

Female Traditional Militancy in the Bamenda Grassfields: The Case of "Anlu" of the Kom Fandom, 1928-1972

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ABSTRACT

The struggle for gender equality and enchanting discourses on egalitarianism in governance and other sectors have ignited multidirectional policy and scholarly interest in women and their participation in varied aspects of public life. While the drive for female emancipation has gained enormous ground in the global North, its parallel push in the global South, especially in Africa, has been relatively muted. There has been a neglect, in policy and scholarly circles, of women's ability, under certain circumstances, to resort to violence or protest against patriarchy or some forms of domination. In African societies, there have historically been various forms of female protest which unfortunately have been given scant attention. In the Bamenda western Grassfields of Cameroon, a historically glorified sanctuary of patriarchy, forces of change – notably education, Christianity and changing worldviews and perceptions of property ownership – provided opportunities for women to seek various ways of addressing or highlighting their grievances. This approach overwhelmingly led to protests and various forms of militancy, overturning conservative perceptions about the female folk. This study lingers on these mutations to show the spiral of female militancy in the Grassfields with emphasis on *Kom*. The paper draws from a careful review of oral and written literature and a consultation of (especially *Kom Fandom*) sources. Over 70% of the information for this study was obtained through written sources. The study finds that the changing dimensions of female revolt were thanks to the courage and determination of some key persons in the *Kom Fandom* like Fuam, Muana and Jua Nathalia Nuh. They and their successes served as inspiration for neighbouring villages in which similar associations such as "Fembue," "Ndofumbue" and "Takumbeng" of Aghem, BabakiTungoh and Bafut, respectively, were created.

Key Words: Mutations, Grassfields, Anlu, and Kom.

INTRODUCTION

In pre-colonial Africa, women were highly recognized and respected. They occupied important positions in the socio-cultural organization of society, notably

the role of queen mother in palaces. Yet their contributions were invisible. Due to the centralized nature of governance and the patriarchal setup of the society, decision-making was kept within the limited circles of their counterparts (Nkeneh 2023, 20). Women were recognized as baby factories with their sleeping positions on the left of the bed (or, as it is described in some Cameroonian communities, *behind the bed*). Thus, their role and contributions were underestimated (Kathleen 1978, 122). The nature of their treatment and recognition has gained sufficient interest from scholars in Africa (Kaberry 2024; Ardener 1975; Chilver and Kaberry 1967). Their active participation in politics, the economy and policy-making coupled with the works of chauvinist apostles and egalitarianism has placed them near balance. Even if lapses still prevailed, the arrival of Europeans with Christianity and other international organizations bestowed on women some rights which have found expression in central African countries such as Congo, Gabon, Chad, and Cameroon (Fotem and Gormo 2008, 91; Guittet 2015, 5).

In the Bamenda Grassfields, the migratory and implantation trend of the *Fondom*, as well as its expansion, was done amidst conflicts. In this region of over 150 independent villages, most conflicts were propelled by competition for the control of resources, land and people. More powerful chiefdoms waged wars to gain control over their neighbours (Nkwi1987, 6). According to Vansina, wars of conquest were not meant to annihilate enemies; rather, they were a means of annexing weak kingdoms (Vansina 1962, 328). This was the case between the Bali-Nyonga and Ngyen-Mboh, Bali-Nyonga and Chomba, Kwashin and Mundali, Bali-Kumbat and Bafanji, Kom and Mujang, and so on. Surprisingly, the attempts by men to resolve these conflicts were in most cases short-lived. However, between 1928 and 1972, despite their inferior status, the contribution of women in leadership and peace-building initiatives, especially using traditional means, historically led to the right decisions. Kom history and folktales point to the belief that the Kom people left Babessi around the late 1920s led by a woman, Nandong, and 1972 stands for the period when the women of Kom resorted to the writing of petitions and full involvement in rural development.

