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**POST GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR
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**THE MAMFOR AND WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
BAFUT FONDOM: 1907-2007**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS (M.A) DEGREE IN
HISTORY

SPECIALISATION: HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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JANUARY 2023

To my parents Martin Ayumbi and Comfort Manka'a

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research titled “The Mamfor and Women in the development of the Bafut Fondom: 1907-2007” was realized thanks to the combined efforts and encouragement I received from a good number of persons. Immense thanks goes to my supervisor Professor E.S.D. Fomin, for the provision of intellectual assistance and fatherly guidance in the course of this academic endeavor. His constructive criticisms, comments and suggestions gave me the most needed directions and inspiration.

I also recognize the efforts of the lecturers of the Department of History of the University of Yaounde I, with particular thanks to Professors Verkijika G. Fanso, Daniel Abwa, Philippe Blaise Essomba, Jean Koufan, Robert Kpwang, Willibroad Dze-Ngwa, Virginie Wanyaka, Gabriel Dong Mougol, Idrissou A., Ander Tassou, Moussa 11, Raymond Ebale, Joel Meyolo and Kum George. Further thanks goes to Doctor Mathias Neba for equipping me with the necessary knowledge and skills required in historical documentation.

My appreciation also goes to the staff of the North West Regional Archives (NWRA), The University of Bameda (UBA) library, the Geography, History and Archaeology Club of the the University of Yaounde 1, the Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences Library (FALSH) of the University of Yaounde 1, History Departmental library, and the Bafut Council library. They provided me with documents that were required in the realization of this research. Again, I also thank all my coordinators as well as all those who accepted to respond to my research questions especially Vivian Lum, Helen Nchang, Brigitte Numfor, Jullien Manka’a, Loveline Nchang, Silocica Ngum, and many others.

Heart thanks further goes to all my family members for their financial, material and moral support during this research. I have at heart my brothers; Evangil, Samuel and Emmanuel, and my sisters Beryl Ngum, Lotte Bih, Yoland Bih, Akongnwi Ngum, Deborah Bei and Amen Lum not leaving out my uncles aunts and cousins.

Finally I acknowledge the contributions of my husband Tamfu Alfred, my classmates especially Diana Ndinteh, Emiline Wirndzerem, Stella Halle, Paul Afuba, Kelvin Wankah, Elvis Nguana, Honorine Ngum and Belamine Bimela. Since perfection is only of God, there must be some imperfections in the work. Therefore, I remain solely responsible for all the errors and omissions found in this work.

ABSTRACT

This work is titled “The Mamfor and Women in the Development of the Bafut Fondom: 1907-2007”. It examines the contributions of the Mamfor and women of Bafut to the development of the Bafut fondom. Bafut is a composite Fondom made up of semi and autonomous chiefdoms inhabited by people from diversified ethnic backgrounds with capital at Bujong. The hypothesis of our work is that the Mamfor positively impacted Bafut women socio-economically, culturally and to a lesser extent politically for the development of the fondom. The work further goes to argue that the Women Empowerment Center in the fondom has affected the women through adult literacy classes. The socio-economic life of the average Bafut woman has improved thanks to the activities offered by the Mamfor and Women Empowerment Centre. The work also argues that the Bafut women have positively influenced the lives of the people. The activities of the Mamfor and Bafut women have been greatly felt in the economic, socio-cultural and to a lesser extent political domain. The study found out that the Mamfor, through groups like the Nka’a Mamfor female group, Akoni female group, Nkah Nka’a female group, the Presbyterian Girls School of science and Technology (P.G.S.S.T), Common Initiative groups and the Christian Women Fellowship mobilized the Bafut community for greater self-reliant development. In the economic domain, the Mamfor and women have secured the livelihood of the Bafut rural women by teaching them some income generating activities as well as modern agricultural techniques since most of them are farmers. The research revealed that the *Mamfor* was not only a major adviser to the *fon* but also deputized in his absence. The *Mamfor* also took part in the judiciary procedures and even handled minor cases in the *Fondom*. The study shows that the *Mamfor* became a major player in local and national politics as she became an active member in the political party to which the *Fon* belong. The research also reveals that the Bafut women have uplifted the moral standards of the Bafut people by castigating negative behaviours in the society as demonstrated by the works of the Christian Women Fellowship. In addition, the Bafut women proved their worth in local administration as traditional counselors, school administrative heads and family maintenance, as well as in the activities of secret societies. They modified some aspects of Bafut customs on widowhood, marriage birth and death. The Bafut women are therefore recognized as potential partners of development. Data for the study was derived principally from two sources: primary and secondary. Primary sources consisted of archival materials and oral interviews with queens, princes, princesses, coordinator of *kwifor*, coordinator of *Takumbeng*, coordinator of *Makumbeng*, and women from some women’s groups as informants. Secondary sources on the other hand included articles, books and unpublished dissertations and theses. For its presentation, the study combines the thematic, and the qualitative methods.

RESUME

Cet ouvrage s'intitule "The Mamfor and women in the Development of the Bafut Fondom: 1907-2007". Il examine les contributions de la Mamfor et les femmes de Bafut dans le développement du royaume de Bafut. Bafut est un royaume composé constitué de chefferies autonomes et semi autonomes, peuplé de diverses ethnies, dont la capitale est Bujong. L'hypothèse de notre travail est que la Mamfor a positivement impacté les femmes de Bafut sur le plan socio économique, culturel et dans une moindre mesure politique, pour le développement du royaume. Le travail va plus loin pour affirmer que le Centre d'Autonomisation des Femmes a impacté les femmes à travers des cours d'alphabétisation pour adultes. La vie socio économique de la femme moyenne de Bafut a évolué grâce aux activités offertes par la Mamfor et le Centre d'Autonomisation de la Femme. L'ouvrage soutient également que les femmes de Bafut ont positivement influencé les vies des populations. Les activités de la Mamfor et des femmes de Bafut ont été grandement ressenties dans les domaines économiques, socio culturels et dans une moindre mesure politique. L'étude a démontré qu'à travers des groupes de femmes comme le Nka'a, Akoni, Nkah Nka'a, la presbyterian Girl School of science and Technology, les groupes d'initiative communes et l'Association Chrétienne des Femmes, la Mamfor a mobilisé la communauté de Bafut pour un développement plus autonome. Sur le plan économique, la Mamfor et les femmes ont sécurisées la vie des femmes rurales de Bafut en leur apprenant certaines activités génératrices de revenus telles que les techniques d'agriculture modernes étant donné que la plupart d'entre elles sont des cultivatrices. La recherche a révélé que la Mamfor n'était pas seulement la principale conseillère du Fon mais elle le remplaçait en son absence. La Mamfor a aussi pris part aux procédures judiciaires et elle a traité certains cas mineurs dans le royaume. L'étude montre que la Mamfor est devenue un acteur majeur de la politique locale et nationale puisqu'elle est devenue un membre actif du parti politique auquel appartient le Fon. La recherche a aussi révélé que les femmes Bafut ont élevé les standards moraux des populations de Bafut en fustigeant les comportements négatifs dans la société comme démontré par les travaux de l'Association Chrétienne des Femmes. De plus, les femmes de Bafut ont prouvé leur valeur dans l'administration locale comme conseillères traditionnelles, chefs d'établissement et l'entretien familiale, et aussi dans les activités des sociétés secrètes. Elles ont modifié certains aspects des coutumes Bafut sur le veuvage, le mariage, la naissance et la mort. Les femmes de Bafut sont ainsi reconnues comme de potentiels partenaires au développement. Les données du texte proviennent principalement de deux sources : primaires et secondaires. Les sources primaires sont constituées du matériel d'archivage et des interviews orales avec des reines, des princes et des princesses, le coordonnateur du Kwifor, le coordonnateur du Takumbeng, le coordonnateur du Makumbeng et les femmes de certains groupes comme informatrices. Les sources secondaires incluent les articles de livres et des dissertations et des thèses inédites. Pour sa présentation, l'étude combine les méthodes thématiques et qualitatives.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C.I.G	Common Initiative Groups.
C.W.F	Christian Women Fellowship
H.M.C	Home Making Center
M.T.C	Marriage Training Center
N.A.B	National Archives
N.W.R.A	North West Regional Archives
P. G.S.S.T	Presbyterian Girls School of Science and Technology
P.C.C	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
U.N	United Nations
W.E.C	Women Empowerment Center

GLOSSARY

BAFUT WORDS	MEANING IN ENGLISH
<i>Kwifor</i>	Most powerful secret society (national assembly)
<i>Nda kwifor</i>	Another appellation for kwifor
<i>Mfor</i>	Fon
<i>Ndah</i>	House
<i>Ndimfor</i>	Adviser to the fon
<i>Muma</i>	Secretary
<i>Mamfor</i>	Mother of the fon
<i>Enchong</i>	A body that selects people for honorific titles
<i>Atangchos</i>	Notables
<i>Beu to beu nikuru</i>	Quarter heads
<i>Beu ma beu nikuru</i>	Wives of quarter heads
<i>Nwi</i>	God
<i>San Ábend</i>	The month of the Annual dance
<i>Aben</i>	Dance
<i>Nifò 'ó, Nifum</i>	Where the previous fons are buried
<i>Nsaanimu nwi</i>	Square of the child of the gods
<i>Nsaani mu Bāburd</i>	Square of the child of those in heaven
<i>Mà bàà, ñgku 'u'</i>	Stones located at Swie
<i>Nyæ bi kû</i>	Waking the dead
<i>Mikobæ</i>	Carved images

<i>Dktt</i>	Protection
<i>Ntumə ni àfù</i>	Cast a spell
<i>Ibàafu</i>	Fetishes, Anulets, Talesmans
<i>Mbèḡ</i>	Thunder
<i>ḡwāḡḡéé</i>	Grass cutting
<i>Kéé m̄ wáà</i>	Striped rat
<i>Aji</i>	Twitching of the muscles
<i>Nḡsàà la' à</i>	Traditional rites
<i>Mumetah</i>	Traditional Day of rest
<i>Nidəə</i>	Cast a spell, poisoned
<i>ḡkhiḡó</i>	Masquerade that buried those who committed suicide
<i>Aben Mfor</i>	Annual dance
<i>Kisari</i>	Water
<i>Mie</i>	Traditional title given by the fon to his subjects
<i>Booh</i>	Traditional cup given by the fon
<i>Abang</i>	A traditional bangle given by the fon
<i>Ndaamu</i>	Baby shower
<i>Nchinda</i>	Servant, messenger of the fon
<i>Mangietoh</i>	Wife of the fon
<i>Chung juju</i>	Masquerade
<i>ḡgu mbu</i>	Chicken given during funerals

<i>Nrwo ni kà'á</i>	Death celebration
<i>Aléniwô</i>	Night before the death celebration
<i>Mabu'u</i>	Masquerade that accompanies the <i>kwifor</i>
<i>Takumbeng</i>	Secret society
<i>Ntswe Ndâfu'</i>	Secrete society
<i>Ndâfu'</i>	Secret cult

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The North West Region of Cameroon has a class of women known as Queen Mothers. Queen mothers are known by different names depending on the fondom from which they originate. In the Bafut fondom for example, the Queen mother is called the *Mamfor*. This is an important female personality who plays a very important role in the society. As an important personality, she stands as a role model to every woman and through her encouragement and leadership, the women carried out a number of activities that helped in the growth and development of the Bafut society. The *Mamfor* was a woman traditionally enthroned in the fondom, and was a senior member of the administrative mechanism of the palace. The *Mamfor* was always the fon's real mother or putative sister, his daughter or wife, and she took the place of his real mother if she was dead, depending on the circumstances at hand.

The word *Mamfor* can be traced to where the Bafut people are believed to have originated and migrated to the Bamenda Grassfields. The word stands for Queen mother in the Grassfields. It can be broken into two parts, *Ma* meaning mother and *Mfor* meaning fon. As the mother of the Fon, *Mamfor* is an important personality in the palace and society of Bafut as a whole.¹ She is mother above all mothers in the fondom. Being a mother to the people, she is attentive to their needs. She is mother to the people because she is the mother of the Fon.

When a new *Fon* is enthroned and the biological mother is no longer living, his sister is enthroned as *Mamfor*.² In most cases, the new Fon is enthroned when the *Mamfor* of the former fon is still alive. In the case where the *Fon*'s mother is already too old, she might act as *Mamfor* for a short while before someone younger, her daughter or grandchild, that is the fon's sister or daughter is installed in her place. In the Bafut traditional society, the position of the *Mamfor* is very important. This is why the society has taken measures to ensure that there is no fon without a *Mamfor*. As is clear with what we have said so far, *Mamfor* is a family member of the ruling fon. The fon must be of royal origin and the *Mamfor* must be a member related directly to the fon.

Women issues have been a major preoccupation for several decades. In many communities especially those in Africa, women have always been regarded and treated

¹ Z.M. Achu., "The Role of Mafo in Mankon Society 1970-2004: An Historical Perspective", M.A Dissertation in History University of Yaounde I, 2004

² Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016

assubordinates³. It should be noted that some African communities reserved second class roles for women like house wives, farmers, domestic servants, household managers amongst others. These second class roles have prevented the women from exposing their potentials in the political, economic, social and cultural development of their communities. This way of perceiving womanhood has for several years been a call for concern.

The struggle to project and present the real potentials of the woman has therefore been at the centre of several conferences since the early 1970s. This struggle was intensified during the 4th conference on women issues that took place in Beijing in 1995. This conference invited women, governments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to fight against discrimination and marginalization of women.

At times, there was a general cry for women to be more involved in pertinent sectors of development. World leaders insisted on the necessity of involving all members of the society; men, children and especially women in development activities. In 1975, the United Nations declared the period 1975-1985 as the "UN decade for women". Thus vigorous measures were put in place at international, national and regional levels to involve women in development activities, in conformity with Resolution 3010 of 1972 in Mexico, in the first conference to dialogue on women's status. The second conference followed suit in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1980, the third in Nairobi (Kenya) in 1985. These conferences all had to the same purpose, that is improving the status of women all over the world and recognizing their efforts towards development⁴.

The women saw the importance of coming together in groups for their voices to be better heard. Women formed mostly Common Initiative Groups, njangi or kitchen njangi and farming groups whose activities were mostly limited around around traditional ceremonies and celebrations. The Cameroon government by 1967 further enforced the organization of these social groups through law N^o 67/2f/19 of June 12 1967. This law authorized the creation of loose associations but prohibited the creation of strong associations for fear that they could destroy the peace and stability of a nation that freshly got independence.⁵ It was therefore in this light that the Mamfor and women of Bafut decided to come together to bring up ideas to

³Ejei R.A "Women in the Development of the Moghamo Clan: 1938-2006", M.A Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ejei R.A "Women in the Development of the Moghamo Clan: 1938-2006", M.A Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2016.

liberate women from discrimination and marginalization and enhance the development of the fondom.

Scope and Delimitations

This work covers the period from 1907-2007. The year 1907 is important because it was in that year during the colonial era that the Germans tried to dethrone the then fon Suh Yieh and put a puppet ruler in place of the fon after the Bafut wars in 1907. This, however, failed because of the unity among the Bafut and their strong- hold in dynasty succession. This incident would have destabilized the institution of the *Mamfor* and her activities since it would have meant the beginning of a puppet culture in the fondom as a change could be seen in the choice, installation, burial rites and activities of the *Mamfor*. The study ends in 2007 when problems began on the seat of the *Mamfor* following the death of *Mamfor* Njiyang Esther which has left the seat empty severally. The study takes a period of one hundred years (one century) and the Bafut fondom is the study area.

Literature Review

In order to better understand this topic, we have backed our knowledge with a certain number of related information read in books connected with it. As far as this work is concerned, very few works focus on the activities of the *Mamfor* of Bafut. However, such works cannot be completely ignored as they provide some information that is useful to this research.

In that light, Aletum in his book titled, *Bafut Institution in Modern Politics of Cameroon 1990, An Appraisal of our Culture: Social Customs and Traditions of Bafut – West Cameroon*.⁶ This book presents some of the social customs and traditional beliefs of the Bafutfondom. It also highlights some of the cultural aspects of the Bafut fondom. This book is relevant to the researcher because it highlights some of the traditional belief systems of the Bafut fondom.

Also, Aletum in his book titled, *Achirimbi II Fon of Bafut 1978* gives us valuable information about the structural organisation of the Bafut fondom and some pertinent cultural aspects of the fondom.⁷ He also examines the ethnic composition of Bafut. This book is also relevant to this work as it treats some of the traditional and cultural aspects of the

⁶ Aletum Micheal Tabuwe, *Bafut Institutions in Modern Politics of Cameroon: An Appraisal of our Culture – Social customs and traditions of Bafut – West Cameroon*. Graziani: Roma, 1971.

⁷ Micheal Tabuwe Aletum, *Achirimbi II Fon of Bafut*. Graziani Roma, 1971.

Bafutpeople. Also, Nebasina in his post graduate dissertation entitled “The Bafut Chiefdom. A study of Rural Geography (1988)” treats the geographical details of Bafut. This work has been very useful as far as the geographical study of the area is concerned.

In the same light, Mbiti made an elaborate presentation of the African society from the stand point of culture, religious practices, and forms of worship. He brought out the primitive traditional African cultural and religious practices with specific examples from certain areas of Africa. This work has helped the researcher in understanding the general philosophy of the Africans vis-à-vis, the ancestors and even the notion of religion. In this light it helped to reshape the comprehension of what African traditional values and religious practices mean to them.

Another relevant study is Asombang in his book entitled “*New Direction in Archaeology beyond Chiefdoms-Pathway to complexity in Africa*” which gives a comprehensive analysis of the political institution of Bafut.⁸ He presents the *Fon* of Bafut as a titular leader with political and ritual powers associated with fertility of the land and the people. He also made mention of the fact that the fon was a member and head of all secret societies and chief priest of the cult. His presentation of the components of the Bafut palace as far as the *Mamforis* concerned has no doubt given an in-depth understanding of the Bafut palace where the *Mamfor* lived.

Again, Ngoh gives a picture of the fondom of Bafut as a highly centralized government with the fon at the apex.⁹ He made mention of the fact that powers of the fon began falling in the colonial era and also outlasted the functions of the fon of Bafut basically as he headed a centralized government. His work therefore handled issue of the functions and duties of the fon of Bafut thus showing that before the colonial era, the community of Bafut depended largely on their *fonmfor beufe* for decision making. His work has helped the researcher to be able to identify the role played by the fon most especially together with the *Mamfor*.

Ritzenthaler in his book entitled *The Fon of Bafut* elaborated on the migration and settlement of the Bafut people to their present location from Ndop plain.¹⁰ He however dwelled with the recent history of the origin of Bafut from Ndop plain without tracing it from Ndob around Upper Mbam in Northern Bamoum. He also presented Bafut as one of

⁸ Raymond Asombang., *New Direction in Archaeology Beyond Fondoms-Pathway to Complexity in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁹ Victor Ngoh., *Cameroon History Since 1800*, Press Book Limbe, 1996.

¹⁰ P. Ritzenthaler., *The Fon of Bafut*, Britain, Cassel London, 1966.

the Tikar. His work has given an in-depth location of Bafut and has helped the researcher in tracing the origin of Bafut in some measures and identifying Bafut as one of the Tikars.

In addition, Eusi, x-rayed the socio-political organizations of some tikaris like Kom, Nso, Bum and Wimbun. Their socio-political organizations according to him are almost the same since they all claimed their origin from the Tikaris. Also, he described some political structures associated with aspects of the *Mamfor*. More so, other pertinent issues concerning the organizational structures of the traditional government of the Bafut Fondom were also handled. This work has helped the researcher to attribute the *Takumbeng* and *kwifor* with their respective functions to the *Mamfor* and the fon of Bafut who is the supreme leader.

Moreover, Robert and Rizenthaler elaborate on the present location of Bafut by tracing their Migratory history and the series of splits within the Bafut ruling class. Their attention was mainly on royal personalities though they also paid some attention to the problems encountered in the course of their migration. The core of their work was predominantly court history as they dwelt more on the issue of royal succession. Other issues concerning the socio-cultural life of Bafut were also highlighted. This work has helped the researcher to make a study of the series of migratory settlements of the study area to their present location.

Chilver and Kaberry, carried out an elaborate study of the Grassfields chiefdoms and fondoms in the pre-colonial era, looking at their origin, migration, settlement and organization before colonization.¹¹ Their works, examined issues of utmost importance in the political, economic and social domains of the Grassfields. By this work, the researchers have been able not only to trace the origin and migration of the Bafut people but equally in knowing how they governed themselves, the role of the traditional institutions in the Bafut local area and as well the relevance of these to the people. Though they were not actually detailed, it was of great help in giving an insight on the values these practices had on the cultural heritage of the Bafut people.

Aaron Neba enlightened us on the geography of the area under study.¹² This helps us to better understand the terrain in which the *Mamfor* exercises her authority as the queen mother and mother of all mothers in the fondom. It is important to know what part of the land is fertile and to find out if the activities of the *Mamfor* and the women of Bafut were

¹¹ E. M. Chilver and P. M. Kaberry, *Traditional Government in Bafut-West Cameroon*, The Nigerian Field 28, 1967, p25.

¹² A.S. Neba, *Geography of the Republic of Cameroon*, 2nd Edition, Neba Publisher, Bamenda, 1999.

influenced by fertile soils. In other words, did the fertility of the soil affect the role played by *Mamfor* and the women of the fondom in the development of the territory?

Yaya in her book titled, “The Contributions of rural women common initiative groups towards poverty alleviation”. The case study of Nkwen Bamenda concentrates only on one of the villages that make up Bamenda Central Sub Division.¹³ Moreover, even in the Nkwen village, she writes only on the rural women. She did not examine the urban women of Nkwen which is part of the study area. However she has inspired us to write on the general women folk in the Bafut fondom.

Canute in his M.A Dissertation titled “An Economic History of the Bafut from 1900 to Present”, treats the economic situation of Bafut in terms of agriculture, industries and craft, trade and community development.¹⁴ This study is relevant to the present as the author highlights some economic aspects of the Bafutfondom which affects activities of the *Mamfor* of Bafut.

Walker and Brazier in *Women, Education and Rural Development in Cameroon: the Fulbe of the Garoua Region* affirmed that the African woman’s position in the society has always been an active and vital one; whether as a mother, wife or market woman, she conveyed her society’s cultural norms and expectations and worked to ensure its survival. Nevertheless, their presentation was limited to the Fulbe women of the Northern Region of Cameroon. However, this ties significantly as to the different roles the Bafut women have played to enhance development.

Also, Enjema in her post graduate dissertation titled “Bafut Women in Trade 1889-1990” examines the geographical background, historical background, immigration, settlement, peopling and location of Bafut. This provided us with information on the migration and settlement of the Bafut people¹⁵. Simo in his post graduate dissertation titled “The Evolution of Traditional Architecture in the Bamenda Grassfield, 1889-1961, The Case of the Bafut fondom”. This work provided us with information on the geographical setting of Bafut, their migration and settlement to their present site and political set up of the Bafut fondom.

¹³N.Yaya.,” *The contribution of Rural Woman’S Common Initiative Groups Towards Poverty Alleviation,*”1999, P. 75.

¹⁴N.Canute., “An Economic History of the Bafut from 1900 to the Present”.M A Thesis in History, University of Nigeria Nsukka, June 1994.

¹⁵E. N. Enjema., “Bafut Women in Trade 1889 – 1990”. *DIPES II* Dissertation in history, ENS Bambili, 2011, pp. 11 – 32.

Fon Abumbi II¹⁶ in his unpublished work examines how the refusal of fonAbumbi I of Bafut to accept the German occupation of his fondom changed the course of history in 1901. This led to the second Bafut war of 1901 – 1910. During this war, theBafut people did not want their palace to be captured by the Germans. They burnt the palace after collecting all traditional relics except the house of the Bafut secret society (*Bocham*) and royal tombs. This information provides us with background knowledge on theBafut fondom.

Lawyer in her work “The Role of Women in the Development ofKom since the pre-colonial period” seeks to examine the role played by the Kom women in the development of Kom. It examined treats some activities of women, their impact and some problems they encountered in the execution of the task of development.¹⁷However, her work has greatly inspired us to writeon women in the development of the Bafut fondom given that they are all communities of the same region.

Achu in her M.A Dissertation titled” The Role of the *Mafo* in Mankon Society 1970-2004”: An Historical Perspective,¹⁸deals with the activities of *Mafo* in the Mankon society. She centered her study on the activities of the *Mafo* in the post colonial era. She also examined the attributes of *Mafo* in Mankon¹⁵. This work therefore handles issues on the duties of the *Mafo* in the Mankon fondom which is relevant to our work. More so, Fowang in her work titled “The Role of Women in Traditional Politics in the Pinyin fondom from Early Settlement to the Present”, Elaborates the role of women in the Pinyin traditional society. These works provides the researcher with knowledge of activities of women in other societies.

Enjei in her work “Women in the Development of the Moghamo Clan:1938-2006” seeks to examine contributions of women in the development of the Moghamo Clan, she looked at some activities of women, their impact and some problems they encountered in the excusion of the task of development.¹⁹ She dwelled much on Common Initiative Groups. Her work has greatly inspired us to writeon women in the development of the Bafut fondom given that they are all communities of the same Region.

¹⁶Abumbi II, “The Traditions and Customs of the Bafut Kingdom”.p .124.

¹⁷ L.A.Lawyer,” The Role of Women in the Development of Kom Since the Pre-Colonial Period”, M.A Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2005, p. 12.

¹⁸ Z.M. Achu., “The Role of Mafo in Mankon Society 1970-2004: An Historical Perspective”, M.A Dissertation in History University of Yaounde I, 2004.

¹⁹ R.A. Enjei, “Women in the Development of the Moghamo Clan: 1938-2006”, M.A. Dissertation in History University of Yaounde I, 2016.

This literature review reveals that no work has focused on “The Mamfor and Women in the Development of the Bafut Fondom” 1907 -2007. In fact all the literature reviewed stand patchy with wide gaps and deviations to constitute a perfect whole for the understanding of our study. It is therefore the paucity of knowledge given by the reviewed literature that necessitated this study.

