red devils. This was out of frustration and shame of a possible early exit from the competition. Along the field fans of Binka red devils began chanting provocative songs of victory which further mounted tension. The Nansara Fc fans believed that they were the town team that hosted other 'inferior' teams and so they couldn't accept defeat on home ground. The violence was also caused by the fact that the myth of Nansara superiority was broken by the red devils. At the end of the match therefore, fans from the home-based team (Nansara Fc) who had a dominating majority invaded the pitch and seriously rough handled the central referee and all visiting players. This led to total commotion in the pitch as the fans from Binka red devils and their players equally retaliated It took about an hour for the forces of law and order to restore calm and successfully convey wounded players and match officials to the District Hospital. Mean while other wounded fans were taken to other medical facilities in the town. Properties were equally destroyed relations between people of Binka and Nkambe became strained. The organising committee of the tournament sanctioned some players of Nansara Fc and the team was equally fined, Massa (2022).

In the New Deal era, football matches witnessed acts of violence in the Bamenda Grassfields due to instances of poor match management. In most competitions especially those not organized by the football federation, amateur match officials were contracted to officiate matches. These men were either sports teachers or trustworthy men with a good knowledge of football rules who were handpicked from the society by those in charge of organizing the football competitions. Violent cases were recorded during or after the match in case where one of the officials sanctioned a wrong move in course of the match

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by accident or by design. Such cases commonly included the awards of penalty kicks, the award of a red or yellow card as warning or sanction to a player or coach by the central referee. Some of these cases brought the match to an abrupt end as fans/spectators would flood the pitch in protest to the move and that was already a fertile moment for violence. In some cases when the match official sanctioned a move which the disgruntled party thought was biased, they angrily walked out of the field in protest setting the stage for angry fans to decide the fate of the match. Returning home was not an easy task at times for the match officials this because the fans always interrupted him and got him brutalized after the match. In some cases, the referee had to take to his hills immediately he sounded the last whistle to officially end the match (Bongong 2019). The economic hardships that stroke the Bamenda Grassfields and Cameroon in general in the 1990s made the people to resort to illegal means of raising money. This also included football stakeholders. Match officials and some players sometime got involved in corrupt practices whereby they took money from teams that desperately needed a victory or from some of the players. In such cases, the actions of the central referee or match officials were visible. This as he either by design or error sanctioned some unjust moves. In case where players were involved in corrupt practices and money laundry, they intentionally got into some foul that gave the opposing team goal scoring advantage. This provoked the angry fans that easily launched into acts of violence.

In the 1980s, a North West regional League match between Kumbo Strikers and Bafut United ended in a chaos. The visiting Bafut United was a goal down and their supporters blamed the central referee of bias and that he had received bribe from the opposing team to favor them. They clashed with security forces on the pitch that were poised at restoring order. This generated to generalize fighting out of the pitch. Many supporters were wounded and some of the Bafut United supporters were detained for safety reason. They however left Kumbo days later when calm had returned.

Finally, the people of the Bamenda Grassfields though some were Christians and some Muslims; they still practiced African Traditional Religion (ATR). This therefore made them to believe that the practice of football must be accompanied by some mysterious powers (Awemoh 2020). During football competitions, some participating teams came

to the field with charms and fetish objects under strict instructions from a witchdoctor or priest on how to use them. Once at the play ground the manner of usage of these fetish objects on strict instructions from the witchdoctor or priest, the opposing team was provoked and this generated violence. In some cases for instance, the objects needed to be thrown in the opponents half of the field or pole before the match kicked off, there players were instructed not to enter the pitch through the normal passage, they were not to greet anybody on the way to the field, the witch doctor or priest himself came to the field personally and had to perform some rituals and at times just seeing him the opponents of that team brought uncontrolled disorder (Awonti 2020). At times the fetish objects were carried into the pitch just as a way to deter the opponents especially those teams that were on away matches.

### **Institutional and Indigenous Response to Violence in Football**

Due to frequent acts of violence in football competitions in the Grassfields, some measures were taken or reinforced to curb these activities and make football a safer game so as to remain the king sports in the region. The football stakeholders easily responded to the measures as the strictly implemented them.