The general notion about Africans by some Europeans misled the latter. A missionary interviewed by Kaberry affirmed that “*the women of this division have achieved a remarkable degree of freedom development, contrary to notions abroad*” (Kaberry1952, xix). The women of Kom *Fondom* are a crucial example of this transformation. Due to excesses and life-threatening issues, women employed varied forms and methods of militancy to combat particular problems, thus greatly contributing to political, economic and social change (Tchouota Margoue2019, 3). This was especially seen in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods with different appellations for militant women’s groups across the Bamenda Grassfields, such as “*Takumbeng*” in Bafut and Nkwen, “*Fumbue*” in Mmen and Aghem, “*Ndofumbue*” in Babaki-Tungoh and especially “*Anlu*”¹ in Komland.

Although much has been written on female emancipation, gender egalitarianism and female combatants, the mutations of female traditional militancy in Kom *Fondom* from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period remain understudied. This paper therefore seeks to bridge this gap. To this end, primary and secondary sources were used.

I. KOM KINGDOM UNDER FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

The women of the Bamenda Grassfields in general and Kom *Fondom* in particular played a crucial role in the liberation struggle against colonial rule, as did women throughout Africa. However, their role has unfortunately not received the same attention as men’s (Kah, 2011,1) some research, including Awasom (2002, 2006), Shanklin (1990), Nkwi (1976, 1985), and Diduk (1989, 2004), though focused on women’s role, do not position women as a central factor in the liberation struggle in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. Nkwi and Nkwain (1963), however, examined some aspects of women’s role. In the Kom *Fondom*, from its nascent stage to its settlement and eventual expansion, women have been presented as movers and makers of history. Their actions had political, economic and cultural

¹*ANLU*: is a disciplinary technique designed by women to seek redress for particular offences committed by men against womanhood.

underpinnings. The early and mysterious death of the *Fon* of Kom after the bloody massacre of the able population, put the remaining members of the community, as they undertook an impromptu migration, under a female leader Nandong, sister of the deceased *Fon* (Tangnakoli, Muni). Nandong took the remaining population from Babessi to their present settlement (Gam 2010, 17). Her diplomatic and bureaucratic techniques were evident in the peaceful cohabitation during their migration journey. Her reign in Kom Fondom before colonization was one of the most peaceful because of her leadership techniques and abilities. Owing to her successes in the political, economic and social spheres, women gained more strength and looked upon her as a model. Her dynamics gave women the stamina to rise against injustice and inhuman practices prevailing in their community. Coupled with the presence of the Europeans, Christianity-related activities and the United Nations Organization provided the mutations of female traditional militancy in the Kom Fondom.

Women's groups, like other voluntary associations in the colonial era, served as vehicles for new ideas and a testing ground for political leaders. This challenges official narratives that have relegated women's groups and leaders to the footnotes of history (Shanklin 1990).

SETTLEMENT AND EXPANSION OF THE KOM KINGDOM

Kom *Fondom*, from its creation, through the settlement of its people, to its expansion, has experienced myriad types of conflict, including wars of expansion against neighbouring or vassal states and of conquest. These conflicts resulted from the presumed unequal distribution of land and natural resources and, above all, colonial abuses. In each of these situations, women were influential in post-conflict adjudications and sanctions, whether it entailed punishing culprits while maintaining their status as community members, or banishing them altogether from the community. For this reason, from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era, we observed the mutations of women's remarkable role in Kom *Fondom*, as they embarked on traditional means of conflict resolution, management and reconciliation – which constitute our major concern.

II.1 THE PRE-COLONIAL FEMALE TRADITIONAL MILITANCY (*ANLU*)

During the pre-colonial period, Kom *Fondom* witnessed many conflicts, notably in the form of inter-tribal wars. A range of factors contributed to this state of affairs. Powerful polities were determined to raid and subjugate their neighbours to occupy enough land for agriculture (Ngoh, 1990: 3). These were usually catapulted by the expansionist tendencies of some *Fons* such as Yuh, whose reign could be described as "the reign of terror" (Nkwi and Warnier 1982, 175). New village settlements were founded as many royals moved out to areas such as Abu, Njinikom, Yang and Alim. Villages were founded by royals who had moved out of Laikom because of *Fon* Yuh`s prevalent aggression. In all of these conflicts or wars of expansion, the place of women has remained pivotal as far as conflict resolution and reconciliation is concerned.