The Statement of Problem

The Bafut fondom from 1907 has had many *Mamfors*. The *Mamfor* was always the Fon’s real mother, sister, daughter or wife, and took the place of his real mother if she was dead, depending on the circumstances involved. When a fon is enthroned, his mother is enthroned as *Mamfor* under normal circumstances. As an important personality, she stands as a role model to every woman and through her encouragement and leadership, the women carried out a number of activities that helped in the growth and development of the Bafut society.

This work seeks to trace the geographical and historical, economic and social organization of the Bafut fondom and their contributions to the activities of the *Mamfor*. This research work is therefore aimed at examining the contributions of the Mamfor and women of Bafut towards the development of the Bafut fondom. The study hopes to answer the following questions;

- Who was the *Mamfor*?
- How efficient was the role of the *Mamfor* in the Bafut Fondom?
- How did the activities of the *Mamfor* influence the Bafut women to develop the Fondom?
- What problems did the *Mamfor* and women encounter in playing their role in the development of the Bafut community and what measures could be taken to enable them carry out their duties?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective or purpose of the study is to investigate the role of *Mamfor* and Bafut women in the socio-cultural, economic and political development of the fondom. The specific objectives that will make up the different chapters of the study are as follows;

- Firstly, to enable the readers discover some relevant physical and human features in the Geography of the area in question. This chapter will also study the people of

Bafut. Here, the history of their origin, migration and settlement will be studied. The socio-economic aspect of the Bafut people will also be examined.

- Secondly, to examine the choice of *Mamfor* in the Bafut fondom. Here, emphasis will be laid on the installment of the *Mamfor* and her burial rites after death. The activities of the *Mamfor* on the general Bafut community will be examined
- Thirdly to analyse the role *Mamfor* and the women of Bafut played in the economic, social and political development of the fondom. This will permit us to examine the activities of the *Mamfor* and Bafut women in agriculture, trade, craft industry and farming groups in the economic domain. Health, education, marriage and birth are examined in the social domain and political roles are examined in secret societies and judiciary.
- The last specific objective of this research is to examine challenges faced by the *Mamfor* and women in playing their role and ways forward to ensure better functioning of the *Mamfor* and women of the Bafut community activities.

Significance of the Study

The history of Bafut has been studied in light of economic and political activities of the people, the evolution of culture, the growth of Christianity, and traditional institutions. However, there has been a manifest lack of interest in the activities of the *Mamfor* and women of Bafut in the development of the fondom. This work is meant to fill this gap. It will help us to widen our knowledge on the importance of the *Mamfor* who stands out as the mother of the community in the history of the Bafut people. The study constitutes an important addition to existing literature on economic, culture and social history of the Bafut people.

Sources and Methodology

The data collected for the study were obtained from two principal sources, namely primary and secondary sources. Respecting the methodology of the history department of the University of Yaounde I, and given that much research has not been done on the *Mamfor* in Bafut and her influence on the Bafut women in developing the fondom, the research was mostly effectuated with the aid of primary source materials. However, the role played by secondary sources cannot be minimized.

The most outstanding of the primary sources that enormously contributed to the realization of this research were oral sources. Oral information was obtained through interviews with people of credible ages in the Bafut fondom and beyond. Nevertheless, we should note that, primary source materials were judged credible and authentic only after they were strictly criticized and compared with other primary and secondary sources.

Other primary sources were documents from the National Archives of Buea (NAB) and the North West Regional Archive (NWRA). Useful information also came from Magazines. Information was also collected from private Archives and most especially interviews. The Bafut Palace and Museum were other research venues. The Bafut library has scanty archival material relating to our study.

The primary sources were strengthened by secondary sources. Secondary sources consulted consisted of, some published and unpublished works obtained from public libraries such as the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Science (FALSH), Library of the University of Yaounde I, The University of Bamenda Library the History-Geography- Archaeological Club Library of the University of Yaounde I and the Bafut library.

This work was carried out using a thematic or the topical approach which enabled us to present the various domains, activities and impact women made on the studied area from 1907 to 2007. We also used the qualitative method of research through out our study. We went to the fields where we conducted interviews with queens, princes, princesses, quarter heads, the coordinator of *Kwifor*, the coordinator of *Takumbeng* and the coordinator of *Makumbeng*. The information gotten from the above discussions was only credited after they had been confronted with other sources, notably archival materials as well as books. Therefore, we undertook a verification of these sources as we compared them with primary and secondary source materials, in order to ensure that the research remained scientific and authentic.

Difficulties Encountered

The realization of this work was not without difficulties. One of the major difficulties encountered during data collection was the inadequacy of previous works on the subject. Little has been written on the institution of the *Mamfor* of Bafut, and even less on the role of the *Mamfor* of Bafut. In situations where information was available, bureaucratic bottleneck constituted hindrance.

Another problem stemmed from the fact that some of the informants encountered were already too old and were unable to give valid information that they had. The information gotten often lacked factual chronology. Apart from that, some identified informants refused to give all the information which could have contributed to this work. They claimed that some traditional secrets had to be maintained. Some of them felt that they were spied on and they refused to cooperate for fear of creating problems for the fendom. As such, some necessary facts were withheld which could have been useful to this work. The informants were motivated with gifts.

Another hindrance was communication. Since we do not fully master the Bafut language, enough information could not be gotten from informants who were exposed to no other language apart from their native tongue. Hence the posing of questions and the understanding of the answers given cannot be said to have been the best. Under such circumstance, we made use of an interpreter.

Also before some concrete information was gotten especially from the notables elders of the Bafut clan, we needed to entice them. Again, some of the notables failed to show up in time for the arranged interview sessions. In most cases, they postponed the interview session to a later date. This slowed down the research.

Some problems were encountered at the level of the palace where the queens and senior mothers had a special liking for secrecy. Others openly declared their dislikes for any activity that looked like trying to trouble them. Some of the informants were however very cooperative. They tried to understand and share their knowledge and experience.

Problems were also encountered due to the ongoing crisis in the South West and North West Regions. Journeying Bafut was frightful, because of the fear of kidnappers and stray bullets. Bafut village is one of the hotspots in the crisis where deaths are registered almost everyday. This also made most of the eligible people who would have given concrete information to seek refuge in nearby towns and villages. In such a situation, calls were made to informants in the village.

Another difficulty encountered was finance, which was inadequate for the study. Movement between Yaoundé and Bamenda and Buea became very costly to cover. Whatever the difficulties, these movements were made and the research preliminaries were done. The only limitations were that these could not be done as many times as possible in order to

exhaust the needed material in the field and archives. Under such, the few journeys made were well planned and managed in such a way that the relevant information was acquired.

In spite of all these difficulties, the researcher is hopeful that this work will go a long way to enhance the knowledge of the *Mamfor* of Bafut traditional set-up. Though very challenging, it is hoped that it will spur further research on the subject.

Organization of the Work

This study comprises four chapters. Chapter one deals with the geographical setting and the human background of the Fandom. The Geographical setting involves the location of Bafut, the climate, soils, vegetation and hydrology, the topography and relief of the Fandom. The human background is divided into four parts; the early history of the people which talks about the migration and settlement of the Bafut people.

Chapter one of this work presents the migration of the different groups of Bafut which began with the Mbebili, Bukari, and the Bawum. This was followed by the migration of the Tikar group into Bafut and the migration of other groups into the fandom. The next parts are the economic, socio-cultural activities of the Bafut people and how they are influenced by the *Mamfor*. The political organization of the territory is also examined in this chapter.

Chapter two of this work is necessary because the activities of the *Mamfor* cannot be discussed without associating them with where the *Mamfor* comes from and where she lives. In addition, since this is an historical work, it is necessary to bring out a brief history of the Bafut people. Chapter two plunges directly into the personality of the *Mamfor*. The activities of the *Mamfor* are introduced and sub-titles bring out the choice and installation ceremony of the *Mamfor*, succession issues and burial rites.

Chapter three delves directly into the subject of, the activities of the *Mamfor* and her socio-economic empowerment of the rural Bafut women for the development of Bafut. This chapter also looks at the empowerment of Bafut women by the *Mamfor*. Her objectives and aims are examined with emphasis on how she has worked for the emancipation and empowerment of women of Bafut to develop the fandom.

Finally, chapter four is focused on challenges encountered by the *Mamfor* in playing her role in the Bafut community and a way forward to ensure better functioning of the *Mamfor* in Bafut. This chapter will also bring out the changes that have taken place in the activities of the *Mamfor* and her limitations.

CHAPTER ONE

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND HUMAN BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of the background to the study area. Geographical features and the historical composition of the people that make up this area will be examined. Our aim here is to situate the study area and its geographical features in space and time. Some of these features include soil, climate, human and economic activities, topography, vegetation, hydrology and relief. In addition, the history of the Bafut people will be presented. Emphasis will be laid on the origin, migration and settlement of the different groups that made up the Bafut fendom. It should be noted that Bafut is situated in the Bamenda Grassfields Region of Cameroon. (see **map 1**). The Bamenda Grassfields refers to the former administrative division of Wum, Nkambe and Bamenda. There are currently seven divisions amongst which there is Mezam with Bamenda as the headquarter. The Bamenda Grassfield have 31 Sub-divisions and Bafut is one of the Sub-divisions under Mezam. This chapter equally examines the socio-political organization and social and economic activities of the people under study which influenced the activities of *Mamfor* of Bafut.

A) Geographical Setting

The Bafut *fendom* is found in the Bamenda Grassfields that covers the North West and the West Regions of Cameroon and parts of the South West Region of Cameroon specifically the Fontem area. The Bafut fendom is located between latitude 6.05 and 6.10N of the equator and longitude 10.00 and 10.13 East of the Greenwich Meridian in the Republic of Cameroon. Administratively Bafut is a Sub Division within Mezam Division of the North West Region that is 22.526 kilometers from Bamenda.²⁰(See **maps 2**)

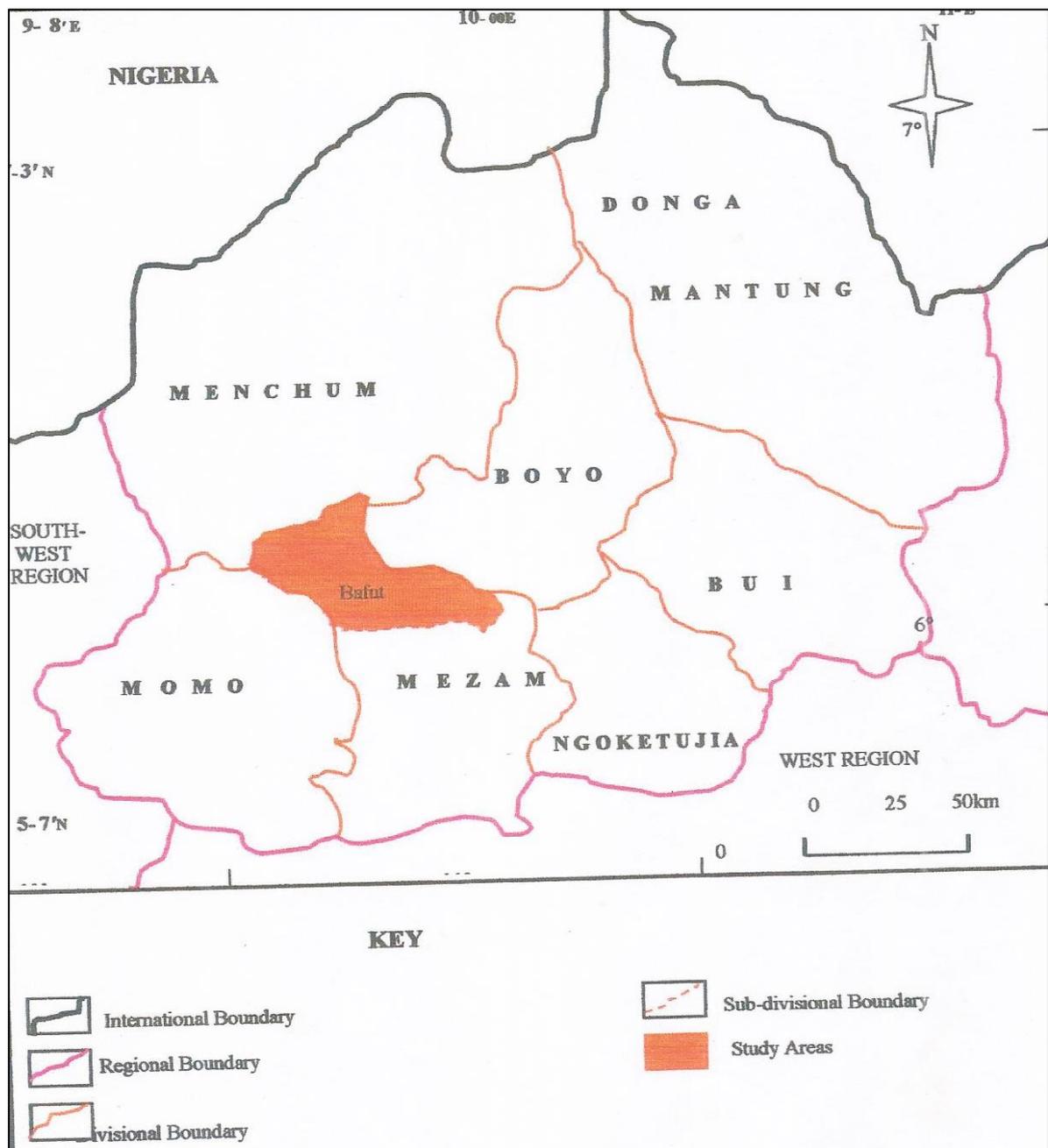
²⁰ Abumbi II, "Traditions and customs of the Bafut Kingdom". p.12.

Map 1: Location of Bafut Sub Division in Cameroon



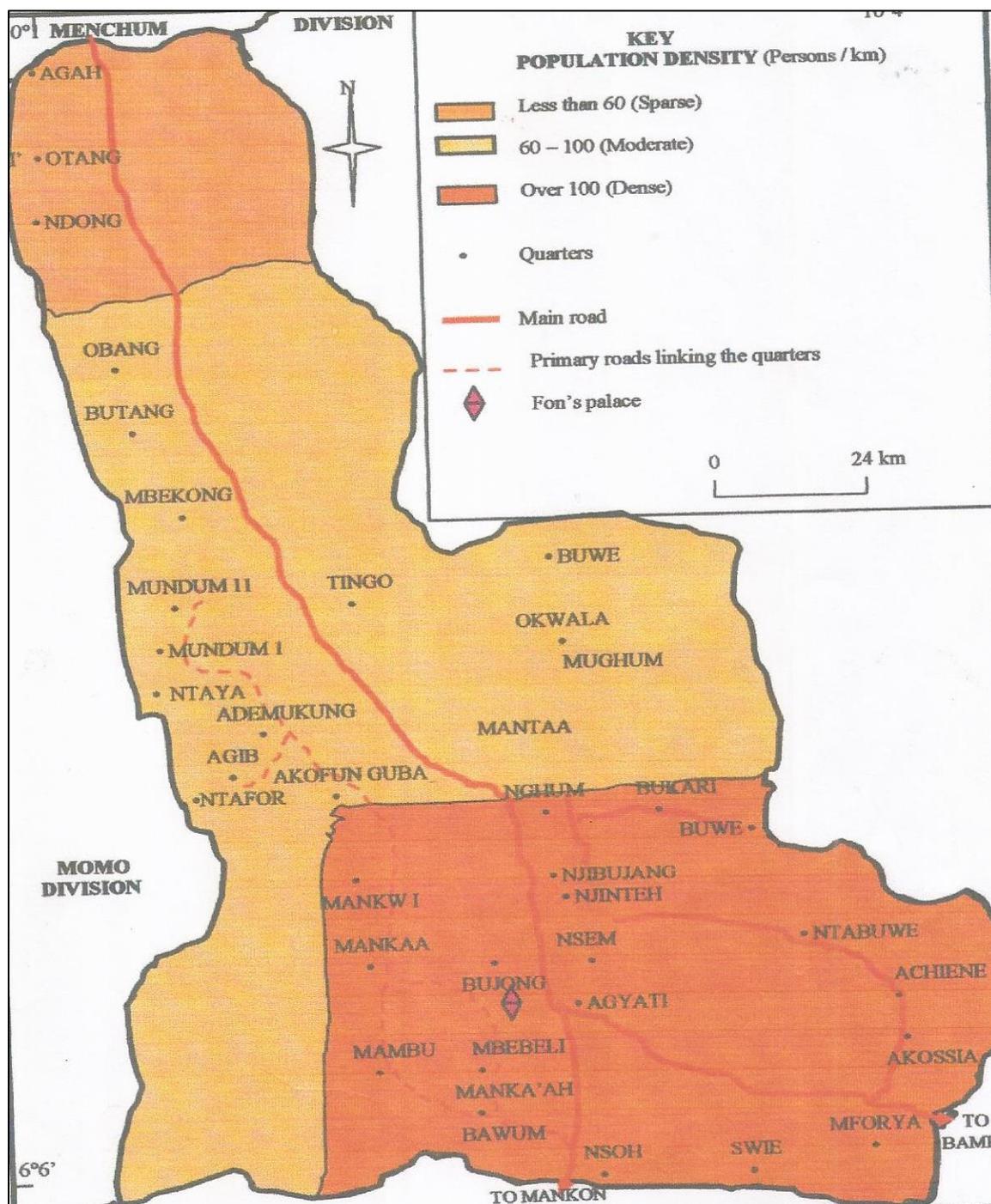
Source: Richard Ngwa, "The Impact of Colonial Rule on Bafut 1889-1961". M A Dissertation in History University of Yaounde I, 1999, p. 4.

Map 2: Location of Bafut Sub-Division in North West Region



Source: Richard Ngwa, "The Impact of Colonial Rule on Bafut 1889-1961", M A Dissertation in History University of Yaounde I, 1999, p. 5.

Map 3: Bafut Population Distribution and the Various Quarters



Source: E.N. Enjema., “Bafut Women in Trade 1889-1990”. *DIPES II* Dissertation in History, the University of Bamenda, June 2011,p.14.

The Bafut fondom has as neighbours Mankon and Nkwen to the South, Wum and Kom to the North, Bambui and Babanki to the East and Mbengwi to the West. Bafut covers a surface area of 425 square kilometers.²¹ The Bafut fondom is part of the sub equatorial climate zone which is principally made up of two seasons. The dry season and the rainy season, the highlands of Bafut are extremely cold as opposed to the plains or lowlands which have an average temperature. Daily temperature range from 14°C in the morning to 23°C at midday. This attracted more people to settle in the lowlands which favoured an easy flow of activities.

Bafut being one of the Tikari fondoms shares affinities with Bum, Ndop, Kom, Nsaw, Mbem, Nsangli, Fouban, Fougom etc. It is a centralized *fondom* with about 80,000 inhabitants. Its political institutions are characterized by a patrilineal system of succession unlike its sister dynasty the Kom which has a matrilineal setup.²² The Bafut palace where the Mamfor live, is situated 15 miles away from Bamenda station. Bafut is a clan with chiefdoms under one single *fondom*. These chiefdoms constitute villages as Bamum village, Mambu village.²³

i) Climates of Bafut

The climate in Bafut is the equatorial type. It has two seasons. Due to the effect of climate change there has been a change in the seasons of recent. Rainfall in Bafut has an annual recording of 2400 millimeters with highest downpour coming between the months of June and October. The rainy season usually lasted for eight months (March to November) and is usually characterized by heavy rainfall which leads to intense farming.²⁴ The dry season on its part lasts for four months (November to March) with low precipitation below 10 millimeters. It is also characterized by beautiful sunshine and remarkable temperature variations between the day and night.

Temperature ranges at 40°C in the morning and 23°C at mid-day. It was during this period that the Dry Harmattan winds and other occasional strong winds blew over the area. The climate favours human settlement and the cultivation of crops in the fondom. In the Bunti zone where land is very fertile, most indigenes settled for the cultivation of crops. In

²¹Ibid., p. 18.

²²M.T.Aletum, *Achrimbi II Fon of Bafut*. Graziani: Roma, 1971, p. 3.

²³ Interview with Samuel Awantoh, 65 years Teacher G.T.T.C Ndop, Bamenda, June 15th 2016

²⁴ N.A.B, File No Ab3/3325. Assessment Report Bafut Tribal Area, Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province, Buea, 1926, p.4.

order that all who are interested should have a piece of land, the fon gives out portions of land to individuals who in most cases do not pay any substantial. These climatic variations were conducive for agriculture which influenced the Mamfor to educate women on the best farming season.

ii) Vegetation

As concerns the vegetation of the Bafut *Fondom*, it consisted of a mixture of forest and savanna. The Menchum Valley and the Southern fringes of Akofuguba and Mankwi were covered with gallery forest.²⁵ Savanna on the other hand dominated the vegetation in the Eastern and Northern parts of the *Fondom*. There were also swampy areas made up of raffia palm bushes. The extensive forest area was threatened by the pressure from the farming and grazing population. The grasses served as thatch for traditional houses as most of the houses during this period in the palace and the fondom, were roofed with grass.²⁶

Other trees of economic and subsistence use were palms, pear, orange, coffee, cocoa and kolanuts which were equally necessary in trade. Trees as cypress, eucalyptus and raffia palm constituted the major source of raw materials for the construction of houses (*Ndah*) furniture and decoration. Raffia palms were used as raw materials for local industries such as traditional architecture, caps, bags and mat chairs used by the fon, princes, princesses queens, the *Mamfor*.

iii) Soils of Bafut

The Bafut Fondom is made up of different soil types ranging from the black humus to lateritic and loose soil types. These soils were also used for the construction of houses. The soils of the Bafut plateau were ferralitic and limited to the Mundum, Banji and Ako funguba axis. While the valleys and mountains were made up of rich humus top most soils eroded from the highlands.²⁷ In Bafut, areas like Akofunguba, Mundum, Agyati, Mankwi and Mforya were covered by sandy and coarse soils. There were fertile loamy soil at the centre of Bafut while the lower Bafut was made up of fertile alluvial soils especially on the hills and high land areas. This is why much food comes into Bafut especially during weekly market days from the lower part of the fondom

²⁵Ibid., p. 19.

²⁶Abumbi II, "Traditions and customs of the Bafut Kingdom". p. 15.

²⁷Enjema., "Bafut Women in Trade". p. 17.

Loam and clay soils are also dominant at the centre of the Bafut Fandom. These soil types are dominant in the northern and southern fringes of the Bafut plateau and valleys. These areas made up the agricultural belt of the Fandom and also constituted the centre of activities.²⁸ Thus these soils of Bafut influenced activities in that most of the women organized by the Mamfor, carried out agriculture which influence the introduction of other activities like trade, craft work and education in Bafut. Also women were advised to pay children's school fees from the proceeds from the sales of agricultural products thanks to the fertile soils.²⁹

iv) Relief and Hydrology of Bafut

The Muya, a river as it is called in Bafut, is the main and biggest river in the land, and it flows into Menchum. Apart from the Muya, there are other streams, like the Milis which empties itself into Muya. Water falls like *Nto'oh-munwi* at Niko, Asanje and Akengnsu can be seen in Bafut. Sacrifices are carried out in the different falls for it is believed that it is the dwelling place of the ancestors. Upper Bafut is made up of "healthy" stones which cover parts of the land especially at Mbebili which is entirely stony, Mankwi and parts of Mankanikong.

The hydrology has contributed to agriculture and fishing for consumption in order to supplement their diet. The Bafut *Fandom* had an undulating relief. The outstanding features are the Bafut Plateau (Manta - Mughom) covering the northern section with its highest point reaching 1100 meters above sea level.³⁰ The plains attracted large population concentrations and became key areas of farming activities and trade. These plains contained fertile soils together with its high population rate influenced agriculture, and trade among quarters encouraged by the Mamfor. This explains why the Bafut main market was found in the lowlands around Manji.

v) Topography

Bafut is located in a low-lying region marked by distinct breaks and falls in altitude towards the centre. It has five main geographical regions namely: Bafut west, east north, south and Bafut centre, all under the control of the fon. Bafut east is made up of Njimuya which comprises Akofunguba, Nkwineba, Ntieabali, Adah, Banji, Adiemukong and Mughie. These areas have a mixed vegetation of savanna and forest with gallery forests found around the

²⁸Ibid., p. 17.

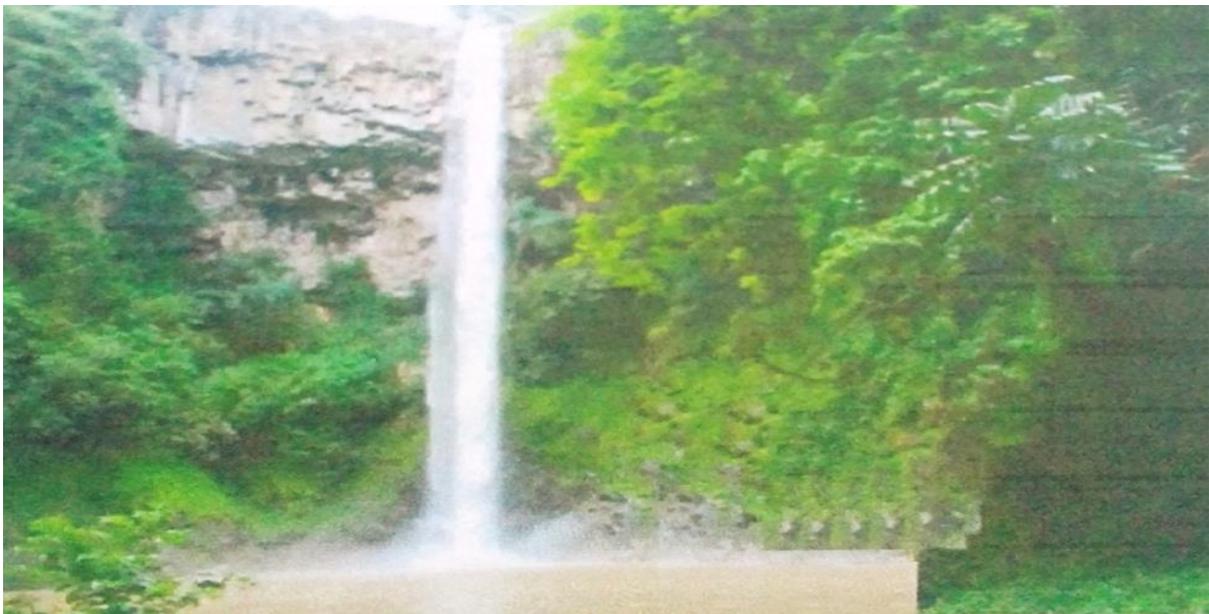
²⁹ Interview with Florence Ngum, 45 years, Trader, Bamenda, 17th of June 2016.