In order to organize a football competition, an authorization was to be obtained from the Divisional Officer who was the chief executive of the area where the completion was to take place. Once the authorization was granted the next step was to inform the divisional or regional bureau of the football federation. This office could provide license and competent referees if demanded. The organizing committee could easily request and get security from the state once the Divisional Officer had granted authorization for the competition to be held. With all these steps taken the football competition became legal and legal prosecutions could be taken against anyone who was involved in acts of violence. The forces of law and order deployed maintained peace and security on the play ground and acts of violence were reduced. However, it should be noted that some competitions were still organized without using these legal procedures. In case where the football federation was involved in football competitions mostly community shields or tournament they provided competent referees who ensured the rules of the game were followed to the latter. In these types of competitions, the organizing body came up with tough rules and regulations that governed the tournament or competitions. The rules were

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hard on sanctioning those who perpetuated acts of violence in course of the competition amongst others, they paid heavy fines and some players had their licenses withdrawn while some teams and officials were suspended. Fans were also made to understand the implications of acts of violence on their teams in case of a fight or any incident of violence that was recorded in the competition. This caution in one way or the other tamed the furious fans that controlled their emotions and saved their teams from dangers of sanctions. The spirit of fair play and conviviality was greatly encouraged amongst the football stakeholders. And also, to contain acts of violence fans from different clubs were not allowed to occupy the same section in the field of play this was to avoid violence during critical moments of the match. Thus, as such fans and supporters of each club occupied a unique section in the field and their movements round the field were most often discouraged. For match officials, players and team officials who were found guilty of match fixing they were severely sanctioned by the competition's organizing committee.

**The Weight of Violence in Football competition in the Cameroon Grassfields**

The expression of rage, fury in football competitions in the Bamenda Grassland had some repercussions on the game as a whole and on the people of the region. They were felt in the social as well as in the economic domain during the new deal era. Acts of violence during football competitions left some football stakeholders with injuries. In most cases of violence, perpetrated by the players, fans or spectators, dangerous weapons were used such as stones, daggers, bottles and razors. These objects inflicted much pain on the victims who ended up in hospitals. To make matters worse, there was general economic hardship which made some of these people to be unable to seek adequate medical care (Awemoh 2020). Apart from injuries, properties were also destroyed in course of the acts of violence, business places suffered destruction of properties and some of their merchandise were also been looted when the surrounding atmosphere became tensed and uncontrollable. As a result, the actions instead brought about negative repercussions economically to add to the existing situation that the people lived at the time (Ibid).

Apart from destruction of properties and looting, the practice of violence, gave a negative image to the football game and to the region in general. In areas where such acts were

frequent, football stakeholders from there had a stereotype because in future competitions their players and teams were either refused registering to participate or were not welcomed by most organizing committees of competitions (Awemoh 2020). This denial to register players of certain teams or from certain localities made it difficult for some talented footballers to ply their trade in the region or to excel. This limited their chances and some who could go professional did not have the chance to do so due to acts of violence.

The acts of violence made some competitions to come to an abrupt end without realizing its objectives. This as the game became a ground to settle scores and no longer a game that united the people because the spirit of fair play was lost. This was happening at a period in time when the government used football as a uniting factor to unite Cameroonians who were disgruntled and divided over many societal issues and political parties as well as political opinions.

### **Conclusion**

Cameroon (East and West) was reunified in 1961 with Ahidjo as president who ruled until 1982 and handed over to his constitutional successor Paul Biya. The coming of Paul Biya saw some radical announcements which made his regime to look very promising at the time he ascended power. The announced changes were cemented with the name of the era which was the New Deal Era. In this era, virtues such as rigor, moralization and were expected from all Cameroonians who served under the new deal regime. The regime survived attempted military take over before it was been hit by the economic crisis. This setback saw the regime embracing the SAP from foreign body, devaluation of the currency, salary cuts, closure of many companies, loss of jobs and general economic hardship. In the 1990s multiparty politics was reintroduced in the country and the events in that followed equally led to civil disobedience. This paper had as thesis that, football competitions in the Bamenda Grassfields were characterized by rage, fury (violence) during the new deal era. The above socio-economic events set the stage for rage and fury to possess the hearts and minds of Cameroonians who lived in the Grass field and this therefore, led to acts of violence during football competitions. The Bamenda Grassfields was the area governed by the British during the trusteeship that covered the Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe Divisions. Today, they are found in the North West region an

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administrative area in the Republic of Cameroon. The socio-political atmosphere permitted the football stakeholders to use any means to satisfy either economic or social desires. Varied reasons accounted for the practice of violence in football competitions in the Bamenda Grassfields during the new deal era. They ranged from indigenous components to institutional components. The names of teams which sounded very violent in nature, the idea of hegemony in the region, the belief in and use of fetish objects in football matches led to acts of violence in football competitions in the Bamenda Grass field amongst others. These activities had far reaching consequences on football as a game or sport, football stakeholders and football competitions in general. It however set the stage for the introduction of measures that made football competitions to be better organized. Apart from better organization it attracted many more people to the game and made it to maintain its position as king sports and a unifying factor in the Bamenda Grassfields during the new Deal Era.

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