However, as far as the pre-colonial period is concerned, oral tradition and scholarly literature point to different controversies regarding female traditional militancy ("*Anlu*") in the Kom *Fondom*;

II.1.1- Fon Tangnakoli and the Babessi Fon`sTrickery

One school of thought, led by Francis Nkwain, stipulates that the "*Anlu*" came into existence owing to acts of trickery on the Kom people by the Fon of Babessi. This trickery resulted largely from jealousy of the Kom population. Given their prosperity and demographic increase, there arose a fear on the Babessi *Fon*'s side, that the Kom would one day dominate them. Thoughts were nurtured, well planned and calculated by the Babessi *Fon* to eliminate the entire active male population of Kom *Fondom* – a largely successful plan. (Gam 2010, 19). According to Francis Nkwain, this act saw the origin of "*Anlu*" which can be traced back to Babessi. This is because owing to this trick, the active male population of Kom origin was destroyed in what could be characterized as somewhat genocidal. As a result, women declared themselves and kept guard at Babessi. While the few old men built houses and searched for food, the women sought the means to revenge the heavy loss which had, however, sowed the seed of "*Anlu*"(ibid., 20).

II.1.2- Conflict between the Kom and the Mujang

According to Walter Gam (in Nkwain 1963), another school of thought led, by Veronica Bongni, maintains that when the Kom people journeyed from Babessi to Laikom, they were constantly harassed by their neighbours; the Mejang, Ajung, Bafmeng and Kijem. Kom subsequently became a vassal state of Ajung and Mejang, required, as per the customs and traditions, to pay tributes to the Ajung and Mejang Fondoms. The Kom were required to carry out various arduous tasks for their masters. They were, for instance, required to use castor oil instead of water to mix mud that was used for construction at the Mejang palace. Eventually, the Kom people refused to perform this difficult task. This refusal was considered by the Mejang as an act of rebellion which had to be suppressed. The opportune moment came when the *Fon* of Kom and his men were on a hunting expedition at Ake. Mujang warriors invaded Laikom, the capital of the Kom Fandom, intending to capture women and children as prisoners of war (Nkwi 1976, 131).

It is said that during this war many people lost their lives while some escaped, leaving only a physically deformed man who was captured. Recognizing the identity of his captors, he was amazed. He eventually became the messenger instructed by the women to tell the Fon and the Mujang people that they would be the ones paying tributes to the Kom Fandom (Nsom 2015, 154).

Nonetheless, under the strict instructions of the queen's mother (*"nafon, nafoyn"*), Kom women stripped themselves naked. It was during this period that the Mejang tributary chiefdom was displaced from its original place through a concerted effort of women. Kom female folk dressed up in men's clothing successfully kept the Mejang warriors at bay, inflicting a humiliating defeat on them (Nkwi and Warnier 1982, 174).

II.2-FEMALE MILITANTS DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The first democratic regime changes in Africa south of the Sahara was also the first time women were enfranchised in British-administered UN Trust Territory.

According to Nfi (Nfi 2019, 12), this enfranchisement of women was thanks to the Lancaster House Conference of 1958 which gave women the right to vote. Before this, there had been women's groups. The end of colonialism and its incapacitating effects transformed many of these groups into political associations through which grievances were variedly expressed against the ruling authorities. This was the case with the "*Anlu*" of Kom, which was initially meant to sanction or exile people who were a nuisance or an irritation to the community (Kam 2011, 16).

The end of colonial rule can be considered a period of rebirth for women. This end, coupled with the prominent roles women had occupied in the westernization drive, which took the form of Christianity, saw women of Kom become active in the socio-economic and political development of the *Fondom*. They were either instigated or manipulated by circumstances or individuals who exploited women's potential for their benefit.