³⁰Simo., "The Evolution of Traditional Architecture". p. 20.

southern fringes of Akofunguba. Asanje, Mforya, Swie, Akosia, Njimbee which falls under Njimuya and Mforya are all situated in eastern and central Bafut. Areas like Manta, Tingoh, Bui, Agah, Mbakong, Otang, Obang and Ndung are classified under Bafut north. The north of Bafut is made up of a mixture of savanna vegetation and forest. The vegetation is swampy and has spotted forests which is concentrated around the Menchum valley. This has motivated the cultivation of rice in this area especially at Tingoh.

Bafut south comprises villages like Bawum, Mambu, Mbeili, Mankanikong and Mankwi. For its part, the centre of Bafut consists of villages like Agyati, Ntabuwe, Nsem, Njinteh, Njibujang, Niko, Mamkaah, Nchum, Bukari, Buwe and Bujong, where the palace is located. Plates present in Bafut are inclined towards the centre with the western sector rising about 1,300 metres with Mount Koo being the highest point. Equally, the Manta-Mughom plateau, which covers the northern sector with the highest point standing at 1100 metres, is situated at the centre of Bafut. These and more are some geographical features one can find in the Bafut fendom. The presence of these features has made the Mamfor to understand how she could carry out her activities in the Fendom.

Plate 1: Asanje Water Fall and shrine at Manta, below Nchum



Source: Che Victor's photographic collection, 15 July 2016

The Asanje water fall is one of the geographical features of Bafut which is used as a shrine where sacrifices are carried out to bless and protect the land.

The hydrology of the area does not only support fishing and agriculture. It is believed most of the rivers, falls, forest and hills act as the dwelling place for the gods. As such,

sacrifices are offered there in order to continuously receive blessings and protection from the gods. This is the reason the Mamfor peacefully carry out her activities since she is convinced that the land is protected and blessed. An example of a shrine where sacrifices are performed to bless and protect the land is the shrine in the Asanje waterfall at Manta below Nchum. (See plate 1). Lower Bafut is very fertile because most rivers found in Babut flow towards this zone. As they flow, they move along with fertile soils washed from other parts of the fondom, depositing them in this zone. This has made the soils of this area very fertile explaining why majority of food consumed in Bafut was cultivated in lower bafut.

B) Human Backgroud

The Bafut Fondom is over 500 years old. It is one of the largest Fondoms in the Bamenda Grassfields".³¹ The term Bamenda Grassfield refers to the former administrative division of Nkambe, Wum and Bamenda. Today, the Bamenda Grassfields is what is called the North West Region of Cameroon, with Bamenda as headquarters. Locally, Bafut is called *Alaà bufi* that is the Bafut Country. It is a composite fondom made up of semi and autonomous chiefdoms inhabited by people from diverse ethnic backgrounds with capital at Bujong. The autonomous chiefdoms are those villages that migrated into Bafut with their chiefs while the semi -autonomous are villages headed by chiefs appointed by the Fon. Bafut is made up of 34 villages under the authority of different chiefs called *benfor* who came into the area at different periods. There also exist twenty-four (24) other villages which are mostly quarters around the palace controlled by semi-autonomous chiefs called *Beutagcho*.³²

With the arrival of the Tikari group led by Ferlou to Mbebili in the eighteenth century, the process of unification started in Bafut with its outcome being the formation of the Bafut fondom. He unified those he met like the Bawum, Mbebili and Bukari, with Mbebili and Bugari were the original settlers, and other groups which came into the fondom like the, Mambu, Mankwi, Mankanikong, Otang, Banji and others and they all formed the Bafut Fondom with Ferlou as the paramount Fon. With the arrival of the Germans in the Bamenda Grassfields in the nineteenth century, they wrongly spelled *Ba-Ferlou*, meaning "people of Ferlou" as Ba-fut."³³ The long usage of this wrong spelling has not only made it acceptable, but also legitimate. This is how the term Bafut came into existence. The people

³¹ A. S. Neba, Modern Geography of the Republic of Cameroon, 2nd Edition, Neba Publishers, Bamenda, 1999, p. 11.

³² C. Manka'a, The "Abin-Nfor Fon's Annual Festival of Bafut 1900-1990, M.A. Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, April 2008, p. 23.

³³ "Abumbi II, Tradition and Customs of the Bafut Fondom, 201 1, p. 24.

spoke a language called *Nighaà Ni Beufeu* meaning the language of the Bafut. It belongs to the Ngemba sub-group of the Mbam-Nkam sub-division of the Grassfields Bantu language family."³⁴ From here, we shall base our attention on the origin, migration and settlement of the prominent groups which have autonomous chieftaincy in the Fondom.

Most groups that migrated and settled in Bafut were well organized into traditional polities such as chiefdoms. The size of each polity was a direct representation of its might and each came in under the leadership of a chief. It should be noted that none of the groups migrated under the name Bafut as such. It was only when they settled and were brought together under the leadership of Ferlou that they came to be known as Bafut. The historical trends and background of the people that make up the Bafut fondom shall be our next stop.

i) The Different Ethnicities

Bafut is made up of diverse ethnic groups including the Tikars, Widikum and the original settlers who were made up of the Mbebili and Bugari people. Other groups like the Bawum, the Tikari (*Ba Ferlou*), Mambu, Ndung, Mudum and others migrated from different directions to form the Bafut Fondom. The different groups are settled in five geographical zones, which have been compressed into three to perfectly suit this study. Apart from the groups that migrated into this area, they were some groups which were the original settlers. The immigrant group met them as settled people. They acted as hosts to the Tikar group which is the largest ethnic group in Bafut today and the other groups that came.³⁵

The different groups are dotted into the three zones. The northern part is lower Bafut commonly called Mbunti which falls into the Menchum valley and is made up of people from Widikum and Menchum. They occupy the forest region of Bafut. The central part is called *Mumala'a* and is heart of the fondom. It is made up of persons of *Tikar* origin who are clustered around the Fon's palace. Its headquarters is Bujong which is also the capital of Bafut. The *Ntare* or Upper Bafut lies south and south west of the capital. It is made up of the original settlers of Bafut, Tikar and Widikum groups. By bringing all these groups under his command, Ferlou assumed the position of paramount which permitted him to control land in the fondom. Oral tradition holds that the people of Bukari and Mbebili are the original

³⁴ J. Ngwa., *Tone in the Orthography of Bafut*, Vol .I September 1982,p. 7.

³⁵ V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon History since 1800*, Limbe, Press Book, 1997, p. 7.

settlers of Bafut. While the people of Mbebili settled on the southern ridge, those of Bukari occupied the northern ridge."³⁶

a) Mbebili and Bukari

The origin of the Mbebili is covered up in myths. Myth holds that there was a small market at Mbebili where traders met regularly, but among them, no one knew the other or where they came from.³⁷ By 5am, the market was already full and no one could tell where the other came from. Nebachi meaning he who settled first, Chief of Mbebili holds that, one end of an ancient market at Mbebili acted as a garbage and contained fresh dirt every morning but no one could tell where the dirt came from.³⁸ One morning, a girl was discovered sitting on the heap of dirt. When her identity was questioned she said that she was instructed by her mother to go and dispose of dirt but warned never to look where the dirt fell. She disobeyed her mother's instruction by trying to look so found herself on the heap of the garbage. It is believed that one of the traders later got married to the girl and started a family which later grew into a village, thus forming the Mbebili village. The place where the girl was discovered was named *Nsani mu ba buri* meaning "field of a child from heaven". With the coming of Ferlou, Nebachi the first loosed his authority to him through a plot thereby relinquishing his authority as the controller of land to Ferlou.

The Bukari for their part who settled on the northern ridge are believed to have come from the Menchum valley taking into consideration their present location."³⁹ Today, Bukari controls villages like Tikong, Mamba, Buwi, Bujang and others. All these villages are answerable to the chief of Bukari who has semi-autonomy and pays allegiance to the Fon of Bafut when need arises. This is because he and his people were defeated and displaced by Ferlou leading to their settlement at their present side."⁴⁰ Apart from the people of Mbebili and Bukari who claimed aboriginal status, there were other groups that came into Bafut with the Bawum as the first immigrants into Mbebili.

b) Bawum

The people of Bawum are said to have migrated from *Ala'a-ante* due to volcanic eruptions. *Ala'a-ante* represents the present day Bamenda Up Station, the area that harbours the governor's residence. From *Ala'a-ante*, they wandered down the hills and finally settled at

³⁶Interview with Veronica Manka'a, 64 years, wife of a quarter head, Mbebili, 16th September 2016.

³⁷Interview with Simon Akah, 85 years, Farmer, Mbebili, 15 September 2016.

³⁸Interview with Chief Nebachi, 52 years, Chief of Mbebili, Teacher, Mbebili, 18th July 2016.

³⁹Interview with Felix Suh, 30 years, Chief of Bukari, Painter, Yaounde, 18th October 2016.

⁴⁰ "Ibid

Mbebili⁴¹. The name Bawum came from a fig tree, *Nte Wum* which the Bawum men used wherever they went. It grew wherever it was planted no matter the climatic condition of the area and it made the soil around it very fertile. This explains why the Bawum people in the course of their migration were accepted wherever they went to. This was because they were seen as "the bringers of fertility". They equally supported whatever difficulties they encountered in the course of their migration like the tree they carried along. The language of this people was *mbèrifii*. When they settled at Mbebili, they had to give up their language and adopt that of Nebachi as a sign of allegiance to the owner and controller of the land in which they were settled.⁴²

The Bawum left *Ala'a-ante* on the instructions of a goddess to move to another place without looking behind. She wanted to punish the inhabitants, the Mendankwe people through an earthquake for refusing to give her water, which a Bawum woman did. The myth further says a woman failed to respect the instructions of the goddess, looked behind upon hearing the sound of the quake and was transformed into a rock.⁴³ These people continued their movement to *Nfortoh*, a cave at Nchum in Bafut, where they spent some time before moving to the North West of Bafut where they met Nebachi. He gave them land at Achumjo where they build a palace for their leader.

A loose confederation was established between the people of Mbebili and Bawum under the leadership of Nebachi who was the original settler.⁴⁴ As the owner of land in pre-colonial Mbebili, Nebachi who acted as the paramount was the centre of focus. As the controller of land, he gave part of his land to the Bawum people and made Ntoh, their leader, a quarter head in his chiefdom. The fact that he was the head of the traditional council and everything was centred around on him made him the overall leader whom everybody had to respect.

While Ntoh and his followers respected the advice of the goddess to move far away from *Ala'a-ante*, three of his brothers settled a few kilometres from *Ala'a-ante* and created small villages. They were Fo-Bina and brothers who settled near the present site of Bali Nyonga.⁴⁵ When the group led by Ntoh finally settled at *Nte Wum*, their present side, Ntoh paid visits to his brothers occasionally and mourned their separation.

⁴¹ N, D. Fuhnwi; "The Fon, Chiefs and People of Bafut in Conflict, Pre-colonial Period - 1968, D.E.A in History, University of Yaounde I, 2002, p. 48."

⁴² Aletum, Political Conflict, 1974, p. 12.

⁴³ Interview with Christopher Suh, 64 years, Kings maker, head of Kwifor Bawum, Bawum, 21st October 2016.

⁴⁴ Roynal, Myth and Political Economy in Bafut, the Structural History of an African Kingdom, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid

The the where about of the three princes cannot be traced today and it is believed they were integrated by the Bali into their community.⁴⁶

The Bawum and Tikari held weekly meetings with their landlord and leader in Nebachi's palace headed by him. However, Nebachi proved to be very greedy and did not entertain his notables whenever they had a meeting. Even items collected by his notables were preserved in his store room for himself and his family.⁴⁷ The *Mu Tikari*, child of the *Takari*, was the opposite of Nebachi. He would callon the notables of Mbebili and Bawum and lavish themwith food and gifts. Seeing his generosity, the notables saw him as a good leader and accepted his proposal to seize power from Nebachi by stepping on his toes.

According to Bafut tradition, this act is considered as dethronement.⁴⁸ By seizing power from another chief in order to take control, it shows how important land can be to traditional rulers. It shows traditional rulers can do anything possible to continuously protect land under their control where the Mamfor could peacefully carryout her activities. After this act, the Bawum people moved a few kilometres from Achumju to their present side at Ntie-Wum. At Ntie-wum, problems began between them and Ferlou over the payment of tributes.

The Bawum who claim to have entered first into Mbebili and supported Ferlou in his seizure of power, considered themselves too important to be controlled by Ferlou who was a new comer. To compensate him for his help in taking over the control of land from Nebachi, Ntoh was made second in command when Ferlou constructed his palace at Bujong. Disagreement continued between the two leaders which resulted in the killing of Ntoh, the Bawum chief. The people decided to go back to their original site at Ala'a-ante.

While resting at Mile Eight on their way back to *alaa-ante*, they were called back by Ferlou upon the advice of the then Divisional Officer Joefred.⁴⁹ The place where they rested is still part of Bawum land today. Before the disagreement between the two leaders, Ferlou and his people, after seizing the throne from Nebachi, moved away from *Mbaà*, where Nebachi gave them land, to *Nchin ni-fiim* still at Mbebili where they settled before moving to Bujong.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Interview with Christopher Suh, 64 years, head of Bawum Kwifor, Bawum, 21st September 2016.

⁴⁷ E. M. Chilver and Kaberry, Traditional Bamenda. The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields, Buea, 1967, p. 9.

⁴⁸C. Manka'a "The *Abin-nfor*", Fon's Annual Festival of Bafut 1900-1990, M.A. Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, April 2008, p. 21.

⁴⁹Interview with Christopher Suh, 64 years, Bawum.

⁵⁰ R Asombang, New Direction in Archaeology, Beyond Chiefdoms, Pathways to Complexity in Africa, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 70.

The two villages the Tikaris headed by the Fon and the Bawum with Ntoh as Chief, are at loggerheads with each other for the Bawum people have not forgotten the killing of their chief. They equally find it difficult to accept to be controlled by someone they helped to climb the ladder of paramount chief and the controller of the entire fendom. The Bawum people as a result of expansion share boundaries with Mankon and Nkwon today.

c) Migration of the Tikar Group into Bafut

According to sources consulted, the Tikar who constitute the largest ethnic population in Bafut originated from North-Eastern Cameroon, around Adamawa and the Lake Chad region (present day Adamawa, North and Far North Regions).⁵¹ Their southward and westward migration was intensified probably because of Fulani slave raiders who invaded the area in the eighteenth century from Northern Nigeria. The pressure of invasion from the raiders and succession disputes certainly must have caused the movement that led the Tikar people to Bafut. They arrived was in different contingents from Kimbi, Tibati, Banyo and Ndobu.⁵²

The migration of the Tikar was in waves and led by princes of Rifum who wanted to set-up their own chiefdoms. Nkwi and Warinier describe their movement as follows:

It was about three hundred years ago that increasing pressure from the North and internal troubles plus the desire for new land led to the splitting up of Tikar groups into smaller bands, which having left Kimi drifted further West and South West. Some of these groups move under the leadership of sons of a Tikar ruler who was later called Fon. These groups at various time reached what is called new Mezam. Among the earlier were those who came from Ndobu, to the Ndop plane in the South of the Bamenda grassfields, where they formed small political independent villages a few kilometres apart. No semblance of political unity was allured. In the North West, we have Mbaw, Mbeem and Nsungli also settlements of Wiya, Tang and war. The main body of these settlements however set-off under the leadership of their Fon and founded the kingdom of Bum. The Bafut, Kom and Nsaw were among the last to arrive.⁵³

According to Hawkesworth, the first movement started off at Ndobu, situated in Northern Bamoum, in the upper reaches of the Mbam River.⁵⁴

⁵¹ V. J. Ngoh, *Cameroon History since 1800*, 1996, p. 7.

⁵² N. Nkwi., *Traditional Diplomacy, A Study of Inter-chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon*, University of Yaounde, 1986, p. 42.

⁵³ P. Nkwi and Warier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*, Yaounde, SOPECAM, 1982, p. 16.

⁵⁴ File No A62, Hawkes worth, E. G.; *Assessment Report on the Bafut Area, Bamenda Division, Cameroon Province, 1926*, NAB Buea.

The legendary story of the Tikar holds that they were led by Afo-afum out of Ndob as a result of hostilities caused by the chambas and Fulani, original settlers of the area, who were brave warriors on horsesback from the North. Eric Ambe on his part affirms: "Then came the Fulani and chambas warriors from Nigeria and Sudan who hunted for slaves both for their own use and to sell to the Northern traders"⁵⁵. This was why Afo-afum had to move away from Ndob with his people.

From Ndob, they were led by Afo-Afum to a new settlement, Nso in Bui Division. Afo-afum later died at Nso and was replaced by Nfor Kikorimbang, a strong, determined and dynamic leader. Kikorimbang went about in search of fertile land for his people. This took him to Korn in Boyo where he spent some time before moving. Kikorimbang left Kom for greener pastures which he saw at Ndop since the land was empty, level, void of hills and large enough to accommodate his people.

The TiKaris lived in the Ndop plane for many years where Nfor Kikorimbang died. His death plunged the people into another succession dispute over which of his three sons would succeed him.⁵⁶ The fight at this level could be described as a cold war. It almost escalated to an open confrontation but for the timely and brilliant suggestion from one of the contestants to the throne. He suggested that the tribe should be divided so that each son would be independent of the others and would rule his own fraction separately.⁵⁷

Following this proposal, the land was shared into three parts, the son who made the proposal was given two quarters while the others received one quarter each. This led to a division of the tribe. Two of the sons took their followers and founded dynasties in Bamenda which today bear different names, while the other son remained at Ndop.⁵⁸ The two sons like their ancestors were again on the road looking for fertile land. The one with two quarters took his people to Kejom-Ketu, Big Babanki where they settled. The younger son settled at *Mbembew* a site close to present day Bafut, with his own followers.⁵⁹

After wandering with his people from Ndop through Babanki, Bafreng halted at different places before moving into Mbebili under the leadership of Ferlou. There, Ferlou met the local chief Nebachi, the owner of the land and Ntoh the first immigrant into the land. The Tikar leader who came in with the title of Ferlou was given a piece of land to set up his

⁵⁵ E. Neba, "Bafut Society and the Colonial Experience. B.A. University of Yaounde I, 1988, p. 7.

⁵⁶ C. Mankaà, "The *Abin-Nfor*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ P. Ritzenthaler, *The Fon of Bafut*, Britain, Cassel London, 1966, pp. 8- 10.

⁵⁸ Aletum, *Political Conflict*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ "Ibid, p. 52.

palace at Mba under Nebachi. Chilver and Kaberry comment: "Then there came a man from Tikari named Ferlou who attracted the people to him by his generosity".⁶⁰

They further explained that Ferlou gained the support of the people of Nebachi and Ntoh by showering them with gifts of brass, pipes, slaves and drinking horns.⁶¹ The greed of Nebachi coupled with the gifts offered to the nobles and citizens by Ferlou pushed the people away from Nebachi toward Ferlou. The elders of Nebachi, Ntoh and Ferlou spearheaded the dethronement of Nebachi by stepping on his toes.

To show how determined and committed the elders were in taking over the throne from Nebachi, they took an oath of secrecy on a stone at the entrance into the present palace of Nebachi. (See plate 2). The terms of the oath were that, whoever revealed the secret would die.⁶² The place was named *Nsani Nkah* meaning the field of oath taking. This stone has since then acted as a shrine in Bafut and every first *Yikà* (a traditional day in Bafut) of the year, the Kwifor must go to Mbebili to pour libations on the stone and other shrines like the oldest tree, and the former palace of Nebachi and Ferlou, amongst others.⁶³

The method used by Ferlou to take over the throne of Nebachi can be considered as a coup d'état. In a meeting with Nebachi's elders together with those of Ntoh and Ferlou, Ferlou, the Tikari leader stepped on the toes of the then blind Nebachi. He said "Does this mean you have taken my kingship? The entire council accepted."⁶⁴ This marked the downfall of chief Nebachi and a new beginning for Ferlou, who now became the leader of the land from that moment coupled with his selection as the paramount chief till date under different successors. As said before, the role of the Fon as controller of land is seen here as he made sure sacrifices were offered regularly to the god in the different shrines so that peace, fertility and good harvest reigns in the land where the Mamfor carried out her functions.

⁶⁰E.Chilver and Kaberry, Traditional Bamenda, The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields, vol I Buea, 1967, p. 19.

⁶¹Chilver and Kaberry, Traditional Government in Bafut, West Cameroon, Milwaukee Public Museum, 1962, p.6.

⁶² Interview with Nebachi, 52 years, Chief of Mbebili, Mbebili, 18th September 2016.

⁶³Interview with Joseph Shusi, 65 years, Tapper and member of Bafut kwifor, Asong, 15th October 2016.

⁶⁴ Idem.

Plate 2: The Stone of Oath Taking and a Shrine



Source: Victor Che's photographic collection, 15 July 2016

The stone of oath on which elders of Nebachi took an oath to dethrone their king Nebachi at Mbebili.

Before the dethronement of Nebachi, the brother of Kikorimbang who left Ndop with his men attempted to settle at Mbabui, Big Babanki and Bafreng but to no avail. He could not withstand the strength of the locals, and who in addition out-numbered his people. As such, he decided to follow his brother Kikorimbang to Mbebili. His coming swelled the population of the Tikari people who had settled at Mbebili. It made them popular and more numerous than the two villages of Bawum and Mbebili put together. This was why Ferlou could easily win the people over to his side which subsequently led to his taking over as the chief from Nebachi. All this was to ascend to the position of paramount which automatically made the individual custodian of land whom according to the norms of the land, installed the Mamfor.

When Ferlou became the new chief he did everything possible to make sure all royal possessions like caps, stool and dresses in the keeping of Nebachi were taken. With the help of Ntoh Bawum, the royal possessions were taken away.⁶⁵ This was to consolidate his position as the paramount chief and controller of land. Some critics consider this act as theft since Nebachi at this time was blind and his possessions were taken without his consent and in his absence. Unable to bear the disgrace and betrayal from those he had hosted in good

⁶⁵Interview with Christopher Suh, 64 years, head of nda kwifor, Bawum, 21st October 2016.

faith as his brothers, Nebachi committed suicide on a tree in front of his palace⁶⁶ and was buried beside the tree. At the time we went to the field, the tree was still standing and fresh, though one side of the trunk had dried up. (See plate 3).

Plate 3: The Oldest Tree in Bafut where Nebachi Committed Suicide



Source: Victor Che's photographic collection 17 July 2016.

The tree on which Nebachi committed suicide because he was betrayed and disgraced by Ferlou a brother he hosted in his land.

The tree is one of the oldest trees that still exist in Bafut, about 500 years old.⁶⁷ It is standing in a football pitch at Mbebili and acts as a player for both teams during football encounters. For Nebachi to have killed himself because his land and title had been taken away from him was clear proof of how important land could be to traditional rulers in Bafut and the entire human race as a whole. In Bafut, land was considered as the resting place of the dead and any attempt to desecrate it was met with serious sanctions ranging from fines to banishment which can only be passed by the Fon as the custodian and protector of land. Also, it was a source of livelihood and thus the Fon had to protect it if he wanted his people to live a better life.

When the traditional items of Nebachi were collected at night with the help of the Bawum elders, the next morning Ferlou moved away from his palace at *Mba* (which

⁶⁶ Interview with John Suh Nufor, 78 years, retired Pastor, Prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 21st September 2016.

⁶⁷ Idem

has remained an ancestral shrine till date) to a new place called *Nchinifum*.⁶⁸ From here, he ruled over the people with Ntoh as his assistant. While at Mbebili, a Princess from the palace of Nebachi named Lum Muche Nkie went fishing at *Nke-Nsare*, a stream below the present Bafut palace.

While walking around looking for fruits, she discovered a vast plain of land and proposed it to Ferlou who sent his guards to supervise the land. Upon their confirmation, Ferlou moved his palace there, (the present site) and Lum Muche Nkie was executed for fear that she would one day boast of her discovery. Till date, she is called in Bafut as *Ndiee alaà Mbwe*, meaning she who discovers and got missing. She was executed at the age of 19 years at *Nsani Munwi*.⁶⁹ Her grave today is a shrine where sacrifices are often offered. Recently, it was a scene of conflict between the Fon of Bafut and a pastor who organised a crusade and cut down the tree that grew on the grave of this girl, now a shrine.

The fon was afraid that one day he might be deprived of his right as custodian of the land as his father did to Nebachi, the Fon had to take precautions by killing Muche Nkie. If Nebachi was deprived of his land and possession, Muche Nkie killed for fear she might one day claim for a position for the land she discover, it shows how valuable land can be to the Fon. In order words he was struggling to protect the land in which he now acts as the custodian and controller, for the Mamfor to peacefully performed her duties.

Upon arrival at the new site, they met the Bukari people who had settled there. These people resisted the attempt of Ferlou and his followers to settle at Bujongat first, but they were later subjugated. They finally accepted the leadership of Ferlou and were subsequently integrated and later given land to settle on, a few kilometres away from the palace.⁷⁰ From Bujong, Ferlou extended his influence, subjugated more villages and brought them under him. From Bujong, the authority and power of the Fon was extended to the subjugated territories.

Apart from the villages he subjugated through the use of force, tribal wars among some groups of people in the area worked to the advantage of Ferlou. Those who could not stand the strength of the stronger party had to either run to seek protection elsewhere or remain and pay tributes to the victor for life. This was the case with the people of Otang. The tribal war between them and the people of Befang forced them to migrate to Mbebili

⁶⁸ Interview with Abumbi II, 63 years, Fon of Bafut, Magistrate, Bafut, 25th October 2016.

⁶⁹ Interview with Nebachi, 52 years, Chief of Mbebili, Mbebili, 18th September 2016.

⁷⁰ Interview with Marius Che, 62 years, retired Teacher, Mbebili, 16th September 2016.

Bafut.⁷¹ When calm was restored, the Otangs were given a piece of land to settle on by Abumbi I.