During this period, a large-scale "*Anlu*" was able to disrupt life in the Bamenda Grassfields from 1958 until 1961. These women sought to resolve problems such as grievances by women over the agricultural policy of the British (contour ploughing). They were also used by the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) to discredit the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) and dislodge it from power (Ndoncha 2006, 18). The actions of these women were prolific. They were joined by other women from Wum, Bafut and Babanki. Malcome Milne, Deputy Commissioner for the Southern Cameroons, and Ken Shaddock, Divisional Officer for Bamenda, received the women and accepted to suspend the law on contour ploughing. This was an indication that women were a force to reckon with and that women were to play a vital role in the battle for leadership between the KNC and the KNDP. The British could not continue to ignore the demands of the women (Nfi, 2019, 114).

II.2.1-Internal Strife between the Militants and Local Inhabitants

At the end of the First World War, the Bamenda Grassfields (Southern Cameroons) became a mandated territory under the British administration, with

well-defined roles (Ngoh 1987). The British later petitioned this portion to solve administrative inconveniences. As already mentioned, the Lancaster House conference gave women free enfranchisement, clearing the way for their full involvement in politics. This period of Renaissance with conflicting tendencies brought women from the backbench to real politics, either induced by politicians or by force of circumstance. An avalanche of factors such as the contour ploughing system and grazier-farmer conflicts had a direct effect on women who were bent on subsistence farming (Kah, 2022,13). Politicians were caught in this web. Emmanuel M. Leffafe Endeley, the premier of the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly, was scheduled to travel through the Kom region to prepare for elections in 1959 (Ngoh1979). Just before his scheduled visit, on 4th July 1958, a meeting was held in the town of Njinikom, during which a regional council member was to explain the contour farming law. It was chaired by Chia Kiyam Bartholomew or C.K. Barth, as fondly called by his peers. Women surrounded the meeting before it adjourned and started the "*Anlu*" with the traditional shrill cry. Seeing the severity of the situation, Bartholomew escaped from the meeting, chased by the women to the local priest's house. After a couple of hours, he left and returned home where the women gathered again that night (Tchouota 2015, 15).

The women who dressed in scattered clothes, men's clothing, and traditional vines spent the night following the usual "*Anlu*" practices of shaming Bartholomew and polluting his yard. Schools and markets would be disrupted by similar groups of women around the region, and on 7th July, there occurred the first in a series of disruptions to schools. The women were able to set up multiple roadblocks and prevent supporters from attending the 11th July visit by KNC chairman Endeley. The Kamerun National Congress (KNC) supporters were ostracized and the women forbade everyone from visiting the houses of KNC supporters or suspected supporters. The women also began ceremonial mock burials of KNC officials and supporters and it was believed by some that the "*Anlu*"

resulted in the sudden death, on 21st December, of Joseph Ndong Nkwain – the KNC chairman for the Kom region (Ndoncha 2006, 15).

The aftermath of these women's revolts was the disruption of court, school and market activities throughout the Kom region for the rest of the year, with protests and other activities. As administrative mechanisms, both traditional and colonial, proved to be entirely powerless, the protests continued. The demonstrations were so wild that no police action could handle it. Only a few police officers were dispatched to restore peace, and the government had to dialogue with the women. Even the traditional ruler, *Foyin* Alo'o Ndiforngu became virtually powerless as the women had taken over control of tribal affairs (Ibid. 17).

The "*Anlu*" however faced enormous challenges, such as in the field of communication. Communication is a central function in any movement or organization. In the case of the Kom *Fondom*, as exemplified in the case of "*Anlu*", the rough topography was a major challenge. Therefore, during these mass demonstrations, the women in the Kom *Fondom* leveraged means of communication which played a formidable role, using tools such as the gong, the communicating or *talking* drum (*guh*) and the shrill cry (Ibid. 20).

II.2.2-Discriminatory Practices and Social Excesses in the Society

The ingenuity of Kom women towards reticence and nonchalant individuals caused a severe rupture, stretching into the system of the colonial administration. It lasted for three years, from 1958 to 1961. During that period, the *Fon*, whose name and position were supposed to be sacrosanct, was constantly humiliated and called by name. His executive arm, "*kwifon*", seen as an epitome of strength, was undermined by the women and many more men who did not sympathize with the women were ostracized.² Although calling the *Fon* by name was taboo in Kom, during the "*Anlu*" period, the sacrilegious practice was rife even among women. The revolt was started in Njinikom mostly by Christian converts. It has

²Bobe Gam Godfrey, 76 years old, interviewed in Fundong on 15/11/2023

therefore been argued that Christianity influenced how the revolt started (De Vries 1998, 44).

The missionaries' teaching about the equality of humans as well as the liberal ideas inculcated among Christians could not be completely separated from the revolt. From this perspective, it is unsurprising that the main leaders of the revolt were early Christian converts like Thecla Neng, Muana, Juliana Chiambong and Fuam. Furthermore, the revolt suggests more crucially that new notions of gender and women's rights had already reached Kom. The mobility and appropriation of education by other women like Benedicta also suggested to the women that they could assert their rights when threatened. The women too were eyewitnesses to the growing urbanization in Kom, and especially in Njinikom, with the opening of Congo Bar and the phenomena of women drinking and smoking in public (Gam 2008, 90).

The above examples show that the church brought about changes. One of these changes was embedded in the powerful position of the *Fon* who legitimated Christianity. This does imply that the *Fon* was a blind collaborator with the church and Christianity. He had accepted to "ride the tiger" as much as he knew that his people needed progress and that the church and Christianity were relevant. This situation was similar to what Roberts experienced in other parts of the African continent such as in Uganda, where the Kabaka negotiated his position. Along similar lines, *Fon* Ndi collaborated with British colonial administrators and missionaries in Kom. When the role of the church as a medium of transformation is considered, the gender aspect is striking. Not only was the power base of the *Fon* undermined, but the relationship between the sexes was also questioned. The church paved the way for a new interpretation of gender relations that diverged considerably from Kom traditional mores. Kom women, for example, assumed positions that had been exclusively reserved for men. One coordinator of the women's revolt, Muana, was given a seat in the Kom Native Court, marking the first time that women had gained representation in the court (Ibid. 2008, 100).

Those who widely threatened the existing power structure of the Fondom were the youths. The local hierarchies created by the colonial administration had little place for Kom youths. These local hierarchies had even contributed to the emigration of some youths, like Timti. With the youths anxious to be recognized the church appeared to be the only place for them (Ferguson and Gupta 1992, 6-7). The youths, therefore, appropriated Christianity and became a rung in the social hierarchy in their own right, while paying little or no respect to the traditional authority (Gam 2008, 104).

II.2.3 The 1955 Land Reforms and Antagonism between the KNDP and KNC

In 1955, women farmers of the Kom Fondom of the western Grassfields were angered by some changes which they interpreted as systematically decreasing their power. These included the increasing frequency of the nomadic Fulani cows coming into their fields and eating their crops, and a law stating that they must switch to a new type of farming called contour cultivation (Tchouota 2015, 2-3).

This farming law coincided with land reforms promulgated in 1955 in the agricultural sector, titled "a law to make provision for regulating the planting and growth of crops, for the control of plant, diseases and pests and matters connected therewith".³ These laws were published in laws of the Southern Cameroons in 1954, 1955 and 1956, containing the ordinances and subsidiary legislation of the Southern Cameroons. Though calculated to increase soil fertility and improve production, the law was misinterpreted by local farmers who needed to have been educated by government officials. The measure was equally calculated to prevent soil erosion in the mountainous areas (Nghoh 1987, 210). However, the failure to explain the substance and implications of the law resulted in an insurrection by the local population who had little or no idea about farm techniques and cultivation.

³Bamenda regional archives, Annual Report, Wum Division, file no 26-Ci1950/1,1951, 05 April 20, 2019

Jua perceived that the window for conducting a door-to-door campaign was closing. He resorted to a system of blackmail and sabotage of the renovations initiated by the KNC. This yielded the fruits of scaring people away from the KNC. In Kom, the KNC became appreciated as a party with the draconian agenda of increasing taxes, causing confusion and above all planning to sell Kom land to the Igbos. This was just an isolated episode in the general drama of political wrangling that animated the Kom scene and struggle for personal hegemony that considerably weakened the opposition party. Although Kom had witnessed inter-party disputes during the years preceding independence, these were not to the same degree as pre-independence events (Ibid).