The Otangs occupied Lower Bafut or the *Mbunti* zone which include the following villages: Agaha, Mofor, Ndung, Koluko, Usudum and others. In Lower Bafut, some villages came to be under Bafut through conquest. They include villages like Akofunguba, Mbekong, Manta, Buno-o, Aba and Obang which are non-Bafut speaking. They were linked to the centre controlled by the Fon through gifts which they brought to the Fon like palm wine, fish, palm oil, groundnuts and other products. This was a sign of allegiance to the Fon as the custodian, controller and the distributor of land.

The people showed their appreciation for the protection given to them by the Fon, by bringing him gifts which was usually obligatory. With the increase in population, new villages were created by the Fon, among which were Manji, Njinteh, Mankaha, Nchum, Nsem, Agyati, Swei, Kenshu, Nforya and Njimbi, all situated in Central Bafut. Some of these villages were far off from the palace of the Fon. No matter the distance, the Fon was the centre of focus. Unlike the *Ntare* zone which have their chiefs, villages in central Bafut have quarter heads that are answerable to the fon of Bafut.⁷²

Apart from the people of Lower and Central Bafut, there were also some groups that migrated into the Ntare zone and settled next to Mbebili and Bawum. We have the people of Mankanikong, Mambu and Mankwi. These villages make up the part of Bafut called the Ntare zone or Upper Bafut. These villages have diverse origins and they came in separately at different periods, except Mbebili who were the first settlers. All of them came in with their chiefs who are autonomous. The above explanation and that still to come is aimed at presenting the various groups that made up our study area. Also it is our intention to clarify us on the entire area under the control of the Fon and the various people who occupy the different parts of the Fondom under the paramount Fon.

d) Migration of Other Groups into Bafut

Oral tradition of Widikum indicates that the Widikum people came from the direction of Mamfe and finally settled at an old market at Ntarikon where there existed a secondary forest.⁷³ From Ntarikon, the people dispersed in different groups.⁷⁴ It is said that

⁷¹ Fuhnwi, Fon, Chief and People of Bafut, 2002, p. 52.

⁷² R.J. Hook, Intelligence Report on the Associated Village Groups Occupying the Bafut Native Authority Area, 1933-1934, Ab/c (3059) 3, file No 1303, National Archives Buea (NAB).

⁷³ Ntarikon is a quarter in Bamenda Center locally called Bafut Park with a daily market.

the dispersion was as a result of the emergence of an ancestor called Mbeka, who transformed into a river guardian spirit. The people followed the river and separated along the way according to the different branches of the river. This separation led to the formation of the following groups: Meta, Ngie, Ngwo and Widikum all situated in Momo Division.⁷⁵ Equally, the people of Mbu and Baforcho found in Mezam originated from this group. The Widikum settled at their present site and from this group came the Mambu and Mankwi people who make up part of the Ntare people of Upper Bafut.

Legend has it that the people of Mambu migrated from Widikum in the Moghamo region of Momo Division around the seventeenth century.⁷⁶ The cause of the migration of the two princes, Mbah Chebighu and Mbah Mforkwa, was a succession dispute. None of them was willing to succumb to the other although Chebighu was the rightful heir. Since he had few supporters, Mforkwa who had more supporters would not allow him take his rightful place. Unable to stand his brother, Chebighu had to leave. His movement away from Widikum was laborious as they trekked through dense forests, high hills and valleys and finally settle at Mberewi, a place now occupied by the present Mudum II people of Bafut.⁷⁷

The Mambu people attacked and defeated the Oshie-Mberewi people and took over their land, sending them to the other side of a lake which acted as a boundary between the two tribes. The sending away of the Oshie-Mberewi people was aimed at acquiring more land. With the death of Chebighu, his son Chesi Mayi took over and continued with the policy of his father which entailed peaceful co-existence with no interference. Chesi Mayi, fell prey to the deceit of his uncle, Mba Mforkwa who later joined them at Mberewi as a result of tribal war at Widikum.⁷⁸

Mba Mforkwa had an eye on the throne of Chesi which tradition does not permit, he lured Chesi into killing a prince of Oshie by the lakeside separating the two villages, claiming the boy had crossed to fetch water on their own side of the lake.⁷⁹ Presently, there is no lake at the site. It must have dried up. An informant told us that it was a water pond and not a lake as such.⁸⁰ The aim of Mforkwa was to incite the population of both villages

⁷⁴ Chilver, Kabery, *Traditional Bamenda*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ C. N. Young, "Succession in the Bamenda Grassfields from Earliest Settlement to 2006", DEA Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2009, p. 46.

⁷⁶ A. R. Chunga, *The Mambu History*, Willy Printers, Small Mankon Bamenda, 2006, p. 18.

⁷⁷ Interview with Mary lum Ntumentang, 55 years, wife of a quarter head, Musah, Mambu, Bafut, 15 September 2016.

⁷⁸ Interview with Ndi Barnabas, 49 years, Teacher, Ntarikon, Bamenda, 20th September 2016.

⁷⁹ Chilver, Kaberry, *Traditional Government in Bafut, West Cameroon*, Milwaukee Public Museum, 1962, p.7.

⁸⁰ Interview with Muchie Joseph, 61 years, retired Teacher, Mberewi (Mudum II), 30th July 2016.

against Mba Chesi Mayi so that he could win their favour and take over the throne since Chesi had no child who could take over from him in case he died.⁸¹

Discovering the evil intention of his uncle, Chesi summoned a meeting of all his elders and notables persuaded them to both leave Mberewi. At this point in time, the Oshie people had outnumbered the Mambu and so they had to accept evacuation to the unknown or stay and bear the consequences. Chesi and his people had to leave Mberewi in three fractions to avoid suspicion. The first fraction led by Awambeng, went along with Chesi's royal possessions and other things like *kwifor* and *Takumbeng*. They were to follow a special route as instructed by Chesi.

The chief was then to follow the same route at his convenience and likewise the last band which was led by Che Tumfong did the same.⁸² The dishonest and disloyal Awambeng took the royal possessions to lower Bafut perhaps with the intension of making himself a chief under Ferlou. Unfortunately for him, he was attacked and robbed of the royal possessions by the *kwifor* of Ferlou and his compound burned. He was later compensated with the title of notable in Ferlou's palace and offered many wives.

The fraction led by Che Tumfong with that of Mbah Chesi lost their way but that of Tumfong found themselves at Awing. A. R. Chunga holds that:

while leaving Mberewi, one of the chief's wives in the company of Tumfong was asked to collect water from the lake. While at Awing, she hunged the water inside a cocoyam leaf on the branch of a tree. The water dripped down and formed Lake Awing.⁸³

Furthermore, he says this was why the lake at Mberewi dried off. It is believed that immediately the chief's wife collected water from the lake; it dried off and followed them to Awing. Mbah Chesi Mayi and his band trekked over the hills to Ala Banji where he met the Beba people. For fear of its nearness to Mberewi where he had killed a prince, he continued to Mankwi then to Mankanikong. While at Banji, he defeated the Bebas and placed Akombo Shushi, his son, to take care of the area so that tributes could be paid to him.

At Mankanikong, Chesi looted the people and carried the booty along with him.⁸⁴ To make sure the people of Mankanikong continued paying allegiance and tributes to him, Chesi kept Prince Tangyie Ngwasi to represent him and to take care of the raffia and

⁸¹ A. R. Chunga, *The Mambu History*, pp. 22-24.

⁸² *Ibid* p. 26.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁸⁴ Interview with Emmanuel Ndonwi, 54 years, Trader, Mankwi, 29th September 2016.

palm bushes at Muzie. From Mankanikong, Chesi continued to Mbebili. According to Wanki Nibanchang II of Mambu, the Mbebili people knew no war and were believed to have been created and placed on the land which they now occupy by God.⁸⁵ They settled in a quarter at Mbebili called *Nta Mbajong* before moving to their present site. This quarter today still remained part of Mbebili land and was named after a son of Mbah Chesi.⁸⁶ Chesi later died and was succeeded by Ambe Che.

Ambe Che on his part, moved away from the tomb of his father to a new site called *Nta-anieh*. Before leaving he appointed his brother prince Ayang to stay behind and take care of his property. Ayang moved a few meters away from the tomb of his father and settled in a land which he named Ayang after and which still bears the same name.⁸⁷ The placing of *muzie* under the care of Ngwasi, seized from Mankanikong people by Chesi shows how stronger groups subjugated weaker ones and forced them to pay tribute to them.

While at *nta'anieh*, AmbeChe's brother, Fusi, had an eye on the throne. Fusi had to move with his supporters to Mankon since he saw that staying at Mambu would not enable him to achieve his dreams of taking over the throne. This band was later called *Mambu MaNkuu* meaning the Mambu of Mankon. Those who remained with Ayang and Ambe Che today constitute a semi-autonomous chiefdom called *Ala Mamb*.⁸⁸ The royal name at this point was changed from Mbah to Wanki, a change we are told came out as a result of Ambe Che who on the invitation of his brother Fusi moved from *nta'enieh*, crossed the *mili* to *nta-mambu* (Mankon) and back to *nta 'enieh* when he discovered Fusi wanted him to settle under him as a quarter head.⁸⁹

From *nta'anieh*, Ambe Che came back to where his father was buried and constructed his palace, a few kilometres south-west of Mbebili at Ntahngoreh. For them to settle peacefully in the land, they had to pay allegiance to Ferlou who by this time exacted much influence on the land. This marked the starting point of his superiority over all the chiefs since he had already captured Mbebili and Bawum through a traditional coup d'état. Today, Mambu is made up of six quarters. They include *Asong*, *Musah* headed by Tah Tumantang and *Musoh* with *Musoh* as third class chief made by the Fon of Bafut. From

⁸⁵ Interview with Wanki Nibanchang II, 60 years, Chief of Mambu, Nurse, Mambu, 24th July 2016.

⁸⁶ Idem.

⁸⁷ Interview with James Akotoh, 69 years, prince, Mambu-Bafut, 24th September 2016.

⁸⁸ Fuhnwi, "Fon, Chiefs and People of Bafut," p. 52.

⁸⁹ Chunga, *Mambu History*, p. 35.

Musah, Ntiela is the next quarter, the seat of *Ala 'a Mambu. Nta'angore, Atuala* and *Achangnecho* are the other quarters. Eight chiefs have been on the throne from Mberewi till date. They include Chebignu, Chesi Mayi, Ambe Che, Neba'an, Cheyie, Neba Nchang I, Suh Mforchu and presently Niba Nchang II.⁹⁰

Another group that entered around the nineteenth century at the same time with the Mambu people were the people of Mankwi. They went ahead of the Mambu people and settled at their present site. Their origin is obscured, but sources hold they came in from Mudum.⁹¹ Since the Mudum people came from Widikum as a result of the Chamba invasion coupled with succession disputes, it is generally believed and accepted that they have the same origin as the Mambu. While at Mudum, disagreement broke out between Ta la'ah Mankwi and his brother Ta la'ah Banji over the throne. To calm the situation, Ta la'a Mankwi moved across the *Muya* (a river) and settled North West of Mbebili and was finally assimilated by Ferlou. Since Ferlou was in command, he had to spread his tentacles all over the land as custodian.

The Mankanikong came in after the Mankwi people from Weh, a region situated in present day Menchum Division.⁹² Under the leadership of Chief Atanga Muwah Ngwamandoh, they left Weh and passed through Mudum I before moving to their present site. Being a peace loving people, they accepted the authority of Ferlou and settled north-east of Mambu and were incorporated into the Bafut Fondom. Accepting the conditions of regular payment of tribute given by Ferlou meant they recognised him as the owner, custodian and controller of the land given to him and his people for settlement.

It should be noted that none of the groups that migrated into the study area came in under the name Bafut (See map IV). The name came as a result of an error in spelling from the Germans. It was only after these groups were incorporated into the larger group led by Ferlou that they adopted the name Bafut.⁹³ The bringing together of the different groups under his control confirms his position as the paramount, and the distributor of land. This is because he showed where each group had to settled with their limits. All the autonomous villages and their chiefs who entered Bafut were linked to the centre through gifts. They brought palm oil, raffia wine, palm wine, fish, food, hunted animals and others as a sign of respect and allegiance to the Fon who had made his power and influence felt all over the land.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Interview with Martin Fuh, 49 years, Prince, Builder, Mankanikong, 23rd September 2016.

⁹² Neba, "Bafut Society", pp. 10-11.

⁹³ Interview with Veronica Nforsi, 55 years, Teacher GBPHS Yaounde, Damas, Yaounde, 5th September 2016.

As the Bali Chamber continued with raids in the Bamenda grassfields, the Chiefs in Bafut saw the need to unite their efforts and fight the common enemy, Bali.

Since the Tikari leader, Ferlou, headed the group with the highest population, the chiefs of Bawum, Mambu, Mankanikong, Mankwi and other second and third class chiefs who came into the region decided to crown him Fon so that the common enemy can be defeated through combine efforts led by him. This was why Ferlou was made paramount in the mist of the other chiefs, thereby giving him the power and authority to act as the controller of land. Christopher Suh holds he was made the "head boy", a post which the British strengthened through their Native Authority (NA) strategy.⁹⁴

Following the different historical circumstances that brought the different groups into Bafut, one can say that the people settled in three areas. Firstly, we have the central chiefdom made up mostly of immigrants and off springs of the Tikar people. They are directly under the control of the paramount Fon. Secondly, we have autonomous villages whose leaders had status similar to those of the paramount Fon. They have traditional political institutions like the *takumbeng and kwifor*.⁹⁵ They are highly respected by their people in the same way the Fon of Bafut was respected. People who make up these chiefdoms are in the Ntare zone. The third and last category of persons who settled around the Menchum valley and other new settlements are the Obang, Otang Ndung, and others.

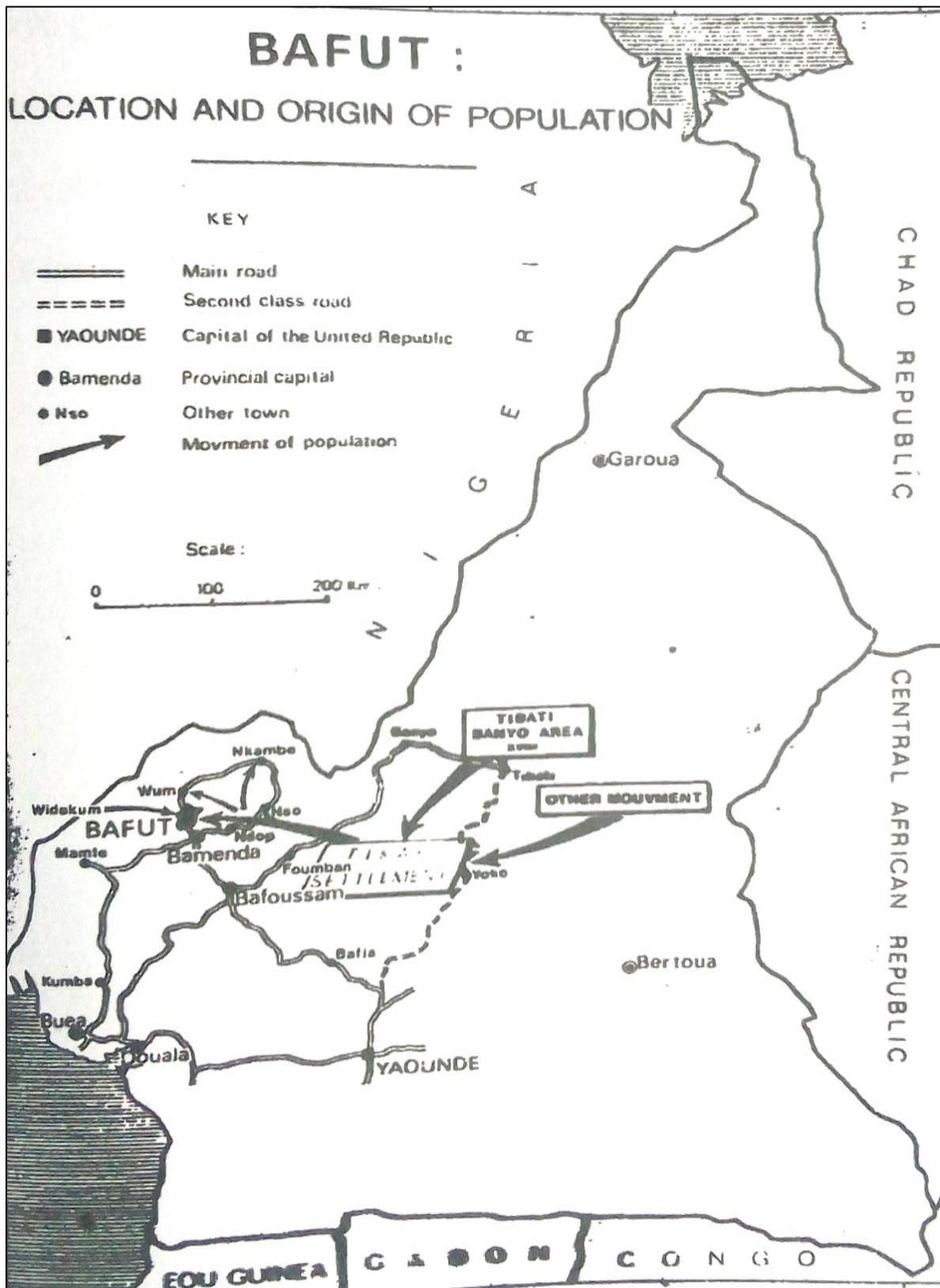
They were people who sought protection from the Fon of Bafut as the custodian and controller of land. They receive orders from the Fon and were not permitted to own any traditional political institutions like *takumbeng and kwifor*.⁹⁶ This classification has shaped the traditional organization of the Bafut Fandom. This is why most of the chiefs are not in good terms with the Fon since they deserve respect from the Fon and other citizens whom he does not give may be trying to intensify his position as the controller of land. Below is a map showing the movement of the different ethnic groups in to Bafut.

⁹⁴ Interview with Christopher Suh, 64 years, head of nda kwifor, Bawum, 21st October 2016.

⁹⁵ Aletum, Political Conflicts, p. 56.

⁹⁶ Interview with Philomina Lum, 65 years, Princess Manka'ah, Bafut, 23 October 2016.

Map 4: Map Showing the Movement of the Different Groups into Bafut



Source: Adapted from John Suh Fontem's Religious Conflict in Bafut.

On the eve of colonial conquest, the Bafut Fondom was a heterogeneous unit made up of people who had migrated from different regions under different leaders now settle in Bafut and controlled by Ferlou. These people settled in three geographical zones: lower, central and upper (*Ntare*) zones. The people from Ntare speak the same language with central Bafut but for a slight change in the pronunciation of some words. On the other hand lower Bafut is made up of people who do not speak the Bafut language. Bafut centre is predominantly made up of the Tikar and are settled in quarters like Manji, Njinteh, Manka'ah, Nchum, Njubujang, Niko, Mbebali, Bujong the Capital of Bafut and others. They have mostly third class chiefs and quarter heads. From the above, it is clear that the Bafut Fondom is made up of geographical features that are suitable for habitation and farming.

The rich and fertile soils especially around Mbuti, its forest; relief, climate and architecture not forgetting its magnificent palace promote tourism. The authority of the Fon is felt all over the entire Fondom as the custodian, distributor, redistributor and the controller of land on which the Mamfor performed her function. He decides who to appoint and dictates what should be done in which part of the Fondom thanks to the geographical features which favours settlement. As such, he can visit, allocate land and supervise activities of the different villages from either his palace or in the different village. This is because geographical features present in the fondom permits human habitation.

C) Human Activities of the Bafut People

i) Economy of Bafut

The Bafut fondom has a diverse economic activities such as subsistence agriculture, artisanal activities, animal husbandry and trade. They are major activities carried out on lineage and family basis. In this area there is division of labour as the men cleared the bushes, felled the trees which were later used to build schools, make benches chairs and tables, needed in schools; the women on their part till the soil, planted crops weed and harvest. The women mostly work in groups (working bee) in order to reduce the burden of work⁹⁷.

The major food supply was the farms. The crops cultivated included cocoyam, beans, maize, vegetables, groundnuts and white yams among others. Oil palms were also cultivated especially by the men and this subsequently spread to other regions as Kom, Bande, Nso and

⁹⁷ N A B, File No Ab3/3325. Assesment Report Bafut Tribal Area, Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province, Buea, 1926, p.43.

the Bapingi. The *Mamfor* encouraged collective food production which was aimed at alleviating poverty and for sale.⁹⁸ The economy of Bafut was based on subsistence farming. Farms were cultivated mostly by women and food for consumption was from the farm. Most crops were harvested at the end or the beginning of the dry season. This was because the planting of crops was estimated to coincide with the coming of the rains.

Farming was characterized by mixed cropping and farm plots which had been cultivated for some time had to be abandoned to fallow so that the soil could regain its fertility. This shows that the people of Bafut practiced shifting cultivation. Main products produced included bananas, beans, cocoa, coffee, cassava, maize, rice, groundnuts and cocoyam. Seeing that the population depended on land for survival, the Mamfor had to encourage and empower the women of the fondom to invest more on agriculture.

Men on their part were restricted to the clearing of farm lands. Also, they were deeply involved in the exploitation of raffia bushes and palm trees which were of great economic importance to the family since it acted as a source of income. Palm wine, brooms, oil, kernels, fire wood and chaffs used for the lighting of fire were gotten from palm trees. Domestic animals such as goats, fowls, pigs and cattle were reared for consumption, and some were used for court fines and payment of tributes, sacrifices and fees into traditional secret societies.

Greater part of these animals went to the chiefs as signs of allegiance as the custodian of land and for sacrifices since they were the chief priests of the land. Parts of the sacrificial animals received were preserved for their family.⁹⁹ Men took charge of providing meat, oil, fish and other needs for the family from the sale of domestic animals. Besides men also did hunting and were charged with the cutting of grass which they used for roofing. Bafut is purely an agricultural tribe and the ties of tradition are given much importance.

The River Menchum (*muyah*) which flows through Bafut was famous for its fishing potential. The women of Obang, Mbakong, Manta and Buwe were encouraged by the *Mamfor* who organized collective fishing using baskets. The mud fish caught was consumed locally and the rest was sold.¹⁰⁰ Animal husbandry and livestock were also essential features of the Bafut economy. Pigs, goats and dwarf cattle were reared. It should be noted that the

⁹⁸Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16th June 2016.

⁹⁹ N.V. Manka'a, "Chiefs and the Economics of Colonialism: the Impact of colonial Rule on the Economic Basis of Chieftaincy in the Bamenda Grassfields, 194-1961", PP. 43-44.

¹⁰⁰Canute A. Ngwa, "An Economic History of the Bafut from 1900 to the Present". M A Thesis in History, University of Nigeria Nsukka, June 1994, pp.30-31.

ownership of dwarf cattle was the prerogative of the fon,¹⁰¹ and they were consumed and commercialized. Thus all these economic activities influenced the role of the *Mamfor* in that from the proceeds, women became financially stable which influence the *Mamfor* to organize educational talks with the women on how to use the money for the development of families and the fondom.

ii) Social Aspects of the Bafut Society

The Bafut people had very strong traditional institutions which were very vital for the community to function the way it did. The people were very attached to these institutions because they depended on them for the growth and development of the fondom. The pre-missionary African society was a religious one. In fact, religion was part and parcel of traditional African societies. Traditional religion was not for the individual but for the community to which he or she belonged.

An individual in the African society could not detach himself from the religion of his group. To do so was to be cut off from his roots, his foundation and the context of security.¹⁰² In short, African traditional religion was written on the heart of the individual, his mind and oral history rituals and religious personages like rain makers and officiating elders. The society was in a way that it had its own religious practices and beliefs. The Bafut society was as such with its own traditional belief system which the *Mamfor* greatly encouraged.¹⁰³ For one traditional religion cannot be propagated into another tribal group.

The Bafut people believed in the existence of a supreme God called *Nwi* (God). With this notion of a supreme one, there was need for an intermediary between him and his people. This mediation was done by the ancestors. Constant contact was kept by the people with their ancestors in the form of sacrifices to request favours such as fertility for women, good weather and long life for their king and the eradication of ills and epidemics from the Bafut society.¹⁰⁴ The *Mamfor* was of great importance as she participated in some sacrifices especially that of the fertility of women and that of the soils of the fondom.

Sacrifices and offerings to the ancestors in Bafut were done in different places depending on the purpose of the sacrifice. Recently the traditional leaders of Bafut have decided to restore all the places of ancestral worship which existed during the reign of Fon

¹⁰¹Ngwa., “ An Economic History of the Bafut from 1900 to the Present’’. p.29.

¹⁰² Interview with Ndonwi Emmanuel, 57 years, Trader, Mankwi, 7th August 2016.

¹⁰³ Interview with Muchier Joseph, 64 years, retired Teacher, Mberewi, 25th July 2016.

¹⁰⁴Interview with James Akotoh, 72 years, Manji, 14th June 2016.

Abumbi I and have created new ones. Each village had at least four shrines and ancestral worship. It is estimated that there may be as many as sixty shrines in Bafut.¹⁰⁵

The shrines could be stones, altars under trees, pools in rivers or just spots that had been picked or determined because one god or a spirit was being associated with it. The worship of gods in Bafut was a community or corporate act. The sacrifices that were done were on behalf of the whole tribe or all the Bafut people.¹⁰⁶ The month of December, *SanÁbenð* (The month of the annual Dance of the fon) is a sacred month in that during this month, most of the sacrifices and libations are made in the prominent shrines.¹⁰⁷

Prior to the *Aben*, the council of the traditional rulers and other notables held meetings to review the affairs of the past years, so as to see what went on well and what went wrong and after a sacrifice was then made to thank the gods or ancestors for their blessing for the past year to appease them for the wrongs committed and plead for them not to punish the people and also blessings for the next year.¹⁰⁸ During the meeting of the notables, feeding was organized and done by the *Mamfor*.

The fon as the highest priest gathered the other priests and they prepared the rituals. The items needed included camwood, wine, animals etc., some of the important shrines are the *Nifò'ò*, *Nifùm* (where the previous fons are buried), *Nsaanimunwi* (square of the child of the gods) *NsaanimuBāburð* (square of the child of those of heaven) *màbàà*, *ńgǔǔku'ù* (stones located at Swie).¹⁰⁹

At the shrines it was believed that they were waking the dead. Camwood was rubbed on the stone and libations of blood or wine were poured on the altar. At the *Nifò'ò*, which was thought to be the abode of some of the dead fons, the sacrifices were actually dropped in the whirlpool and these were either accepted or rejected. It was said that if the calabash went beneath the water and returned empty, it indicated that the ancestors accepted and drank the wine.¹¹⁰

The Camwood was put in a special leaf and placed in the pool and was taken under the water by the ancestors. The leaf as the calabash returned dry showing the sacrifice was accepted. It was also said that the ancestral kings in the *Nifò'ò* also gave camwood in return.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Nebachi, 54 years, Chief of Mbebili, Fon's palace Bujong, 17th June 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with James Akotoh, 72 years, Prince of Bukari, Bukari, 14th July 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Nebachi, 54 years, Chief of Mbebili, Manji, 17th June 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Idem

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Martin Fuh, 53 years, Prince, Manji, 23rd July 2016.

The camwood was a sign of blessing for the people from the ancestors. This camwood was used in the other shrines during the sacrificial season. That was why the sacrifices started at the *Nifò'ò*. This Camwood was added to the one the fon had anointed people who came for the initiation rite of greeting the fon which was a symbol of blessing. The *Mamfor* encouraged women to come for this initiation in order to be blessed by the Fon.

If the camwood was not accepted, wood ash was sent up in return and this would be a curse. If the sacrifice was not accepted, there would be punishment for the priests and the tribe as a whole. In this case, the *kwifor* would do everything to correct the wrong and repeat the sacrifice at the *Nifò'ò* so that the annual dance (*aben*) could take place. Naturally the dance would not take place if the ancestors rejected the sacrifice.¹¹¹

The main sacrifice marking the commencement of the Annual dance was the one in the palace. This sacrifice was human sacrifices in the past and later animals were used and sacrifices were made at various other spots in the palace in addition to this main ritual. These sacrifices were secret, not open to the ordinary people in public. We do not know the details of the rituals involved except what was revealed by those involved in the practice.¹¹² The sacrifices were offered with prayers, incantations, confessions and request, made to the gods or ancestors (ancestral spirits). It is worth noting that the Bafut people did not have carved images or molten gods of wood, silver or gold.

iii) Political Organisations

When the Bafut people settled in their present site, they met existing political structures in Mbebeli. The political administration was a centralized system with the fon at the head. The fon was assisted by the *Mamfor*, *Ndimfor*, *Muma* and secret societies. There were also second class chiefdoms and third class chiefdoms. These were quasi autonomous chiefdoms whose chiefs were second class and third class. The Bafut society was characterized by a patrilinear system of succession that is from father to son.¹¹³

The fon was at the head of the administration; the fon's palace was the centre of all the administrative and cultural activities. The palace of the fon which was where the *Mamfor* lived, was the head quarter of the fonom. The only female kin to the fon at this level was the *Mamfor*. He negotiated agreements and alliances with neighbouring fonom. These alliances provided room for smooth trading and cultural activities, which were mostly organized by

¹¹¹ Idem.

¹¹². Interview with Nebachi, 54 years, Chief of Mbebeli, Manji, 17th June 2016.

Mamfor and some selected women in the fondom. He appointed virtuous people to significant positions and was highly respected especially as his word was law.¹¹⁴

The *Ndimfor* was a position occupied by two princes who were appointed as the *Ndakwifor* to assist the fon in the administration of the fondom, (*Ndimfor* and *Muma*). The *Ndimfor* was the first assistant to the fon. He gave the fon advice on matters of tradition. The *Muma* who was the second royal assistant was to represent the fon in foreign affairs. As a result good foreign relations promoted cultural diversity and education.¹¹⁵ The *Mamfor* was greatly respected by the people. She was the queen mother and was the mother of the reigning fon. However, she was the only female kin to the fon who acted as a regent if the fon was a minor. She advised the fon and also settled disputes between wives of the fon as well as women *Nto Mamfor* was her own apartment in the palace.

Among the male societies in the fondom was the *Kwifor* whose membership was made up of sons of commoners and of the royal family beyond the fourth generation. *Kwifor* was regarded as the constituted authority of Bafut and the fon was answerable to it. The *kwifor* (*NdaKwifor*) was the most powerful secret society in Bafut. It was considered as the “National Assembly” because it was the highest law making body in Bafut. This institution was very important in trade, as they controlled local markets; it opened market days with the recitation of the names of the late fons. It was the main institution that was responsible for the choice and installation of *Mamfor*.

There was the *Takumbeng* which was a society of several princes chosen from amongst the most prominent sons raised in the house of wives which was governed by a senior wife.³⁰ There was also a “small” *Takumbeng* which was made of female members. This female *Takumbeng* consisted of very old women who had attained menopause and performed on very rare occasions that were abominations.³¹ Other institutions in the administrative setup of the Bafut society were the *Enchong* and the quasi-autonomous chiefdoms.¹¹⁶ The different groups directly and indirectly influenced the activities of the *Mamfor*.

In the case of the presence of semi-autonomous settlements, the *Atangchos* who were chiefs and sub-chiefs were in charge, although they had limited powers and could be overruled by the fon and *kwifor*. At the level of quarters, the running of the day to day activities lay in the hands of quarter heads, known as *BeuTaBeuNikuru* (men) and

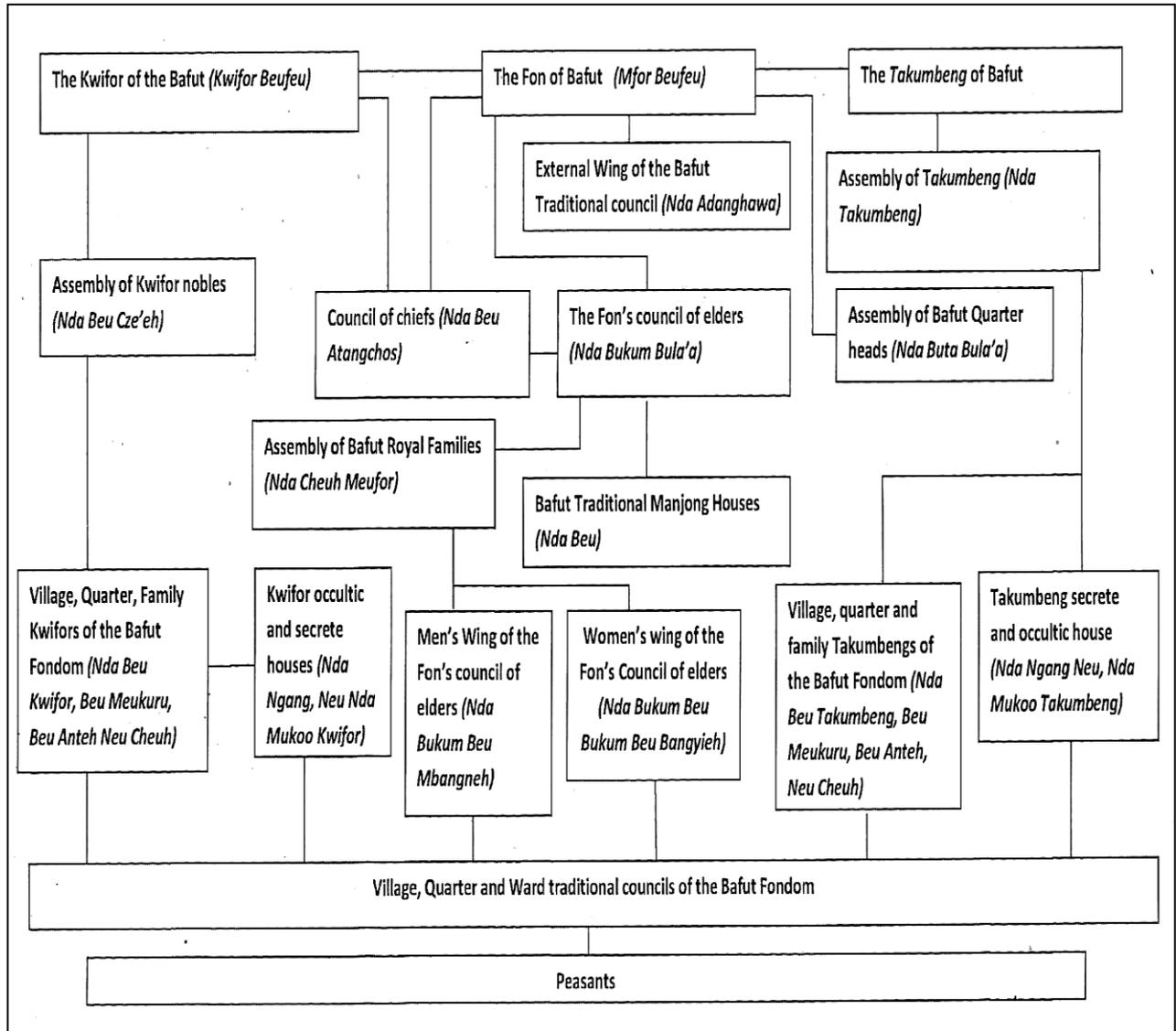
¹¹⁴Interview Nsalah James, 49 years, Farmer, Asong, 19th July 2016.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Veronica Mankaa, 58 years, Wife of quarter head Mbebili, Mbebili, 4th July 2016.

¹¹⁶Idem.

BeuMaBeuNikuru (women). With family heads, men usually took decisions at the family level. The chart below shows the traditional political setup of the Bafut fondom from the fon to the commoners.

Figure 1: Organisational Chart of the Traditional Government of the Bafut Fondom



Source: Fon Abumbi II, "Traditions and Customs of the Bafut Kingdom". (Unpublished Work)

Traditional political organizational chart of the Bafut Fondom showing how the traditional government is organized, that is, from the Fon (Mfor Beufeu) to the peasants or commoners.

Conclusion

From the above, it is worth noting that the geographical and historical background of the Bafut fondom had and still has an influence on its history and the activities of the *Mamfor* in the fondom. The movement of these people from different areas finally brought this group to its present location. To consolidate their position the different fons had to institute a good number of reforms, some of which were the socio-political organisation of the fondom. The geographical features such as the conducive climate and the lowlands around Agyati, Nsem, Manji favoured the growth which greatly influenced the activities of Mamfor. The next chapter will deal with the Mamfor in the Bafut traditional society.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAMFOR IN BAFUT TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Introduction

The *Mamfor* of Bafut, being mother of the society and a possible regent had to be installed or enthroned and given the powers and authority to perform the duties of the fon when it became necessary. From when she was installed, she could perform her motherly role as mother of the fon with all due respect. This chapter will discuss the origin and enthronement of the *Mamfor*, her succession and burial rights after she died. The activities of the Mamfor with the Bafut people will also be discussed.

A) Mamfor in Bafut Society

The Mamfor has particular aspects that deals with her personality. This part of the study will deal with those personal aspects of the Mamfor.

i)The Origin of Mamfor

The word *Mamfor* can be traced to when the Bafut people were believed to have originated and migrated to the Bamenda Grassfields. The word Mamfor exist in the languages of other communities and in the Bamileke region, although with slight differences in the spelling and pronunciation. The word stands for “queen mother”.¹¹⁷The institution of the Mamfor was adopted in Bafut because it was realized by men that women had difficulties in presenting their problems especially those concerning women issues. This therefore made the men to create a seat for women in the administration who could listen to women and together with them and provide solutions to their problems.

The scope of this study which is a period of one hundred years had four *Mamfors*. Three of them were called MamforLem Abor who ruled from 1907 to 2007. The second Lem Abor was named after the first and the third after the second. The last *Mamfor* was Mamfor Njiyang Esther who was installed in 2007. Her reign lasted Just for few months because of her sudden death that same year.¹¹⁸

In the Bafut Fondom, the queen mother is called the *Mamfor*. This is an important female personality who plays a very important role in her society. As an important

¹¹⁷ Achu “The Role of Mafo in Mankon society:1970-2004: An Historical Perspective”, M.A Disertation in History, university of Yaounde 1,2004. p 4.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16 July 2016.

personality, she stands as a role model to every woman.¹¹⁹ The *Mamfor* is a woman traditionally enthroned in the *fondom*, and is a senior member of the administrative mechanism of the palace. She was always the *fon's* real mother, sister, daughter or wife, taking the place of his real mother if she was dead, depending on the circumstances at hand.

The word *Mamfor* can be traced lexically to when the Bafut people are believed to have originated and migrated to the Bamenda Grassfields. Nevertheless the word *Mamfor* exist in the languages of other communities and in the Bamileke region. Although there is only a slight difference in the spelling and pronunciation in the different places. The word stands for Queen mother in Grassfields. As the mother of the *Fon*, *Mamfor* is an important personality in the palace and society as a whole. When a *Fon* is enthroned, his mother is enthroned as *Mamfor* under normal circumstances. If she dies, one of the *Fon's* sister, wife or daughter who has good character is enthroned as the *Mamfor*.

Mamfor lives in the palace and is endowed with powers and authority. If she happens to be married, she is required to leave her marital home and husband and live in the palace.¹²⁰ (See plate 4). *Mamfor* is respected and recognized as the mother of the people. She is to women, mother above all mothers in the *Fondom*.¹²¹ Being a mother to the people, she is attentive to the need of all her people. She is mother of the people because she is the mother of the *Fon*.

When a new fon is enthroned and his biological mother is no longer living, his sister is enthroned as *Mamfor*. In most cases, the new fon is enthroned when the *Mamfor* of the former fon is still alive. If such is the case, out of respect for the old *Mamfor*, she is allowed to work hand in hand with the *Mamfor* of the new fon. Nevertheless each *Mamfor* is installed with her particular fon. In the case where the fon's mother is already too old, she might act as *Mamfor* for a short while before someone younger, her daughter or grandchild, that is the fon's sister or daughters is installed in her place.

¹¹⁹ Achu «The Role of Mafo in Mankon s ociety:1970-2004»,2004. p. 5

¹²⁰ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16 July 2016

¹²¹ Idem

Plate 4: The Bafut Palace



Source: Victor Che's photographic collection, 17 July 2016

The Bafut palace, the home of the Mamfor.

ii) The Succession Issue and Installation of Mamfor

The *Mamfor* who was regarded as the female fon in Bafut, had to undergo certain rites, which gave her power and authority to rule. Normally in Bafut, the enthronement of the new fon was done at the same time as that of his own *Mamfor*¹²². If that was not done, the former *Mamfor* continued to rule as regent until the new Fon and *Mamfor* were installed. When the new fon and his own *Mamfor* were enthroned, he ruled with her following the norms of society. The *Mamfor* of the deceased fon might continue to act if the new *Mamfor* was still a minor. The newly enthroned *Mamfor* learned about her role in society from the *Mamfor* of the deceased Fon.¹²³

The team responsible for selecting a new *Mamfor* was the same that selected the new fon. If the newly enthroned fon's mother was still living, she naturally was selected as *Mamfor*.¹²⁴ The *kwifor* and *Takumbeng* were the two societies in charge of choosing the new fon and the new *Mamfor*. Before doing so, they went into spiritual communication with the gods of their land. It was believed that they performed a number of rituals including fasting and appeasement of the gods through offering of sacrifices before a *Mamfor* was selected. This was done in order not to choose a wrong *Mamfor*.

¹²²Interview with James Akotoh, 72 years, Prince of Mambu, Mambu, 14 July 2016.

¹²³Idem.

¹²⁴ Idem.

Plate 5: Takumbeng Shrine at the Bafut Palace



Source: Photo Archives Palce of Bafut, Bafut Museum.

The photo is the main shrine of the Takumbeng situated at the entrance of the Fon's palace. A secret society responsible for the choice and installation of the Mamfor.

It was feared that a mistake would throw the society into confusion and problems since the *Mamfor* was next to the Fon.¹²⁵ The *Kwifor* and *Takumbeng* performed their duties secretly in order not to choose a wrong person. The *Takumbeng* performed its function before coming to its hut at the entrance to the palace. **(See plate 5)**. The process of selection comprised the submission of the new fon's sisters or daughters, if his mother was death. They then prayed and fasted over these names for the gods to reveal a single name to them. This name was then secretly given to the new fon whose installation ceremonies commenced immediately. An example was the installation of Mamfor Njiyang Esther who was installed by Fon Abumbi II in 2007. **(See plate 6)**.

The criterion used for the selection of the *Mamfor* was well defined. Names to be submitted to the gods were properly scrutinized, taking into consideration the character of the fon's sisters or daughters, their inclination to material things, their sense of judgment and their knowledge of traditional norms of the Bafut society. It did not matter whether or not the candidate was married.

¹²⁵Interview with Joseph Shusi, 65 years, member of Kwifor, Asong, 18th July 2016.

Plate 6: His Royal Highness Fon Abumbi II and Mamfor Njiyang Esther



Source: Photo Archives Palace of Bafut, Bafut Museum.

The Fon of Bafut Abumbi II and Mamfor Njiyang Esther during the installation ceremony of the Mamfor

When the Fon was informed by the *Kwifor* and *Takumbeng* societies of their choice, he then summoned all his wives, sisters and children both far and near for the installation to be carried out. When summoned, these women were not told the reason for their being called up. This was done in order to avoid conflict, suspicion, conspiracy, jealousy and gossip.¹²⁶ As it is usually said, "Who would not want to be a *Mamfor*?" The time of the installation of the new Mamfor was a surprise to everyone. Once gathered at the palace, the Fon proceeded with the ceremony.¹²⁷

The royal family moves first to the royal graveyard *Nushwim*, where the new *Mamfor* was presented to the family. At the royal graveyard, the *Chamukong* or special body moved round looking at the Fon's sisters and daughters before lifting up the hand of the chosen one

¹²⁶Interview with Joseph Shusi, 65 years, member of Kwifor, Asong, 18th July 2016.

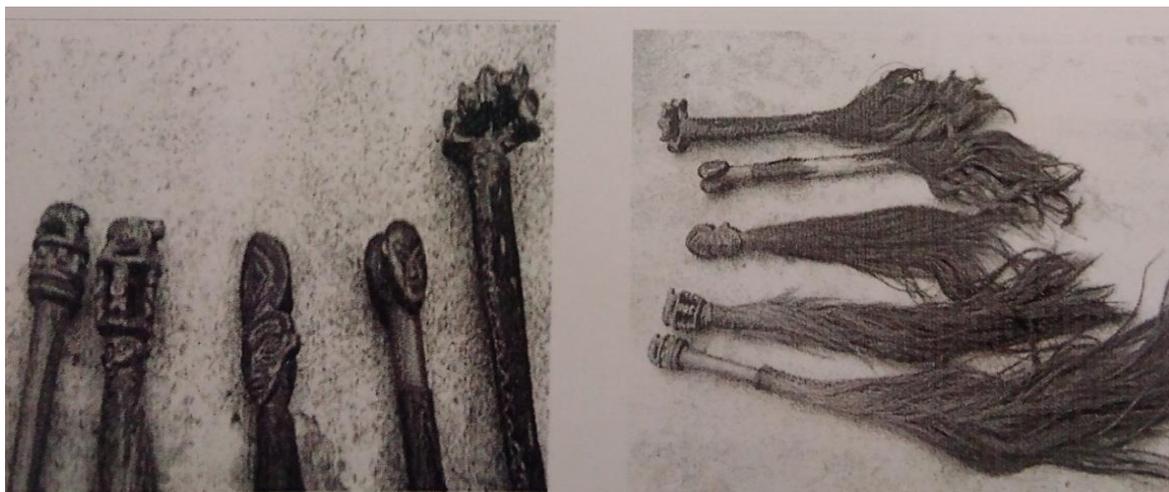
¹²⁷ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

among the lot. The group then prayed over her, invoking their ancestors to come and fill the new *Mamfor* with power, wisdom and discernment. The whole family then moved back to the palace for the next phase of the installation.

At the palace, the chosen woman was rubbed with red oil and camwood by the *Chamukong*. These were symbol of strength and power. As this was going on, the sisters and daughters danced round singing enchanting songs of praise and blessing. Normally, there were special garments for the new *Mamfor*, said to be inherited from past generations. The garments were the property of a former *Mamfor* and were secretly kept after her death, when she was symbolically dethroned. It was kept in such a manner as to avoid mishandling or loss. It was believed that these garments carried with them some powers which were necessary during the reign of the new *Mamfor*.¹²⁸

The garment included a special creeping plant called *mendoro* worn like a chain round her neck, a special loincloth, a special wooden drinking cup, a special raffia bag and a special and uniquely designed chain which matched with what might be called a special designed *grigri* or bangle worn round the *Mamfor's* neck and arm. She was also given a fly whisk with a wooden handle (See plate 7). The *Mamfor* was then made to sit on her stool a special designed seat for her. It was at this point that all the inherited properties were handed over to her. From then, she assumed her duties fully as *Mamfor*.¹²⁹

Plate 7: Five Fly-Whisk



Source: Photo Archives Palce of Bafut, Bafut Museum.

Fly-whisks with wooden handles used by the Mamfor, queens, princesses and princes during dances

¹²⁸ Interview with Nebachi, 52 years, Chief of Mbebili, Bujong, 17th July 2016

¹²⁹Idem

After her installation, the sisters of the *Mamfor* had to greet her officially, and they offered her a cooked meal with chicken and goat meat. They were obliged to buy her a tin of oil, one bag of salt, one bunch of plantain and a live goat to be killed and shared among them. They also performed their special *juju* dance for the occasion. All royal persons bearing the name *Mamfor* brought the new *Mamfor* gifts. Then the whole village gathered at the palace court to greet the new *Mamfor* with unspecified gifts of food type, raw or cooked. The *Mamfor* welcomed all and accepted the gift sitting on her stool in front of the village plaza, dressed in her traditional outfit.¹³⁰ (See plate 8).

Plate 8: The Bafut Palace Plaza



Source: Field photo by the author

The Bafut palace Plaza, a ceremonial ground during the installation of the Mamfor

The new *Mamfor* had to learn by herself what she had to do, where she had to go and how she had to behave in the society. If her predecessor was not living, the fon taught her some of these duties. Generally, the *Mamfor* of the formerfon was the tutor of the new Mamfor. As Queen Mother, the *Mamfor* lived in her own part of the palace. This means that she was obliged following tradition and custom to abandon her formal home even if she was married and to start living in the palace.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Idem.

¹³¹ Idem.

Mamfor had attendants who performed various duties for her. Her immediate attendant was a personal *nchinda* who moved with her everywhere she went, particularly on official visits. This *nchinda* carried her bag and any other thing she took along with her. Her important movements included shopping for the palace stock, visiting the fon's relatives and friendly fondoms, visiting her own family and in-laws and attending gatherings of importance and interest in and out of the fondom.¹³²

Note should be taken of the fact that although the *Mamfor* now lived in the palace, she still had her matrimonial home if she was already married. Servants assigned to her catered for her immediate needs including cooking, washing and working in her farms. Her cooks also cooked for her husband and children every day. She herself visited her matrimonial home every day.

iii) Burial Rites of the Mamfor

When a *Mamfor* died in Bafut, her death was not immediately announced. This was because as a royal figure, she had to be buried specially. Certain rites and rituals had to be performed on her corpse before burial. To this effect, those who were present at the time of her death were obliged to keep it secret until the fon decided to announce it officially. If her husband was still alive, he was informed and given time to make the sad news known to the bereaved children. He himself was not allowed to talk about her death to anyone. It was her immediate family that was responsible for her burial not the whole Bafut society.¹³³

The deceased *Mamfor* was prepared and laid in state for the immediate family to see. Her corpse was regarded as sacred and could not be seen by all. Only her immediate family comprising her husband, children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, in-laws, the fon, the queens, princes and princesses saw her corpse laid in state. The treatment of her corpse was handled by a secret society. When this was done, the fon was informed. He then sent for the *Mamfor's* family for the official ceremony to begin. Generally, the announcement was that the *Mamfor* was inviting her people to come eat and drink with her (saying that a *mamfor* or a fon was dead could cause misfortune in the land).¹³⁴

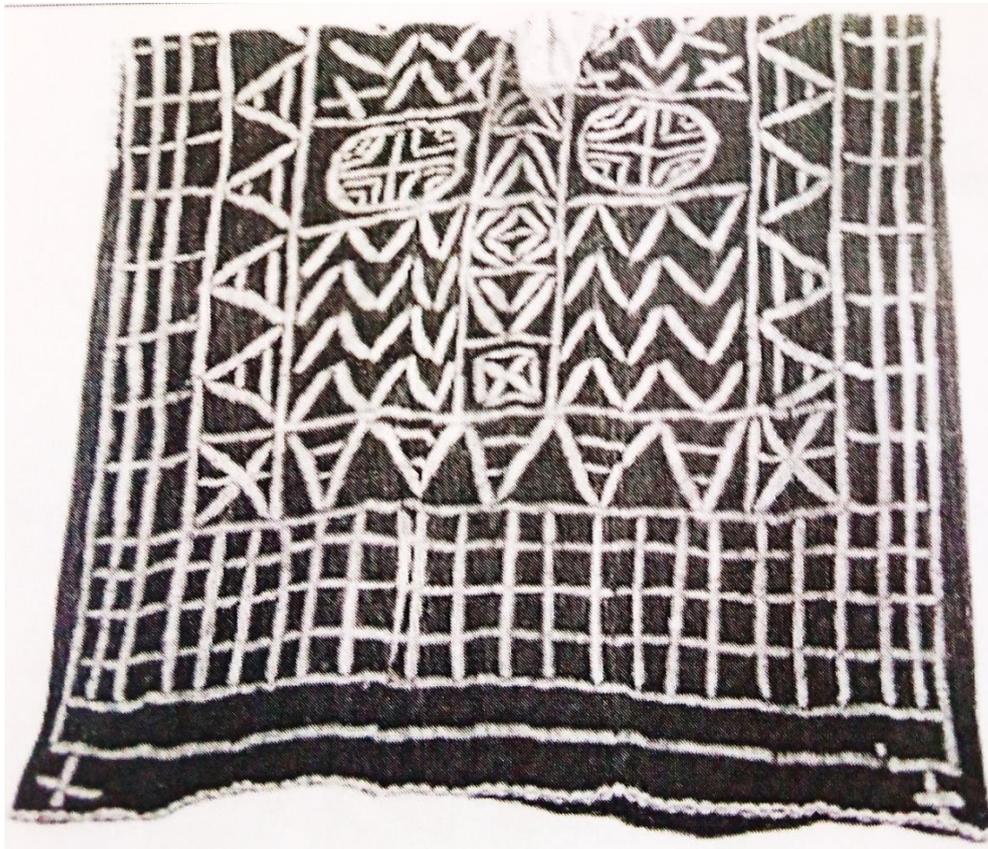
¹³² Interview with Che Micheal, 63 years, Member of takumbeng, Bujong, 17th June 2016

¹³³ Interview with Martin Fuh, 53 years, prince of Bafut and a builder, Bujong, 23 July 2016.