It should however be noted that the KNC government, which was the main ruling party at the time, was held accountable for what Kom natives considered inappropriate land reforms. This alienated the masses from them, leading to a KNDP victory (Ibid. 211). These reforms aligned with the Wum Divisional Authority Soil Conservations Rules (W.D.A.S.C.R) which was enacted for the re-enforcement of their political ideologies.

KNC was a political group that had aligned itself to Nigeria and in 1958 had secured nearly complete control over electoral politics in the region. In reaction to these three major concerns, the women utilized "*Anlu*", a women's network traditionally used to punish those who transgressed against social norms. In January 1958 thousands of women from all over Kom converged at Njinikom, leaving their husbands at home to take care of the crops and family (Elowgn 28).

III.-THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

The post-colonial period was a new dawn in human history. History, being dynamic, changes with time to reflect the emergence of different regimes, governments, and great figures and their multifactorial impact on trends in the recording and analysis of historical events. This dynamism in the scientific study of history no longer placed women at the margins of world historiography as was the case in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. With this awakening in

perception and mentality worldwide, women have evolved from using traditional methods of expressing their grievances to writing petitions and attending conferences. From the perspective we adopt in this paper, this could be termed “*Anlu*” in the modern context.

III.1- The Activities of *Fon* Ngam and Modernity (1972)

At independence, the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroons inherited a political scene marked by political party wrangling, rooted in the unkind climate that reigned in the fifties. Women could be manipulated to the extreme by challenging both the modern and traditional administrations. This movement gave way to a kind of open disrespect of the *Fon* and contributed to placing these latter at the mercy of the D.O. and the British High Commissioner for Cameroon. It was therefore another area in which the *Fons* were hamstrung by circumstances. In soliciting help from the modern administration and to forestall trouble, the *Fon* wrote to the British authorities vividly describing his confusion and frustrations (Ngam 2009, 275).

This period in Kom *Fondom* can be termed the period of reconciliation and mass cleansing of individuals who in one way or another were implicated in ostracism. In the same year, Kom *Fondom* witnessed the loss of the *Fon* Nsom Ngwe who was seen as a stooge to modernity.

Michael Njinabo who became the *Fon* proved to be the right person to handle this period of lopsided marriage. He was the first Christian *Fon* to rule Kom and, unlike his predecessors, he was ready to embrace modernism. In the attempt to cleanse the Kom state from the atrocities of the “*Anlu*” women movement, *Fon* Nsom Ngwe asked his traditional diviners (priests) to prepare for the ceremony. The *Fon* and the college of administrators thought that cleansing the land of these atrocities would occasion the forgiveness of the sins of the women within the land and ensure reconciliation. Unfortunately for the *Fon* and his team of traditionalists, government authorities interpreted this cleansing ceremony from a different perspective. In January 1971, in an attempt to exercise the only power

that had not been taken away from the traditional authorities – the performance of rituals – “Kwifoyn” announced that they would perform purification rites. Having consulted its diviners, the traditional institution decreed that to restore peace, fertility and prosperity in the land, the 1958 “*Anlu*” had to be purified. All women were told to dress like “*Anlu*” women and report to the Palace for ritual purification (Nsom 2015, 126).

However, it can be justified here that the 1972 cleansing had nothing to do with the 1958 “*Anlu*” which had political overtones. The Kwifoyn, motivated by its ritual duty rather than politics and on the understanding that it could assemble the women, stood in two markets and asked all adult women to report to Laikom on an appointed date. The act of purification was scheduled to take place on the 9th of February. Soon after the first and second announcements at Njinikom and Belo, respectively, the Divisional Officer, Mr. Boma, issued a strongly worded circular asking the *Fon* and his team to call off the demonstration. In the name of public order, the Kwifoyn’s good intentions were misrepresented (Ibid.).

The *Fon* and Kwifoyn were stupefied as they had erroneously thought that the power to perform religious rituals still lay fully with them. The D.O.’s actions made obvious to the *Fon* that, as far as public opinion was concerned, he needed not only to seek but also to lobby for the D.O.’s assistance⁴.