¹³⁴ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

When all the necessary people had assembled in the palace, the corpse dressed in strict traditional attire was exposed to them lying on a bamboo bed specially made and covered with traditional cloth. A special costume was used to decorate the ceremonial ground for the funeral of the late *Mamfor*. (See **plate 9**). Special incense was burnt in the room where the corpse was laid in state. After the family had seen the corpse, it was sealed in a coffin and carried away by the *Kwifor* traditional society, for final rites and rituals after which it was buried. At this stage, whatever was done before burial was no longer public knowledge. The next thing was when the *Kwifor* came back to the palace and led the family to the graveyard where the late *Mamfor* had already been buried.¹³⁵

Plate 9: A Special Cloth Used for Decoration



Source: Photo Archives Palace of Bafut, Bafut Museum.

Special costume used to decorate the ceremonial ground for the funeral of the Mamfor, Fon and certain nobles.

iv) Mourning of Mamfor

¹³⁵ Idem.

It is when the *Kwifor* carried the copse away that the whole village was informed of *Mamfor's* death. Mourning activities included traditional prayers and special dances of mourning in the palace. During mourning, there was much food and drinks.¹³⁶ The village was generally assembled through the use of a “talking drum” called *kweyn*. When the sound of the *kweyn* was heard, people knew something of great importance had happened and they assembled at the palace.¹³⁷

After the burial, the late *Mamfor's* property was shared among her family members. The children if still young continued to stay and grow in the palace where the queens catered for them. If their father was still living, he took his children to stay with him rather than at the palace.¹³⁸ There was no set period for the installation of the new *Mamfor*. But it was usually made as early as possible in order not to leave her functions in the palace and society unperformed. The issue of selection and installation was left to *Kwifor* and *Takumbeng* as already discussed.¹³⁹

B) Social Activities of the *Mamfor* in the Bafut Community

Activities of the *Mamfor* in the Bafut community were seen in the social and political domains. The paragraphs below examine the social activities of the *Mamfor* in the Bafut community which influenced the growth and development of the fondom

i) Wearing of Protective Charms (*ñktt*)

Since the Bafut man valued his life and property, they sought all means of protection from the witch doctor to protect themselves, their family and their property. The Bafut man went to the witch doctor for protection and for magical powers. Some had their bodies cut, got objects that were buried in their compounds or got herbs that were planted in the compound.¹⁴⁰ The indiginious people were encouraged by the *Mamfor* to go for these objects in order to be protected.

Some women did not only go for protection but for magical powers too. It was common to hear in Bafut that somebody was sick because a spell was cast on him. The

¹³⁶ Interview with Felix Suh, 34 years, Chief of Bukari and painter, Mbebili, 28th June 2016.

¹³⁷ Interview with Mary Lum, 58 years, wife of quarter head Musah, Mambu, 4th June 2016.

¹³⁸ Achu «The Role of Mafo in Mankon society: 1970-2004, p. 32,

¹³⁹ Interview with Achirimbi John, 85 years, King maker, Bujong, 19th June 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Idem.

common expression used in Bafut was *ntùm̄niàfù* (cast a spell on or poison). When this happened, it was called *nid̄d̄d̄*. This is said to have originated from the Bambili people. When one was inflicted with this disease his legs would swell up and it was very dreaded because it usually ended in death.¹⁴¹

ii) Fetishes, Amulets, Talesmans (*ibàafu*)

Fetishes were objects possessing mystical powers. Amulets were also fetishes. These were objects or even jewelry which possessed magical powers and were worn on the body as protection against evil. These were gotten from witch doctors. Talismans such as rings or locketts were worn because it was believed that they brought luck. Treated bangles were worn by traditional leaders like notables, the *Mamfor* and the fon. These bangles had mystical powers to protect them.¹⁴²

Charms like amulets and talismans were produced by witch doctors from special ingredients such as herbs, roots, barks of trees bones, leaves and animal parts as horns etc. Charms in Bafut were used for various purposes as attraction of lovers, winning a job, protection from sickness, gaining wealth or social position.¹⁴³ Charms were also used as protection from gunshots during times of war. The *Mamfor* encouraged the people of Bafut to go for such charms to protect themselves during wars as they sometimes acted as soldiers while some supplied food to soldiers at war front.

iii) The Mamfor and Lightning (*mbèŋ*)

Lightning was a dreaded force in the Bafut fendom. People sent thunder to harm others or their property. If someone did a great wrong to a Bafut man, he who suffered the wrong went to someone with the ability to harness this force. The specialists used these mystical powers to send lightning to the target first to warn. The lightning stroke a tree in the compound of the enemy target or just knocked him down. If he did not repair the wrong, thunder will again be sent and the result would be dreadly. This time the lightning struck the

¹⁴¹Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

¹⁴²Idem.

¹⁴³ Interview with Achirimbi John, 85 years, king maker, Mbebali, 11th June 2016.

person dead.¹⁴⁴ *Mamfor* advised women and people in the Fondom to avoid hurting others so as to avoid the wrath of lightning.

iv) Soil Fertility Ritual of Grass Cutting (*ñgwâñgéeé*) and the Mamfor

In the month of March there was the fertility ritual of grass cutting (*ñgwâñgéeé*) in Bafut. This was a big ritual meant to protect the village from evil people who could do harm to the people and take away their food using mystical powers. In this ritual people brought all kinds of grass to the palace and this was chopped up by initiated people.¹⁴⁵ The grass was then mixed together and shared among the people. It was spread in a line across the road to compounds and at road junctions. On the day of this ritual no farm work was done in the village or the quarter where it was held.

Related to this grass ritual that was the spreading of groundnuts shells on the road. When people shelled groundnuts for planting, they threw the shells on the street. They believed that when people walked on the shells, this would make the groundnuts to do well when they were planted. On the other hand some people planted some kind of grass which they believed to have powers in their farms to make crops do well.¹⁴⁶ The *Mamfor* encouraged the people to carry out this ritual in order to protect their food from witches and to have good harvest.

v) Traditional Day of Rest (*mumetah*) and Grievious Sins

On this day no one went to the farm. It was a day of rest for the Bafut man, the local subjects stayed in their houses and no work was done on this day. Those in the palace drank and enjoyed on this day. This day came about when the first fon was lost (died) and it was decided that this day should be respected. All the subsequent fons who died were buried on this particular day of *mumetah*. So on this day people did not go to their farms because it was believed that the dead fons moved with some spirits. Thus evil could befall those who went to the farm.¹⁴⁷ The *Mamfor* advised the people to use this day to take care of their homes and children, while she organized cooking in the palace for feasting.

¹⁴⁴ Idem.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Ndonwi Emmanuel, 57 years, Trader, Mankwi, 7th August 2016.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Muchier Joseph, 64 years, Retired teacher, Mberewi, 25th July 2016.

There were three grievous sins in Bafut, (committing adultery with the fon's wife, killing a human being and committing suicide by hanging). Suicide by hanging was a curse or a taboo in Bafut. A person who hanged himself had committed a grievous sin and so had brought a curse upon himself. He had polluted the land where he hanged himself. When a person hanged himself, it was immediately reported to the palace. A masquerade called *ηkhiòò* was sent from the palace to bury the person. When the masquerade came, a hole was dug just beneath the dead person's body. The rope on which the body hung was then cut and the body fell into the hole and was then filled with soil.¹⁴⁸

A person who saw the hanged body became impure and thus needed ritual cleansing so that the curse was washed away. The entire family was cleansed ritually. There was a society responsible for the cleansing process and the family concerned took the required items to the palace. Camwood was given to be used for the cleansing process. Each member of the family was anointed with this powder.¹⁴⁹ The *Mamfor* advised the Bafut community to avoid such act which could put a stigma on the family members of the person.

vi) Secret Societies (*NtsweNdâfû*)

The secret societies in Bafut that people knew were the *kwifor*, *tsung*, and the *takumbeng* (*takumbôη*). These groups were not open to just anybody. The *tsung* was a secret society for the princes. Only the initiated were allowed to join it. *Takumbeng* was a palace society and its members were mostly princes. The main *takumbeng* was in the Bafut palace but each quarter or village had its own *takumbeng*.¹⁵⁰

The *takumbeng* had mystical powers and if someone committed a crime, killed a person through witchcraft, stole an article and did not confess the crime, the *takumbeng* was called to perform certain rituals and cast a spell on the offender and if the offender, did not confess and pay a fine he died. The *Mamfor* advised people to strictly respect the norms of these secret societies so as not to incur punishment meted on those who go against their norms.

There was also the *ndâfû* (medicine society) for people who wanted personal gain and power. These people had mystical powers and held secret meetings to acquire wealth, fortune

¹⁴⁸Interview with Achirimbi John, 85 years, king maker, Njibujang, 19th June 2016.

¹⁴⁹Idem.

¹⁵⁰N.A.B, File No N W/Sald/1978/3/BK, Achirimbi II, Fon of Bafut, Aletum Tabuwe, 1978, p.20.

and position in the society. They also gave wealth and position to other people. People who wanted power or wanted to hurt their enemies joined such societies and their wishes were granted. During their meetings they ate meat which was symbolically chicken which was in effect human flesh. People who belonged to this society offered close relatives such as their mothers, fathers, wives and children as sacrifices to have wealth.¹⁵¹ The medicine society was discouraged by the *Mamfor* as it led to loss of family member especially youths which affected the community as development of the fondom was in the hands of the youths.

vii) Mamfor and Princes

The *Mamfor* also coordinated the marriage of princes. When a prince attained the age of maturity, the *Mamfor* saw to it he was married in order to start his own family. This, she did by proposing young girls from which the prince picked a wife and a piece of land was offered to him by the fon where he built and farmed or even reared animals.¹⁵² When a prince found a young lady to marry, the *Mamfor* carried out all the formalities: meeting the girl's family, paying the bride price and so on.

When it was a princess getting married, the *Mamfor* had to ensure that all the necessary arrangements were made for the entertainment of the groom's family when they came to make bride price arrangements. Before the princess left for her marital home, the *Mamfor* ensured that she was properly trained by her mother on how to run a family. This was necessary so that the newly wedded princess did not go to marriage ignorant for her status as a royal person.¹⁵³ The *Mamfor* also contributed politically to the growth of the fondom which will be seen below.

A) Political and Administrative Activities of the Mamfor

The *Mamfor* contributed politically to the development of the Bafut fondom. She had ruled as first lady of the fondom. In fact she was the only female authority who contributed directly in governing the fondom.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

¹⁵² Interview with Achirimbi Claude, 56 years, Prince and teacher of G.H.S Bafut, fon's palace, 16th June 2016.

¹⁵³ Idem

i) Mamforas the Fon's adviser

One of the principal role the *Mamfor* played was that of personal adviser and chief counselor to the fon.¹⁵⁴ This function was peculiar because she was the only person apart from the fon who was quite versed with the inner politics of the palace. She informed the fon secretly of all that went on in the palace and the village. The issues that she would talk about included matters of treason, conflict over land ownership and disputes that could cause instability in the village¹⁵⁵. She knew how to distinguish what was wrong from what was right following traditional norms. This was one of the reasons why the *Mamfor* had to stay in the palace rather than at her matrimonial home.¹⁵⁶

In order to make a good counselor, the *Mamfor* had to be very alert in noticing everything that happened in the palace. She was therefore a keen observer, evaluating events before advising the fon. She and some of her personal advisers worked together to obtain the information that she passed on to the fon. When some problems reached the fon, he first consulted and actually discussed them with the *Mamfor* before taking a decision. Note should be taken of the fact that most problems in the fondom revolved around land matters: ownership, boundary demarcation, farm plots, crops, and so on.¹⁵⁷

ii) Mamfor as the Fon's Representative

The *Mamfor* usually deputized for the fon when the latter was on mission to other villages or fondoms.¹⁵⁸ During such times, the *Mamfor* became the major decision maker in the palace. She had the authority to settle disputes which were within her competence, especially disputes among women, disputes in families and disputes among princes and princesses. In the case of a very delicate matter, she listened keenly and tried to temporally appease the parties concerned until the fon returned to take a final decision.¹⁵⁹ The *Mamfor* was one of the few people who knew exactly when the fon was to travel out of the fondom and exactly when he was to return. The movement of the fon was kept secret in order to avoid

¹⁵⁴ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Che Micheal, 63 years, Member of takumbeng, Bujong, 17th June 2016.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Mary Lum, 58 years, Wife of quarter head Musah Mambu, Mambu, 4th June 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Achirimbi Claude, 56 years, Prince and teacher of G.H.S Bafut, fon's palace, 14th June 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Idem.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Veronica Mankaa, 67 years, Wife of quarter head Mbebili, Mbebili, 4th July 2016.

upheavals in the fondom and in order not to make ambitious people in the palace plot against him.¹⁶⁰

Also, the *Mamfor* appeared in the traditional council, and this gave her the chance to contribute to the leadership of the fondom and also discuss issues base on the point of view of women. The Mamfor had a peripheral role in the territory which is effective. Moreover, she could recommend to the male leader of *Kwifor* to summon members for a meeting at which they would point out the wishes, aspirations and concerns of the people to the leaders of kwifor. They would indicate what actions they wanted *kwifor* to pursue in addressing these issues

iii) Mamfor as a Judge

The *Mamfor* also acted as a judge in minor cases in the fondom. She carried out this judicial function by sitting in her court in the palace and listening to cases that came up.¹⁶¹ (See plate 10). Few metres away from her court, there was a stone on which guilty criminals were beheaded. (See plate 11). She usually adjudicated disputes between stray animal owners, and village women, concerning the destruction of farms or crops. Other cases included family and marital problems. There was one very peculiar family case in Bafut regarded as an abomination involving a man known as Pa Neba. Pa Neba, a married man and father had been stealing little objects from people's compounds and farms. These acts were frequent and too well known and the matter was brought to the palace for the *Mamfor* to solve.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Ngwa Bukum, 64 years, Member of takumbeng, Bujong , 17th June 2016.

¹⁶¹ Idem.

¹⁶² Interview with Nfor Kare, 57 years, Member of takumbeng, Bujong, 17th June 2016.

Plate 10: The Court of the Mamfor



Source: Field Photo by the Author

The court of the Mamfor in the palace where she attended to cases concerning the palace, women and other persons

Although Pa Neba was caught red-handed several times, he was never taken to the palace. On this instance, he was caught red-handed stealing a bunch of plantain from a woman's farm and taken to the *Mamfor*. What makes this case pitiable was that Pa Neba was quite responsible with a wife and children, and even possessed large farms and plots.¹⁶³ His wife unable to stand the disgrace, abandoned him, taking with her their children. The *Mamfor* in studying the case, learned that Pa Neba was suffering from a curse placed on him by his late mother because Pa Neba had fought with her over a piece of farming land, which Pa Neba had inherited from his late father, but which his mother continued to farm.¹⁶⁴

When Pa Neba got married, his wife was interested in farming the same piece of land. Pa Neba took upon himself to stop his mother from farming the land. As such, a series of quarrels sparked up between him and his mother. At one point, the mother and the son actually picked up a fight in the farm and Pa Neba had his mother well beaten seizing all her

¹⁶³ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Idem.

farming equipment.¹⁶⁵ In rage and anger, the mother tore up all her clothing and in her nudity, cast a spell on the son. She told him that she was the one who gave him life and that it was the hoe and the cutlass that made him a man and that he was going to his reward for taking those things from her. When words were sent to the palace, the *Mamfor* and the fon immediately sent for the woman in order to appease her anger.¹⁶⁶ Since the case was linked to land and ancestors and had caused an abomination, the Mamfor could only advise that rituals and sacrifices be made to the gods and ancestors to remove the curse.

Plate 11: Stone on which criminals were assassinated



Source: Field Photo by the Author

A stone where guilty criminal were beheaded after judgement by the Mamfor or the Fon.

This scene aroused a lot of panic in the fondom because everybody knew its implications. Such a scene was an abomination which could not only affect Pa Neba's family but also the Bafut land as a whole. The *Mamfor* prepared a chamber in the palace for Pa Neba's mother to stay, later allocated a piece of land to farm and also bought her new farm equipments. She called the woman's son to make peace with his mother. She was finally sent back home to her family and advised to try to live in harmony with her son.¹⁶⁷ The spell that

¹⁶⁵ Idem.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Philomina Lum, 68 years, Princess of Bafut, Bujong , 17th June 2016.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Mankaa Constance, 43 years, Queen and Teacher of G.S Njinteh, Bujong , 18th June 2016.

was put on Pa Neba was continuous stealing. Because of it, his wife who was the original cause of the problem, separated from him.

iv) Mamfor in Peace Keeping

Inside the palace, the *Mamfor* also ensured that there was peace and stability among the queens, princes and princesses. She tried to always make sure that disputes were avoided and that nothing that cropped up was left unsettled. At the level of the queens (fon's wives), she appointed the most senior to handle disputes that might arise among them, calling her attention only to serious quarrels that needed her intervention. The *Mamfor* performed her judicial role with much ease because she had more direct contact with the people than the fon.¹⁶⁸

The *Mamfor* was very particular in making sure that fines levied on defaulters in the palace were paid as required. Fines were levied in cases concerning land encroachment, stealing of palace property and violation of important days like *mumeta'a* or what was locally known as "country Sunday". Other fines were levied on defaulters of the fon's annual dance.¹⁶⁹

The *mumeta'a* was a day reserved for rest and traditional worship. The day commemorated the day the fons were buried. The people believed that the earth carrying the death fon should never be tampered with on the day they were usually buried. Thus on such a day, no farming activity involving digging of the soil had to be undertaken. Instead, the village and family gods were worshipped and rituals and sacrifices performed. It would appear that the "country Sunday" changed in each region, according to the day that the most deceased fon were buried.¹⁷⁰

There was a special police group which sent its members out into the fields, on secret days to arrest defaulters and bring them to the palace. Occasionally, some women were caught and fined. The fines ranged from seizure of property to paying fines in goods. The property seized was carried to the palace. At the palace, the *Mamfor* listened to the defaulters and passed judgment accordingly, imposing fines ranging from a number of fowls or goats to cows depending on the gravity of default. Other fines included carrying of firewood or water for the palace. These fines were paid to the *Mamfor* within a specified period.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Comfort Siri, 36 years, Princess and Petit trader, Bujong , 18th June 2016.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Tah Ojuku, 79 years , Member of Kwifor, Bujong , 17th June 2016.

¹⁷⁰ Idem.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Neh Doris, 49 years, Princess and farmer, Bujong , 18th June 2016.

There was the occasion known as *Nukwi*, which brought guests from far and near and all the villagers were dressed in strict traditional attires. It was a great annual festival, a day of great feasting, dancing and merry-making. On that occasion, the dancing and presentation of gifts were done in the palace. The occasion was also known as the “fattening” period when women were forbidden from any duties and invited to feed in the palace.

The *Mamfor* also took time off to rest from her political and administrative duties. This was the only time when the *Takumbeng* society of women could come out to assist the local police to arrest defaulters.¹⁷² The fines were used to develop the fondom and were also a source of income for the *Mamfor*. The fines generated income when the goats, fowls and cows were sold to interested buyers.¹⁷³

v) *Mamfor* and the *Takumbeng*

The *Takumbeng* society also came to the *Mamfor*, the only person who could look at them in their nudity and not be cursed, to inform her about how things were going on in the land and to advise her on what to do. They could detect a warning of evil fortunes through incidents like a sudden high infant mortality rate, death rate, or an outbreak of a destructive pest or a disease killing crops or villagers.

The *Takumbeng* could also inform her about issues that made women in the fondom to be disgruntled, like their crops being eaten by animals.¹⁷⁴ They would sit with the *Mamfor* and discuss these issues in order to see what action to take. Generally, the cleansing of the society was recommended. If that was the case, the *Kwifor* and male *Takumbeng* societies were charged with carrying out this activity of cleansing.

vi) *Mamfor* in Discipline

The *Mamfor* also acted as a disciplinarian who sought redress for particular offences and abuses against women or those that were against the social and natural order. For example physical, violence toward a pregnant woman, gross disrespect of an elderly woman or insults directed towards a woman’s sexual organ were handled by the *Mamfor*.¹⁷⁵ The *Mamfor* actually ensured social harmony in the village. Moreover, she mediated in cases involving husbands and wives and discouraged violence. When violence against women

¹⁷²Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu and nurse, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

¹⁷³Interview with Achirimbi John, 85 years, king maker, Bujong, 19th June 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Idem.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Ngwa Bukum, 64 years, Member of *kwifor*, Bujong, 17th June 2016.

persisted, the *Mamfor* intervened to address the situation.¹⁷⁶ Also in the case where a woman became disrespectful to her husbands, the Mamfor intervened with effective disciplinary measures or sanctions.

Conclusion

In closing up this chapter, it must have been understood that the choice and installation of the *Mamfor* is the full responsibility of the *Kwifor* and *Takumbeng* secret societies. The stages of installation are examined in this chapter. Meanwhile we also observed in this chapter the burial rights of the *Mamfor*. The activities of the *Mamfor* in the community were equally examined. The next chapter of the study shall be devoted to the activities of the *Mamfor* and women in the development of the fonom.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Veronica Nforsi, 58 years, Teacher G.B.H.S Yaounde, Yaounde, 7th December 2016.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MAMFOR AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE BAFUT WOMEN FOR DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The *Mamfor* played political, social and economic roles in empowering women in the society in which she lived. The activities performed by *Mamfor* in the various domains of politics, economy, socials and culture have made her credible in the Bafut community. These now will be examined at both the palace and the village levels.

A) Political Activities of the *Mamfor* and Bafut Women

The *Mamfor* together with the Bafut women contributed politically to the development of the Bafut fendom. She had ruled as first lady of the fendom. She greatly influenced the women for development.

i) Mamfor and Women during Wars

The Mamfor guided women during wars. She involved women indirectly in the war. For example, women helped disable persons, the old and pregnant women especially during migratory wars and in instances where the people had to subdue, other groups before settling. During such periods, the hills were used for defense. The significance of the hilly areas during such events was that the advancing army could be seen from a distance. The hills were also good for shelter and to target for the enemy, and this made the people of Bafut prepared against the enemy at all times.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, the Mamfor organized women in order to ensure regular food supply. They stored maize, beans, groundnut, cocoyams, egussi and household articles. In this case, when some enemies manage to break through and reach their homes, they found out in great dismay that there was no food to loot, no person to attach or capture, and thus no need to proceed. This was such a diplomatic tool used by the women. Although women did not set-off for battlefields, they had specific duties and functions which were as vital as those performed by men.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Siri Mumah, 80 years, Member of makumbeng, Bujong ,17th June 2016.

Also, the Mamfor used women to strengthen diplomatic ties in the fondom.¹⁷⁸ Women were used as tools to cement friendly relationships in the Bafut community both within the ranks of the royal family and commoner's class. This was done through marriages. This is what had kept chiefdoms in close contact and harmony from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial periods.

ii) Mamfor in Party Politics

The Mamfor of Bafut played a very prominent role in party politics. She is so involved in modern political activities that she influenced the women of Bafut to join the party of her choice. As a member of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, C.P.D.M, the party to which the fon belongs, she tactfully influenced the queens and other women to become members of it. She sees into it that the queen and palace workers have their registration and voting cards of the party.¹⁷⁹ In general as a leading woman; the Mamfor played an important political role which was appreciated by Bafut people. The influence of the Mamfor was also felt in the social and economic spheres.

iii) Mamfor and Secret Societies

The Bafut women have had secret societies since the pre-colonial period till today. Through these secret societies they played their own role in the management and evolution of the society. Some of the secret societies ran by men in Bafut included *Takumbeng*, *Tchong*, *Menang* and *Kwifor*.¹⁸⁰ The lone secret society ran by the Bafut women was the *Makumbeng* or Female *Takumbeng*.¹⁸¹ The Mamfor was part of this secret society though she was not necessarily its leader.

The existence of the *Makumbeng* society could be traced as far back as the early history of Bafut. Its impact on the Bafut fondom have been aptly portrayed in the society. This was the only female secret society in the Bafut fondom. The *Makumbeng* took care of matters concerning women who had attained menopause. The most senior member of the society headed the assembly.¹⁸² With the assistance of other women, she disciplined stubborn women. The *Makumbeng* was equally out to protect the interest of the female folk. The

¹⁷⁸ Idem.

¹⁷⁹ Idem.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Siri Mumah, 80 years, Member of makumbeng, Bujong, 17th June 2016.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Labeh Neh, 79 years, Member of Makumbeng, Bujong, 19th June 2016.

¹⁸² Interview with James Akotoh, 72 years, Prince of Mambu Bafut, Mambu, 14th July 2016.

Mamfor advised women to stay away from trouble in order not to fall into the trap of this secret society.

The *Makumbeng* was very apt and effective in collecting debt from dishonest citizens. Through the *Makumbeng*, the female folk were organized and their interest protected. However, their participation in traditional political affairs of the village remained passive. Another function performed by the *Makumbeng* concerned the settlement of disputes among the female folk. It afforded a quick and efficient way through which disputes especially between two or more women were resolved. Fines were accordingly meted onto those women who were found guilty.¹⁸³

B) The Socio-Cultural Activities of the *Mamfor* and Bafut Women

In the social domain, the *Mamfor* defended the interest of women in the society since she was best placed to do so in the palace. Since the land was very fertile and the predominant activity for women was farming, most of their problems were either land disputes or the destruction of their crops. The *Mamfor* was also a strong advocate of women's rights, since the men always treated their wives and girl children unfairly simply because they were women. She fought for their liberation from political, economic and social restrictions.

i) Mamfor and Women in Marriage

The *Mamfor* had the duty of organizing the women of the palace. She organized the wedding of the fon to a new wife after enquiries to know about the woman's character, and particularly if she was still a virgin. When it was right, she went and paid the necessary bride price. It should be noted that no family turned down the marriage offer of the fon made by the *Mamfor*. All young virgins were eligible wives of the fon so long as they had no blood relationship with the fon. It was the *Mamfor's* duty to see to it that the fon's sexual needs were satisfied¹⁸⁴

The bride price in Bafut was paid in the form of exchange of gifts. These gifts ranged from cattle to foodstuff given to the family head of the bride and those responsible for collecting the bride price. If a young woman turned down the offer of marriage to the fon, she was likely to be exiled from the fonom and disowned by her parents. Her banishment would

¹⁸³ Idem.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Veronica Mankaa, 67 years, Wife of quarter head Mbelili, Mbebili, 4th July 2016.

be accompanied by curses. A woman betrothed to the fon wore a special bangle, which indicated her status. No man had the right to love such a woman. To do so brought the risk of banishment from the land.¹⁸⁵

Items that were included in bride price in Bafut were oxen, goats, pigs, sheep, fowls, clay pots, hoes, cutlasses, knives, wooden spoons, stools, traditional bags, bags of beans, bags of maize, bags of salt, jugs of palm oil, baskets of groundnuts, jugs of palm wine and bunches of plantain. The food items, particularly the plantain, palm oil and palm wine were for feeding and entertaining the in-laws on the day of the wedding.¹⁸⁶

In addition, there was what was known as suitor services which included clearing of farm plots by the suitor, building of fences, fetching firewood, fetching of thatch, harvesting of crops and building of a new house. In the palace, the *Mamfor* ensured that the *nchindas* rendered these suitor services on behalf of the fon which she supervised and personally coordinated the payment of the bride price to the girl's family.¹⁸⁷

There were three types of marriages in Bafut namely the *ngoo manyie*, the *usa manyie* and the *ngoo manyie-usa' manyie*. The *Ngoo Manyie* was marriage by consensus contracted after the suitor had paid the whole bride price and the bride was led to his house at night by a group of relatives with bamboo light known as *nka'*. *Usa' Manyie* was marriage through elopement, in which the girl ran away to the house the man she loved and they celebrate their wedding themselves. The bride price was paid much later after the marriage had been accepted by both families.

The last type was the blending of *Ngoo Manyie* and *Usa Manyie*. In this, the suitor paid the bride price but did not wait for his wife to be brought at night with bamboo torches. The marriage formalities were performed when the bride and the bridegroom were living together, before the pregnancy of the wife of the three the commonest and the most respectable was the *Ngoo Manyie*.¹⁸⁸

When the fon of Bafut married a new wife, she was educated on the customs and traditions of the fondom, particularly if she came from a different fondom. She was taught the

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Comfort Siri, 36 years, Princess and petit trader, Bujong, 18th June 2016.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Mankaa Constance, 43 years, Queen and teacher of G. S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Idem.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Bujong, 16th June 2016.

economy of food, nutrition, hygiene, good behavior and the craft of childbearing and child catering. The *Mamfor* made sure that the new queen understood that divorce and adultery were not of the community and not worthy of a fon's wife. The penalty for adultery was death.¹⁸⁹ The, *Mamfor* ensured that the new queen understood and mastered in order not to fall into some kind of trouble. Six weeks of seclusion were devoted to such education.

In Bafut, being a woman meant being a mother and the success of marriage depended much on the fertility of the woman. The *Mamfor* played a great role in educating women on marriage and in their turn they then educated their female children. Before marriage, the woman must have gotten the informal type of education designed for the bride to be provided with the necessary ingredients for a marriage life. That is why social living in Bafut revolves around the women and the young girls who were also taught the economy of food nutrition, good behaviour, mother craft and the secrets of a happy marriage life.¹⁹⁰

The *Mamfor* equally encouraged women to take part in the marriage of their sons. Many women contributed heavily to the payment of the bride price required of their son. Though this gesture has changed greatly in recent years, some women still practiced it. They were always the first to look for young girls for their sons. They took special care of their daughter-in-law by providing them with basic kitchen utensils. In the typical Bafut custom, the bride spent quite some time with the mother-in-law before moving to her own kitchen, however, the practice has greatly changed.¹⁹¹ Moreover, the mother in-laws also gave advice to the bride on how to treat her husband so that they both could live in harmony.

The *Mamfor* organized the marriage of princes and princesses to ordinary people in the fondom as well. The *Mamfor* catered for the general welfare of the society. She catered for abandoned women and children in the fondom. These women and children were brought to the palace which became their new home, considering that the Bafut society had no orphanage.¹⁹² The *Mamfor* also solved problems involving co-wives in polygamous marriages.

When problems occurred, the head of the family sat in as the judge and was assisted in this task by the eldest sister of the family head or the mother of the family head. In the case

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Philomina Lum, 68 years, princess of Bafut, Bujong , 17th June 2016.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Simon Akah , 88 years, farmer, Mbebili, 11th June 2016.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Nfor Kare, 57 years, Member of takumbeng. Bujong , 17th June 2016.

¹⁹² Idem.

where the family head was permanently absent, the mother or the eldest sister sat in as the judge. The case was brought to the *Mamfor* only if the family judges found it difficult to provide lasting solutions to the problem.

ii) *Mamfor* and Women in Education

Before the advent of western education in Bafut, education was done through the informal method. This was through the singing of traditional songs and the narration of folk tales by parents. Knowledge was thus passed on from parent to child and from one generation to another. Mothers taught their daughters farming, cooking, and cleaning. As for the boys they accompanied their fathers to their various secret societies and helped them in tapping palm wine, hunting, and house construction. At a later age, they represented their fathers in occasions which their fathers were unable to attend in person. It was through such means that tradition and culture was handed down through the ages.¹⁹³

The youthful men replaced their parents in their way of life, that is being patriotic and to promote the traditions and customs of the Bafut fonom. The role of the woman as a house wife was to train the young girls on the values of womanhood, virginity, humility and above all to respect their husbands. The *Mamfor* always advised women to take the education of their young girls serious so that they would not bring disgrace or shame upon their parents.

Education was also to prepare the child for manhood or womanhood with marriage as its natural consequence. The *Mamfor* encouraged women to teach their children. Children learned much through interaction. From an early age, children interacted more with their mothers than with fathers. Most productive and moral lessons imparted to children were woven into routine life activities.¹⁹⁴

Traditional education was aimed at the integration of children into their social environment and the formation of character. That was why the *Mamfor* encouraged mothers to teach their daughters the techniques of farming, cooking, house care, baby care and entertainment of visitors. Women also taught their children respect for the local gods and hierarchy. In addition, women were a medium through which social habits or values were

¹⁹³ Interview with Jame Akotoh, 72 years, Prince of Manmbu, Mambu, 14th July 2016.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Numfor Brigitte, 43 years, Farmer, Bujong, 13th January 2022.

passed on to the next generation. The heritage of ancestors was handed down through stories, proverbs, riddles, games, music, arts, dances and behaviour.¹⁹⁵

The education of women and female children was further intensified in the 1950's when the Basel Mission opened the Presbyterian Girl School of Science and Technology (P.G.S.S.T) at Agyaty to improve on the morals of girls. The school began as a Marriage Training Centre (M.T.C). This was because of the need for a training centre for married women. In 1957, Reverend Hoffman began putting up the necessary building at Agyati-Bafut. On 13th February 1958, Miss Weber Lina started the first courses which were originally intended for married women and young girls who were about to get married.

The Marriage Training Centreschool provided full boarding accommodation. In 1960, the name of the school was changed from M.T.C to Home Making Center (H.M.C) and in 1968, the name was further changed to the Presbyterian Home Making Center (P.H.M.C) in order to improve on the standards of the institution to the realities of the time. With this change, admission was opened to all girls and training lasted for nine months.¹⁹⁶

In 2000, the name of the school was changed from PHMC to the Presbyterian Girls School of Science and Technology (P.G.S.S.T). This change in name came with a change in the mission of the school, from training women to take care of their homes in aspects of cookery, house care, needle work, dress making. The school trained young girls in science and technology so as to face the new challenges of life. The duration of study changed from two years and further to five years. By the early 2000s the population of the school stood at two hundred and sixteen (216).¹⁹⁷

The school had a well defined curriculum with two departments which studied religious studies, food and nutrition, health science, home management, government, accounting, fashion and fabric design, pattern drafting, sewing and word processing.¹⁹⁸ The school had well equipped laboratories, one for computer sciences and the other for food and nutrition. It was an all round girls school, and it was well equipped mentally, spiritually and technically as graduates could start their own interprises and become self sustaining. The

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Siri Winnifred, 42 years, Teacher C.S Mambu, Mambu, 12th January 2022.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Ngum Helen, 43 years, Farmer, Manji, 16th January 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Constance Mankaa, 43 years, Teacher G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

¹⁹⁸ Idem.

Mamfor always encouraged women and young girls to enrol in this institution so as to improve on their status.

Women were encouraged by the *Mamfor* to introduce their daughters into farming from the early age. This is to say that their daughters followed them to the farm, carrying their hoes or any other farming tools. At that early age, girls helped their mothers to fetch drinkable water or perform other lighter chores. When they were of age, it was time to start tilling using the hoe. *Mamfor* also advised women to act as moral guardians of their children, inculcating in them moral virtues. They taught their children how to respect their elders and visitors. By guiding their children through the different stages of development, women prepared them for responsible adulthood.¹⁹⁹

The *Mamfor* with members who belong to the C.W.F (Christien Women Fellowship) organized workshops, seminars and conferences for women and girls. During the seminars, different topics were treated by experts who were always invited to take part, treated some topics. The women were given lessons on cookery, needlework, health and sanitation, motherhood and child care and on finances.⁴³

As concerns health and sanitation, the expert did much to create awareness in women and the society about their health. The *Mamfor* encouraged women who belonged to other women's groups like the C.W.F(Christien Women Fellowship) of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and C.W.A (Catholic Women Association) of the Roman Catholic church, to always bring in what they were taught in those groups which were also of importance to the women.⁴⁶

As concerns mother and craft, lessons were introduced to the women by members who were also members of the C.W.F movement. They attended leadership courses where these lessons were taught. During craft lessons, women were taught how to make cough medicine using honey and lemon. They were also taught the preparation of lotion, vaseline, soap and food for children from the local food. The women were also taught sewing, decoration of bags, tablecloths among others.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Idem.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, Petit trader, Bujong , 12th January 2022.

Simple but effective methods of food preservation were taught to the women by C.W.F members. In this way, most of the fresh farm products were processed (such as dried vegetables, corn, beans, yams) and were sold later during periods of scarcity. Most of the women were experts in foodstuff retailing. Some were big business women carrying out inter-village and inter-regional trade.²⁰¹

The women were also taught personal and environmental hygiene that went a long way to improve the health of most families. The women were also given first aid lessons because they could find themselves where there were no doctors. They were also taught needlework, cookery, cleaning of the kitchen and the environment. This was because the woman's first responsibility was to ensure the welfare of the home, family and the community, no matter her other professions.

With the knowledge of motherhood and childcare, women were able to ensure the education of the girl child. They were equally informed on how they could be self-reliant. They carried out activities that impacted the lives of their members and brought positive changes. Practical lessons were organized during which soap making, lotion, powdered soap were taught to women.²⁰²

With the opening of centers like P.G.S.S.T, the *Mamfor* encouraged women and young girls to enrol. She also advised women with multiple-activities to attend evening classes and the adult women went for adult classes which helped them to develop intellectually and morally. The lessons taught in motherhood and childcare helped girls and young mothers to develop self-confidence and respect for their husbands by being responsible home makers.²⁰³

In the families, husbands and wives could dialogue and this brought about peace in homes and communities. As a result, most Bafut men were no longer regarded upon like demi-gods by their wives thanks to the efforts of the *Mamfor* as well as because they were knowledgeable of their rights. The standards of living in families improved because of knowledge obtained from the activities.

²⁰¹ Idem.

²⁰² Interview with Bih Mary, 51 years, Queen and Farmer, Bujong, 18th June 2016.

²⁰³ Interview with Constance Mankaa, 43 years, Queen and teacher of G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

iii) *Mamfor* and Women in Putting to Birth

The fertility of a fon's wife was very important, because a woman who did not bear children was despised, even when she had other positive qualities.²⁰⁴ When a queen was pregnant, the *Mamfor* made sure she was well taken care of and fed until the child was born. Again, the *Mamfor* had to see to it that the nursing mother did not do any hard work and that both mother and child were well protected. The child was generally breast-fed for about three years and during that time the mother avoided sexual relations, seeing masquerades and *juju*, particularly the frightful ones.

The nursing mother was not allowed to see corpses or direct relatives. She was not even allowed to eat chicken.²⁰⁵ The pregnant queen was delivered of her child in olden times by elderly queens, who were called *Ndamuh*. When the child was born, the *Mamfor* saw to it that the placenta was removed and buried under the bed of the queen, where the birth had taken place. This was to enable the gods of the land to grant more children and make the queen more fertile. The *Mamfor* also buried the umbilical cord under a healthy plantain sucker in order to ensure continuous fertility.

The plantain was later harvested and it was cooked with a combination of palm oil, bitter herbs and large chunks of meat what they called *Ndamuh* plantain, and eaten by the mother and her new baby and every other young queen who was still to give birth. In the event that the new baby was male, the *Mamfor* performed the circumcision, using a special grass and iodine to heal the wound.²⁰⁶

In addition, women were vital as bearers of children. According to Bafut tradition concerning birth, when a woman gave birth, neighbours were informed. The father of the child could buy oil, beef and salt which he took to his in-laws to announce the birth of the new child. In return, the in-law (the girl's parents) prepared food (plantains in excess oil) in which they take to their daughter. The birth place of the woman was a house built for that purpose. Traditional birth attendants received the baby. This woman received salt and meat in return as a sign of appreciation from the father of the child. The birth attendant was often

²⁰⁴ *Idem*.

²⁰⁵ *Idem*.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Constance Mankaa, 43 years, Queen and teacher of G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

called at times to name the baby. At the girls house, the baby was kept indoors until the navel fell off.²⁰⁷

Moreover, when the neighbors were informed about the birth of the child, they started streaming into the compound. The husband bought salt and oil for the reception. The oil and salt was used in eating roasted plantains. It was also palatable to be eaten with pepper. The plantain was roasted and shared for everyone to eat with palm oil. After a woman gave birth, the placenta was received and given to the relative present. It was immediately taken home for burial at the husband's compound. However, the placenta of twince twin was buried by the traditional priest. For single birth, it was buried by the woman or girl's relative.²⁰⁸

In Bafut, children of multiple birth are called *Mumfa'a* and are held in high esteem. If a queen gives birth to twins, she was treated with a lot more respect, not only because such children were rare, but also because they were mystical bringing luck on the family. A mother of twins was called *Mangyie*. She could go to the palace without giving palm wine to the fon, and had the privilege of clapping hands and speaking directly with the fon.²⁰⁹ A queen with twin babies was kept together with her babies in a special confinement for five years after which there was feasting and dancing in the palace. Gifts to the child were in pairs in order to be allow to see the children.²¹⁰

iv) Mamfor and Women in Festivals

Other occasions where the *Mamfor* was fully occupied with organizing feeding in the palace were the festivals like *Aben Mfor* the fon's dance *Abuing*, *Nukwi* and *Nusa*. The fon's annual dance in Bafut was very important to the people for the functioning of the Bafut fondom. The fon of Bafut organized an annual dance in his palace usually during the month of December and within a few days to Christmas. During such a dance, Bafut sons and daughters from all over the national territory and especially those at home converged at the palace plaza in their numbers for the dance.

The fon's annual dance usually lasted three days. It was usually a very colourful ceremony as almost everyone appeared in traditional regalia. During the annual dance, the

²⁰⁷ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, Petit trader, Bujong, 12th January 2022.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Ngum Silocica, 46 years, Trader, Mankaa, 18th January 2022.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Mankaa Constace, 43 years, Queen and teacher G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

²¹⁰ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16th June 2016.

fon of Bafut usually granted honorific rights to deserving Bafut men and women. The lowest of these rite was the *mie*, next the *booh* and the highest was the *abang*. It followed that a woman started with the *mie* and to the *abang*. Those with the *abang* were of higher social status than those with only the *mie*. (See **plate 12**). And some one with the *mie* was higher than someone who had none of the above.

The *Mamfor* encouraged women to go for the awards which permitted them to feel free in the presence of the fon.²¹¹ When one had been given the *mie* by the fon, one could talk to the fon whenever necessary. You could also greet the fon traditionally. But someone who had not received even the *mie* could not talk to the fon, or even alone greet him.

Plate 12: A Woman Holding Her “Booh” And “Abang”



Source: Photo Archives, Palace of Bafut, Bafut Museum

A woman holding her “booh” and wearing her “Abang”, both granted by the Fon of Bafut, His Royal Highness Abumbi II after she was advised by the Mamfor.

²¹¹ Interview with Mankaa Constance, 43 years, Queen and teacher of G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

Prior to the *Aben*, dance, the council of the traditional rulers and other notables held meetings to review the affairs of the past year, so as to see what went on well and what went wrong and after the meeting, sacrifices were made to thank the gods or ancestors for their blessing for the previous years, to appease them for the wrongs committed and plead for them not to punish the people but rather to bless them in the coming year.²¹² During the meeting of the notables, feeding was organized and done by the *Mamfor*.

The fon as the highest priest gathered the other priests and they prepared the rituals. The items needed included camwood, wine, animals etc., some of the important shrines are the *Nifò'ò*, *Nifùm* (where the previous fons are buried), *Nsaanimunwi* (square of the child of the gods) *NsaanimuBāburō* (square of the child of those of heaven) *màbàà*, *ńgǔǔku'ù* (stones located at Swie).²¹³

Nusa was a ritual festival during which the fon and the nobles communed together and addressed the people. On that occasion, the fon and the ward heads were dressed in ritual attires and the old women of the fonom performed the ritual. The fon, carrying a club and a state knife sat on the throne in the palace plaza ground to watch the dancing by various ward groups. Then a fowl was fed with some concoction through its mouth and anus and held up while the fon, the old women and the ward heads recited incantations to the gods.²¹⁴ After that, the fon twisted the neck of the fowl while incantations were still being recited until its neck pulled off. The head and neck of the fowl were then thrown on the heap of grass, the wings and legs broken after prayers.

The fowl represented evil spirits or persons with evil intentions. The breaking of the leg and the wings was a sign that any evil spirit or person attempting to do evil in the fonom, would suffer a similar fate.²¹⁵ At the end, the fon throw the death fowl on the heap of grass prepared beforehand, and hits the grass and dead fowl with his club. Then with their clubs, the old women begin to hit the grass until the heap and the fowl were smashed, while the men used their knives to cut it into pieces. Each ward head then collected a quantity of it to place

²¹²Idem.

²¹³ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

²¹⁴ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu and nurse, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

²¹⁵ Idem.

in his compound and on road junctions. This, was believed, would rid Bafut of all evil spirits and make the women more productive.²¹⁶

v) *Mamfor* and Women in Health

Traditional doctors or herbalists were solely responsible for the treatment of diseases. They used herbs to prepare concoctions for the treatment of illnesses like fever, poisoning, infertility, fractures and mental disorder. When the illness became complicated the person was transferred to the traditional doctor's compound where he stayed up to when he was cured. Items such as chicken, goats, kolanuts, cowries and pigs were given as payment for the treatment.

The quantity of items demanded depended on the gravity of the illness. The health of the *Mamfor* was very important as she could not performed her functions if she was not in good health. Most of these traditional doctors taught their sons who succeeded them after their death but some went against the regulations of the treatment making it less effective.²¹⁷

Activities were carried out in health carefully and through purely traditional means. In Bafut like other traditional societies of Cameroon, traditional healers who included women were involved in the treatment and prevention of diseases and disorder in people's systems. These doctors used roots, tree barks and leaves in preparing medicine for the healing of both physical and spiritual illnesses. Generally, diseases like gastritis, dysentery, headache, poison, and bractures were treated by them.²¹⁸

However, female traditional doctors were mostly concerned with the well-being of women and concentrated mostly on the treatment of infertility and mental disorder in women which most male traditional doctors did not master. They were also highly involved in traditional midwifery and treatment of diseases in babies like navel and stomach pain. These healers used incantations, herbs and liquids to treat their patients.²¹⁹

Before treatment was administered to patients, the healers consulted the ancestors through divination. This was done not only as a means of finding out from the gods the cause of the illness, but also as a means of knowing whether or not the illness or disease could be

²¹⁶ Idem.

²¹⁷ Interview with Ndemfor Julius, 67 years, Tapper, Asong, 5th February 2022.

²¹⁸ Interview with Veronica Mforsi, 58 years, Teacher of G.B.H.S Yaounde, Yaounde, 7th December 2016.

²¹⁹ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 64 years, Chief of Mambu and nurse, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

cured. Female doctors proceeded in most cases by giving the patient a spiritual bath aimed at sending away the evil spirit that must have brought the illness before administering treatment.

Payment for treatment varied from one doctor to the other depending on the nature, duration and method of treatment to be used. Treatment could be paid for with items like salt, goat, palm oil, and fowl or it could be done for free. The Mamfor encouraged women to learn these treatments. In the past, the Mamfor herself was part of those treating those who were sick. She was the midwife and she mostly specialized in the treatment of baby diseases.²²⁰

As concern conventional medication, women served as nurses and midwives. Most health training institutions, hospitals and clinics are flooded with women. Women sensitized the Bafut population on the ills of diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, dysentery and HIV/AIDS. At times, medical experts were invited by the *Mamfor* to come and speak to the women. Since health is wealth, the Bafut women were very attracted to it especially as they were the custodians of family well being.²²¹

Those who were C.W.F members gave lessons to the women about caring for the old, sick, disabled and mentally deranged. From time to time experts in a particular aspect of life visited these women, and threw more light on the lessons. Health lessons were given during seminars and conferences.²²² The lessons were mostly on topics like sexually transmissible diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS, malaria, yellow fever, fractures and sprains, convulsion, pre-natal care, cancer and others. Besides, women were taught hygiene lessons, healthcare, nutrition and how to care for the sicklers at home.

The women also learned the symptoms of diseases that needed medical treatment.²²³ Motherhood and childcare were the priority of the women since they were considered as role models in the society. Motherhood lessons and childcare lessons were considered very important to their lives and the lives of their families. The women were given lessons on how to care for themselves during pregnancy for those who were still giving birth.

²²⁰Idem.

²²¹Interview with Muchier Joseph, 64 years, Retired teacher, Mundum, 25th July 2016.

²²² Interview with Mankaa Jullien , 40 years, Teacher G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 4th February 2022.

²²³ Interview with Ndi Barnabas, 53 years, Teacher, Ntarinkon, 28th July 2016.

They were taught how to care for themselves during and after delivery. The members were equally taught needlework, cookery, cleaning of the kitchen and environment in general.²²⁴

This was because the woman's first responsibility was to ensure the welfare of the home, family, and community no matter her other professions. The family was the central part of any community of progress. With the knowledge of motherhood and childcare, women of Bafut were able to ensure the education of the girl child. The women were taught to be self-reliant. They carried out activities that impacted the lives of their members and brought positive changes. Practical lessons were organized in groups during which soap making, lotion, powdered soap were taught to women.²²⁵

The lessons taught in motherhood and childcare centers helped girls and young mothers to develop self-confidence and respect for their husband by being responsible homemakers. In the families, husband and wives could dialogue and this had brought about peace in homes and communities. As a result, most Bafut men were no longer regarded upon as demi-gods by their wives thanks to the efforts of the Mamfor and members of the C.W.F movement as well as because they were knowledgeable of their rights. The standards of living in families especially those of women who attended the conferences, workshops and seminars improved because of knowledge obtained from the movement's activities.²²⁶

The women from time to time visited the sick in hospitals and orphanages, and prayed with them, shared God's word and most often handed the patients gifts in cash and kind. They also organized public works like cleaning of public places in the fendom. They supported the old and the needy in the community by providing them with their basic needs like food, clothes, medicines and wood. It was in this way that they made valuable contributions to the development of the Bafut fendom and Cameroon as a whole.⁴⁵

vi)TheMamfor and Female Taboos

In Bafut women were not supposed to eat the gizzard of a chicken which was reserved for the men. As married women, you were not to eat gizzards because if you did it would be a terrible story when people heard of it. There was a song that was composed about a woman named "Nchang" who after preparing a chicken decided to eat the gizzard instead of keeping

²²⁴ Interview with Joseph Shusi, 65 years, Member of kwifor, Asong, 18th July 2016.

²²⁵ Interview with Marius Che, 65 years, retired teacher, Mbebili, 19th July 2016.

²²⁶ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, petit trader, Bujong, 12th January 2022.

it for the husband. The Bafut society condemned such an act especially as a chicken was considered whole or complete only when the gizzard was there.²²⁷

A woman during menstruation was not supposed to see the fon because it was believed that if she did her menses would not stop. She was not to cook, eat out of an ordinary plate or sit on an ordinary chair when she was menstruating. During such period, she was supposed to eat only out of a special wooden bowl and also sit on a special wooden chair. After the menstrual period was over, the chair and bowl were pushed under the bed until the next period. This was done because the woman was considered dirty during menstruation and should therefore not contaminate people.²²⁸ The *Mamfor* was not an exception.

A woman was not supposed to sit and cross her legs in the midst of men, for if she did, it meant she wanted to say that she was equal to or above the men. The Bafut society accepted that the *Mamfor* and women were subordinate to men. The *Mamfor* and Bafut women were not supposed to see traditional dance groups as the kwifor and the *chungmasquerade* dances which was reserved for men.²²⁹ Women were advised by the *Mamfor* to avoid these taboos in order to escape the consequences.

vii) *Mamfor* and Women in Cultural Activities

The *Mamfor* also encouraged cultural activities such as women dances, and singing. Dances and songs were of importance during cultural festivals like *Abin Mfor*, the annual festival and the fon's funeral. The *Mamfor* ensured that women appeared in their cultural attire and with food for the occasion. She encouraged other cultural occasions like marriages and births.