The idea of fine-tuning traditional institutions to be fully integrated into the state system was topical in Ahidjo’s political scheme. He made tremendous attempts to wipe away regional sectionalism, perceiving it as a means of fostering a sense of belonging to the state, rather than particular regions, and of including all citizens, their sex notwithstanding, in nation-building. By seeking to disempower states that had been built on traditional systems of government, including historically powerful traditional states within the Cameroon state, Ahidjo hoped

⁴N.A.B, Bikom assessment report file no 15, 3/1961/12/, 17 march 2019

to demolish aspects of these traditional systems which excluded women from public administration (Fonchingong 2011, 126-127).

III.2-The *Anlu* in the Modern Context (1972)

The collective mobilization of women in pre-colonial and colonial Cameroon differed from the action of post-colonial era Cameroonian women. Elite women have become active participants in the creation of ideologies that preserve their elite status but undermine and subordinate them as women. Seen within this perspective, the Kom women's movement became famous as early as 1968, although its activities involved mostly the writing of petitions, such as the petitions to the UNO on sex bias and the petition to reject the payment of dowry, bride price, among others which made women become either liabilities or assets to their parents ([https://www.change.org/p/the government of Cameroon-the ministry of women's affairs](https://www.change.org/p/the-government-of-Cameroon-the-ministry-of-women's-affairs)).

Seminars and conferences have also been held to educate women, especially in rural areas, on their rights and obligations. This encourages them to escape from the traditional and old methods of presenting their grievances⁵.

However, recognizing the greater visibility of women in agriculture and community development, the actions of women in pre-colonial and colonial Cameroon do not align with the norms of modern and educated 21st-century women. Because of this, some traditional and administrative authorities reproached the women for employing strategies that were anti-social to culture and uncivil. This is coupled with the fact that the Delegation of Women's Affairs does not encourage women's associations that operate as secret societies such as the "*Takembeng*" of Nkwen, "*Anlu*" of Kom, "*Fombuen*" of Babanki and "*Ndofoumbgui*" of Aghem. They rather encourage development associations.

The practices of these secret societies, which operate as associations, are perceived to be disgusting and revealing of women's privacy (for example;

⁵Interview with Nkwain Merylyne, Belo, 06 June, 2019

walking naked on the streets). All traditional laws and customs must be respected as long as they are not repugnant to natural justice. By describing the women's activities as not conforming to the tenets of modern law, wrongly identified with natural justice, the Delegate is simply subscribing to Europe- and America-centered views of Western justice systems as universal and all other systems as deviant (Waylen 1998, 25).

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the dynamics underlying Kom women's activism from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. The potentialities of women in the Kom Fondom were evident in the role they played from Babessi to Laikom, their current capital. Despite their lack of formal education, these women's roles remain in the sands of time. Some of these women included Nandong, the first woman to rule in Kom as the custodian of the palace after the mysterious death of the Fon (Tangnakoli), Fuam, Muana and Jua Nathalia Nuh. Their position in the historiography of the Kom Fondom shows that women are skilled in conflict resolution and management – skills which are highly needed in the country's development drive and apt for use in government services.

We noticed changes in the positions and actions of women over time. This can be blamed on colonialism and its preaching of equality. Today, women no longer pay as much attention to traditional means of resistance; they opt for modern methods like writing petitions and holding conferences to table their grievances to the authorities thought to be responsible.

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S/N	Name of informant	social status	age	Date of interview	Place of interview
01	Bobbe Gam Godfrey	Pastor	76	15/11/2023	Fundong (Abuh)
02	Kuh Boniface	Farmer	70	12/10/2023	Fundong (Abuh)
03	Ndi Ernest Yuh	Farmer	60	06/11/2023	Fundong (Abuh)
04	Nkwain Merilyne	Farming	80	06/06/2019	Belo
05	Shing Sylvester	Farmer	69	12/10/2023	Fundong (Abuh)
06	Simon Nkwain	Farmer	73	15/11/2023	Belo