During the Fon's death celebration, she made sure the women and princesses carried significant beaded wands of horse-tail *lingand* sang mournful songs. The widows or queens shaved their heads clean and grieved naked in a single file, their bodies covered from head to foot with ashes. They sat or rested on the ground in the palace plaza.²³⁰ The *Mamfor* attended

²²⁷ Interview with Mbonjem Neba, 43 years, Taxi driver, Mankanikong, 22nd July 2016.

³⁶ Idem.

²²⁸ Idem.

²²⁹ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, Prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

²³⁰ Interview with Nsalah James, 49 years, Farmer, Asong, 19th July 2016.

meetings elsewhere and encouraged women from different quarters to meet and to socialize and exchange ideas that were beneficial to them.

During the meetings, the *Mamfor* encouraged the women to teach their children the Bafut language and culture in order that they should never be lost or die out. The *Mamfor* was the intermediary between the palace and female subjects of the fondom. She represented them in the palace where she presented their plight, their worries and their needs to the fon. She defended the rights of women against men and was instrumental in promoting their empowerment and emancipation.²³¹

B1) Social Impacts

Education received by women in their groups, made them to be aware of their role in the society and place as nation builders. Educating a woman is educating a whole nation. As such, the education of the Bafut women had impacted the whole community. Most women were able to read and write because of the knowledge they have acquired in their various groups. The leadership skills, training, expansion of social and economic opportunities and the advancement of women's right has helped to develop the community. More women were involved in groups and businesses.²³² Women headed and taught in private nursery, primary and public schools like GBS Njinteh, PS Mankaah, and Memorial Nursery and Primary School Agyati.

The presence of social groups made women to interact and sensitize others on social issues. The adult literacy classes organized by these social groups especially the C.W.F, helped a lot to widen the knowledge of women. Through these groups, women were able to participate in seminars, workshops and conferences which helped to instil leadership skills, and self-confidence in women and given them access to information. Self-confidence that was built in women, enabled them to participate in preaching, reading lessons in church and addressing the public.²³³

Through seminars, conferences and workshops, lectures on the causes, symptoms and prevention of diseases such as malaria, typhoid, diabetes, cancer and sexually transmitted diseases were given out to the public. Lectures were also given on HIV/AIDS, which was one

²³¹ Interview with with Siri Winnifred, 42 years, Teacher, Mambu, 12th January 2022.

²³² Interview with Philomena Lum, 68 years, Princess of Bafut, fon's palace, 17th June 2016.

²³³ Interview with Mankaa Constance, 43 years, Queen and teacher of G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

of the most scandalous illnesses. Sensitization on the ills of certain malpractices such as smoking, drugs, prostitution and abortion and their negative consequences was done among women. The women became aware of the dangers of certain forms of behaviours to their health, family and society. Hence one can say that the Bafut women made a significant social impact on the bafut community.²³⁴

C) Economic Activities of *Mamfor* and Women

This section will be concerned with the economic status and role of women in Bafut and will x-ray aspects such as agriculture, trade, animal husbandry, craft industry and some economic associations.

i) *Mamfor* and Women in Agriculture

Economically, the *Mamfor* also encouraged the women to participate in cash crop farming such as njinger and cocoa. While women were involved in subsistence peasant agriculture and food preparation, men engaged in wealth producing activities like building and contributed certain products to the household like oil, salt and meat. Women gained their status, money and a certain degree of independence from their agricultural output and local trade.

In agriculture, men only prepared the land after which women tilled it. They planted, weeded, and harvested crops and kept some for household consumption and sold some to obtain some basic needs such as oil, salt and pepper. These could also bring in revenue to augment the family income.²³⁵ Scheduled collective farming produced *dayu'u* - yams, *mukuu* – beans, *njiih* – bambara groundnuts, *casara*- cassava, *nungoh* – plantain, *macabe* – cocoyams, *aku'u* – colocasia and *ndonge* – sweet potatoes.

Vegetables, fruits and legumes were also cultivated. Fruits included mangoes, avocados, pears, paw paw, plums and pineapples. There was also the cultivation of njinja. Raffia palms were grown around the farms by the princes and village men, from which palm wine was tapped for sale and ceremonial use. Fish farming also supplemented protein value

²³⁴ Interview with Felix Che, 34 years, Chief of Bukari and Painter, Bukari, 28th June 2016.

²³⁵ Interview with Ndemfor Julius, 67 years, Tapper, Bawum, 5th February 2022.

of the food supply in Bafut. In-land fishing became part of women's occupation, and was usually carried out during the dry season.²³⁶

According to V.G Fanso, all traditional pre-colonial societies in Cameroon, concentrated more on the production of their staple food. This was the case in Bafut where the production of cocoyams, yams, cassava, maize, beans, groundnuts and potatoes was the priority.²³⁷ Women especially those in Mbuti cultivated maize and beans twice a year that is during the wet and dry seasons. It was done in this way because corn and beans were highly demanded for family consumption, feast, and equally for sale.

The Mamfor encouraged women in the fondom to practice shifting cultivation. The length of time for which an area was worked and fallowed depended on the type of crop, the fertility of the soil, and the availability and accessibility of other lands. Moreover, since some soils were not very fertile, Bafut women practiced the slash and burn techniques while others simply allowed the farms to fallow after two or three years of cultivation. Though a certain amount of planting occurred in most seasons, it was toward the end of the dry season that plots were extensively cleared and planted with grains and coco yams.²³⁸

The women of Bafut used traditional farming tools such as hoe which was attached to a knee-joint handle which in most cases measured some twenty to twenty-four inches making farming a back breaking task for women. Besides the hoe, a woman invariably carried a bag, a basket and a walking stick to the farm. She left the house at dawn for the farm and often return late in the evening.

Most of the women had small huts at distant farms, and at times only returned to the village on market days.²³⁹ During harvest periods men sometimes helped their wives. Men usually put in very little time for farm work, hardly more than ten days in the whole year. The women could cut away the tall grasses and low undergrowth themselves. The sale of food crops had a far-reaching effect on the income of farmers. This was due to the fact that

²³⁶ Interview with Suh Joseph, 43 years, Farmer, Mbebili, 11th June 2016.

²³⁷ V. G. Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools*. . .p.36.

²³⁸ Interview with Suh Joseph, 43 years, Farmer, Mbebili, 11th June 2016.

²³⁹ Interview with Nsalah James, 49 years, Farmer, Asong, 19th July 2016.

foodstuffs and other articles were sold throughout the year. This enabled businesswomen to make money all the time.²⁴⁰

The numerous tons of food crops exported from Bafut ensured an inflow of cash and a good economy. The existing market for the sale of food produced equally enabled the Bafut rural people to buy manufactured goods such as clothing, farm tools, building equipment and others.²⁴¹This in a way contributed to the development of Bafut and had positive effects on the lives of the Bafut population.

Furthermore, in the colonial period, women were very visible in the agricultural domain, but their status greatly changed as they generally became involved in activities previously regarded as reserved for men. Such activities which brought high social status and wealth included trading, handicraft and livestock breeding. Infact, a good number of women had at least a goat, pig and fowl. Most of them for example did cultivation around the compound and a few kilometers away from the home.⁶¹

In addition to traditional crops, Europeans introduced new crops like irish potatoes, carrot, cabbages, tomatoes, groundnut, and a range of others. Women who cultivated them sold the surplus in the markets.²⁴²Many factors have contributed to the increase in agricultural production and economic progress of Bafut. The economic well being of womenfolk in Bafut has been ensured by Bafut culture. Women were protected for example in the ritual ceremonies that were meant to protect the land against witches and wizards who flew on the high winds, destroying crops and bringing sickness to the community.(See plate 13).

The rituals guaranteed increased food production by blessing of farm tools and seedlings. Co-operation in farms work has also led to economic progress. Through this mode of co-operation, women became owners of large plots of farmlands where they all jointly tilled, planted, weeded and harvested crops.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Interview with Ngum Helen, 43 years, Farmer, Manji, 16 January 2022.

²⁴¹ Interview with Suh Joseph, 43 years, Farmer, Mbibili, June 2016.

²⁴² Idem.

²⁴³ Idem.

Plate 13: Protection from Witches



Source: Photo Archives, Palace of Bafut, Bafut Museum

A fetish consisting of major medicine hangs across the road at the entrance to the village to protect destruction of crops by witches and wizards who fly on the high winds.

A woman in Bafut produced a good variety of food crop. This made Bafut an area where there is sufficient food and eliminates hunger and famine from Bafut. Since the food is in excess, women sell some of them to generate income in order to meet other human needs.²⁴⁴ The agricultural competence of a woman in Bafut demonstrates that agriculture is very important in improving the economy and the women in Bafut plays a great role in improving the economy of Bafut.

Apart from the common cultivation of food crops, and breeding of animals, women specialized in manufacturing specific products to sell in other villages. These products included pots, caps, baskets and embroidery. With time, they came together with common initiative groups which allowed them take care of the family in aspects such as paying health bills and school fees for their children. Women were however not expected to accumulate wealth which might offer them independence from their husbands.

²⁴⁴Interview with Ngum Silocica, 46 years, Trader, Mankaa, 18th January 2022.

Trade was allowed when the woman used the income for the household and their children.²⁴⁵ In this case, the husband did not interfere. It was in this sense that women usually gave the money they earned to their husbands to use for themselves and for the benefit of their children. Women looked upon this as feeding their husbands and children. Like in most Cameroonian societies, agriculture was mostly the main activity of the Bafut people.

The Bafut people owned personal pieces of land on which they practiced the production of food crops. These helped the population in meeting up with the demand of their community like marriages, births, deaths and sacrificial ceremonies.²⁴⁶ The task of agriculture in Bafut was attached to women. The women who had as assignment to cater for their children and husband, engaged seriously in food production for domestic and local consumption.

In order to carry out agriculture, the women needed land on which they could farm. Land ownership in Bafut was the men's affair. The right to own land was based on the principle established by the traditional authorities, that whoever claimed a virgin piece of land owned it. The men then had the right to give out part of this land to their loved ones. It was therefore based on the sharing process that women gained access to land through their husbands.²⁴⁷ However, the women in Bafut had only farming rights over such pieces of land allocated to them by their husbands and brothers. They had no legal right over such land and could not allow any other person to farm on the land without the consent of their husbands.

Apart from acquiring farmland from their husbands, women could also cultivate on land left behind by their deceased mother-in-laws.²⁴⁸ In the case of the death of a mother, her farmland was automatically owned by one of her sons who handed it over to his wife. Women also had access to land when they were entitled to controlling a deceased brother's property, especially when his son was too young to inherit the property. In such a situation, the mother could give out this piece of land to other women or family members, who farmed on it until the owner became of age to control the land.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵Idem.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Neba Coco, 58 years, Farmer, Musah, 19th January 2022.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Lum Mary, 58 years, Wife of quarter head Mambu, Mambu, 4th June 2016.

²⁴⁸ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, Prince of Mbeili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

²⁴⁹ Idem

When a woman was entitled to farm on a particular piece of land either as the wife of the owner or a temporary user, she had to be consulted by her husband or the owner before the land was taken back from her. In this case, the piece of land was replaced by a similar or more fertile piece of land, unless the farmland was taken away from her as punishment for a crime she committed.²⁵⁰

The labour of women in Bafut was based on an agricultural calendar that depended on the first rains which usually started in March. Farmlands were prepared for planting in the dry season. During this season, the farmlands were cleared with the help of men and the women tilled the soil for about two months. Mixed cropping was practiced in Bafut. Two or more crops were grown in the same farmland at the same time.

With the coming of rains in March, maize, beans, cassava, groundnuts and yams were planted. Weeding is done from the month of April to July. Beans was the first crop to be harvested in July. Maize and groundnuts were equally harvested from late July to the end of August. After harvesting was completed, the crops were prepared for storage.²⁵¹ The different tools used by the Bafut women to accomplish the different farming tasks included hoes (*asoh*), used for the formation of ridges, mulching of crops like cocoyams, yams, cassava, maize, and for weeding.

Knives called *nifuu* were used in the harvesting of cocoyam and yams. The farming methods practiced were similar to those that were practiced in most black African societies. The farming method that was used in Bafut was the slash and burn method. The bush was cleared, allowed to dry and some weeks later, the grass was gathered and burnt (*Ankara*) and crops planted. This was followed by shifting cultivation where farm lands were cultivated for three to five years and when the farm's fertility was suspected to have been exhausted, the farmland was abandoned for a new piece of land.²⁵²

The Bafut women cultivated through the formation of ridges on which they planted their crops especially cassava and yams. These ridges were formed depending on the nature of the crops and the ease with which they could be formed. On hilly areas, Women formed their ridges across the slopes, which prevented erosion. The women used fertilizers which could be

²⁵⁰ Interview with Nchang Lovelyne, 51 years, Farmer, Manji, 25th July, 2016.

²⁵¹ Interview with Martin Fuh, 53 years, Prince and builder, Mankanikong, 23rd July 2016.

²⁵² Interview with Neba Bili, 48 years, Farmer, Agyati, 6th February 2022.

disposed grass. They equally bought fertilizers at times, applied cow dungs bought from cattle rearers, or pig dungs especially those rearing pigs.²⁵³

The prices of the various food crops sold either at the village level or the markets revealed that women's participation in agriculture contributed to the economy. The women in Bafut were able to come up with some income which was used in purchasing other needs. These crops produced in abundance led to food self-sufficiency. Also, with the income generated from the marketing of these crops, the living standards of the farmers has improved.²⁵⁴

Besides the food consumed at home, these women could supplement their food with fish, meat, chicken and vegetables. The result was a remarkable amelioration of living standards among the Bafut population. This explains why ailments such as kwashiorko, prevalent in most Sahel African countries and in the Northern part of Cameroon never existed in Bafut. Equally, the education of children in Bafut was provided for, a venture financed in part by income realized from the women's agricultural activities. By feeding their families and educating their children, women contributed greatly to the development of Bafut.²⁵⁵

ii) Mamfor and Women in the Craft Industry

The Mamfor encouraged participation in the local craft industry. Apart from the cultivation of food crops and breeding of small stocks, the Mamfor also encouraged women to specialize in manufacturing of specific products to sell in other villages.²⁵⁶ These products included raffia woven baskets, mats and bags and raffia sticks. Brooms, fishing nets traditional umbrellas, farm and kitchen equipment like knives, spoons, hoes, spears, cutlasses, axes, mortars, bowls and kitchen benches were also made by women. Clay deposits were used in pottery and the brick industry.²⁵⁷

This sector was dominated by women and as time went on younger women were advised by the *Mamfor* to leave it in the hands of the older women. They produced clay bowls, pots and pipes. The gregarious position of the blacksmithing among the Tikar group suggested the possibility of the earlier hunters. It was a means of livelihood and a source of

²⁵³ Interview with Nchang Lovelyne, 51 years, Farmer, Manji, 4th February 2022.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Nde Micah, 43 years, Farmer, Bawum, 28th January 2022.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Marius Che, 65 years, Retired teacher, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Mankaa Constance, 43 years, Teacher G.S NJinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

²⁵⁷ Idem.

food. The animals caught were shared among the hunters according to the customs and traditions of the fondom. The animals caught were consumed and the rest sold.²⁵⁸

Other crafts that women and the *Mamfor* became involved in were decorated doorframes, drums, fibre bags, regalia made of beads and baskets made from fiber and bamboo. The baskets were to carry foot for Nobles and for grains. It was also used by women during work in the fields. (Seep late14). They also engaged in embroidery, producing men's clothing, the *tog* and other traditional dresses.

There were also industries producing corn flour, indigenous beer produced from local maize or millet, dishes needed to store flour, *garri* or *waterfufu*. The basic materials used in the production of some of these articles were bamboo fibres and cane. Most of these materials were found in the numerous raffia bushes in the area, except for cane which was only imported from other villages outside Bafut. In weaving bags, the women sorted fibers, scoured it and dyed it. The fibers was then passed through a local loom and woven tightly.²⁵⁹

Plate 14: Baskets Used to Carry Food



Source: Photo Archives, Palace of Bafut, Bafut Musseum.

Baskets used to carry food for the Notables and for grains used by women during work in the fields. These are plaited raffia objects made by queens, Mamfor and wemen in the Fondom encouraged by the Mamfor. The calabashes were used for drinking.

²⁵⁸Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbibili, 16th June 2016.

²⁵⁹Interview with Muchier Joseph, 64 years, Retired teacher, Mundum, 25th July 2016;

Other articles such as baskets were woven from light backs of bamboos that were plaited with the hands. The Bafut women were noted for their expertise in basket making. There were large deposits of clay which women used it for pottery. Women were encouraged by the Mamfor to generally produce what was required for the home and keep the surplus for barter with other women for what they brought. The different pottery products included pots, bowls, and cups.²⁶⁰

Wood from the red tree was used to carve mortars and pestles, hoe-handles among other things. These women excelled in the manufacture of high quality artistic pottery that was traded far and wide. Such high quality pottery products were too valuable to be used as ordinary kitchen utensils; hence they were mostly used for ceremonial occasions and in daily life by high ranking people.²⁶¹

iii) Mamfor and Women in Animal Husbandry

Evidence of the activities of the Mamfor was seen in the practice of animal husbandry. She encouraged the women of Bafut to rear pigs, goats, and fowls. Rearing of fowls was an important activity of the Bafut rural woman. They fed the fowl with maize, grass, potatoes and bananas in the early hours of the day and they were left to wander around during the day in search of food. Women equally catered for young chicks to prevent kites from carrying them away. Livestock was more than mere food.

Cocks and fowls were used in bride wealth payment, exchange of gifts, and payment to enter secret societies. They were also used as sacrifices to gods.²⁶² Domestic animals were reared for consumption, and some were used for court fines and payment of tributes, sacrifices and fees into traditional secret societies. Greater part of these animals went to the chiefs as signs of allegiance as the custodian of land and for sacrifices since they were the chief priests of the land.

Parts of the sacrificial animals received were preserved for their family.²⁶³ Men took charge of providing meat, oil, fish and other needs for the family from the sale of domestic animals. Besides men also did hunting and were charged with the cutting of grass which they

²⁶⁰ Interview with Ndonwi Emmenuel, 57 years, Mankwi, Trader, 27th August 2016.

²⁶¹ Interview with Mbojem Neba, 43 years, Taxi driver, Mankanikong, 22 July 2016.

²⁶² Interview with Numfor Brigitte, 43 years, Farmer, Bujong, 13th January 2022.

²⁶³ N.V. Manka'a, "Chiefs and the Economics of Colonialism: the Impact of colonial Rule on the Economic Basis of Chieftaincy in the Bamenda Grassfields, 194-1961", pp. 43-44.

used for roofing. The climate, relief, hydrology, vegetation and soil influenced agro-pastoral activities which are intricately linked to traditional politics in the Bafut fondom. All these influence climate and human activities as well as crop distribution.

The highland supports the cultivation of crops like maize, cassava. Fishing and the rearing of animals were common activities in this area. The presence of these features have greatly contributed to the functions of the Mamfor and women in development as it influence the generation of income in the fondom which is a great tool that empower women for the development of the fondom. Fishing in the Bafut fondom was practiced along the river courses

Animal rearing gained ground in Bafut during the colonial era. In the post colonial era, women gradually improved in animal rearing. They learned to confine animal in fences and were provided insecticides like sulphur and sodium fluoride by agricultural and veterinary experts who were invited by the Mamfor. These insecticides were sprayed around poultry houses and fences to guard against insect bites and flu. Pesticides were also provided to be used by women on birds and animals against pests, ticks and jiggers.

The animals fed on green leaves, sweet potato, banana and other leaves. A majority of women were involved in it. It should be noted that the manure gotten from the rearing of these animals was used for farming. Animal rearing improved the financial status of some women since the proceeds were used to either sponsor children in school or to improve on the living standards of their families.²⁶⁴

Concerning rearing of fowls, new methods were introduced to improve on the activity. This was enhanced by missionaries who taught women how to feed their fowls so they could grow faster. Instead of carrying chicks to the farm in order to protect them from hawks, women were taught how to build poultries. From the 1990s, workers of the ministry of agriculture introduced a new breed of fowls popularly known as agric fowls which made the Bafut women to improve on their fowl rearing exercise.

The women cross-bred the new breed with their local breed fowl and obtained a mixed breed fowl.²⁶⁵ This resulted in an increase in the quantity of fowls that existed in Bafut

²⁶⁴ Interview with Ngwa Bukum, 64 years, Member of takumbeng, Fon's palace, 17th July 2016.

²⁶⁵ Idem.

society and the quality of the diet of the Bafut people. A good number of Bafut women operated poultries and had enhanced economic activities in the village vicinity.

iv) Mamfor and Women in Trade

Trade was another important activity that was encouraged by the Mamfor. The women of Bafut were involved in local trade which was mostly handled in the market place. The market was held once every week and trade was done mostly by barter in the pre colonial times. Items like grains, oil, salt and pepper were exchanged for other accepted measures. Bafut women actually took part in local trade and thus traded in grains since this agricultural product were second only to palm oil. Women dominated the trade since they were the main producers of agricultural products.²⁶⁶

Women were free to carry the quantity of items they wish to the market. Apart from food items, women traded manufactured goods like baskets and clay pots. As concerned long distance trade, the role of Bafut women was restricted for obvious reasons. Firstly, this trade required much capital, which only title holders and thefon had it. Secondly, it required good connections with traders in other chiefdoms. Also, trading between chiefdoms in ordinary and luxury commodities was not an easy task.

There was also no means of transport other than trekking.²⁶⁷ This was to say that transporting tons of palm oil and grain, pigs and goats required considerable manpower. However, the role of women in long distance trade was therefore limited but not completely absent. In view of the fact that the main duty of women in Bafut was to take care of the family by providing food for subsistence, they were not fully involved in business. However, those involved in trade had access to the national market and to a lesser extent to international markets.

As far as trading with the national territory was concerned, the Bafut women bought foodstuff from the suburbs and sold them to the women who travelled to Bamenda, Douala, Yaounde and Bafoussam for further sales.²⁶⁸ In effect, some women did not travel away from Bafut to sell their commodities, but they had middlemen who transported them to various destinations in the national territory.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Ngum Silocica, 46 years, Trader, Mankaa, 18th January 2022.

²⁶⁷ Idem.

²⁶⁸ Idem.

Some of the crops that were highly demanded were beans, groundnuts, maize and yams.²⁶⁹ Nevertheless, a few of the Bafut women also traded within Africa. They bought beans maize and yams from Bafut market and transported to Gabon, Congo and Central African Republic.²⁷⁰ Most Bafut women did marketing in a limited scale because of lack of a large capital.

Palm wine was equally sold on market days and on “country Sundays”. This was a purely female business because most, women were involved in palm wine marketing in markets or popular village squares such as Nsani munwi, Three Corners Njinteh, Nsani Mbebali and others. As the days went by, modern huts were constructed for the sale of palm wine. Thousands of liters of the cherished “white stuff” were transported from Bafut on a daily basis to markets in Bamenda.²⁷¹

v) Mamfor and Women in Community Development

The backbone of the economy of Bafut lay in the hands of women. However, they did not own land in the past but now because of Western education and the great cry of women, they have become owners of land. The status quo of women has greatly changed. Most of them own large pieces of land on which they practiced cultivation and animal breeding. Some even build and accumulate houses as a form of wealth.

Resently, in Bafut, and because of access to land and the increasing activity of cassava production and transformation, most of the women were involved in the cultivation of cassava on hectares of land. In addition, some of them cultivate or do vegetable gardening.²⁷² The farm activities made women to come together to save money. They also contribute financially in village development; for example they financed the water development project which was an operation aimed at supplying water to all the quarters in the village.

The women also contributed in making sure all the quarters in the village were accessible through the construction of roads. By so doing, women contributed enormously to community development and could not be underestimated. The lives of women in Bafut have

²⁶⁹ Interview with Muchier Joseph, 64 years, Retired teacher, Mundum, 25th July 2016.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Mbonjem Neba, 43 years, Taxi driver, Mankanikong, 22 July 2016.

²⁷¹ Interview with Ndemfor Julius, 69 years, Taper, Asong, 5th February 2022.

²⁷² Interview with Achirimbi John, 85 years, King maker, Njibujang, 19th June 2016.

been influenced by their trading activity. Women do not solely depend on their husbands for food money. With this trading activity, they were sure of good meals in their homes.²⁷³ From the small profits made out of their businesses women were able to educate their children, pay their hospital bills and clothe themselves and their children.

Most of the women had three to four children in secondary schools where fees and other school requirements cost about one hundred thousands francs a year.²⁷⁴ This emphasizes the fact that though agriculture is the main economic activity, the Bafut women still carried out trade as an economic activity which generated income to sustain their living standards.

All these economic activities helped the financial empowerment of the women of Bafut. Through these economic activities, the queens were able to own money for the feeding, clothing, and education of their children.²⁷⁵ Many of them now participated in njangi groups, where they learned how to save for future needs. This has led to the development of corporative groups that give out loans to farmers. Some of these female groups include the *Nka'a Mamfor* female group, the *Akoni* female group and the *Nkah Nka'ar* female group.

The *Mamfor* in her numerous political, administrative, social and economic activities has proven to be a woman capable of performing her duties in the right manner and has contributed enormously to the growth and smooth running of the society. As such, the administration cannot run smoothly at any given point in time, without involving her in its activities. Her activities in all these domains were well suited and could be effectively performed only through the *Mamfor*. She is greatly respected and admired as queen mother.

CI) Mamfor and Bafut Women in Economic Associations

Women love the presence of *Mamfor* in Bafut so much so that she has become their idol. They love her because she is sociable and mixes with them easily. She is approachable and welcoming. Her contributions to the society has taught women a lot of skills and techniques which has let to the initiation of modern farming groups and encouraged their activities in activities like the *Nka'a Mamfor* female group, the *Akoni* female group, and the *Nkarh Nka'a* female group. They became aware of the problems of the women and the fact

²⁷³ Idem.

²⁷⁴ Idem.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Christopher Suh, 6years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16th June 2016.

that she was marginalized by the male folk. Thus she became very active in working towards the eradication of the problems of women and in advocating her empowerment and emancipation.

The men always discriminated against the Bafut women. Men secluded women for so long that women themselves were hardly aware of what was happening to them. They were reduced to domestic and farm workers. They cooked, washed clothes, cleaned surroundings, and took care of the children.²⁷⁶ They usually woke up early every morning in order to perform these household chores and go to the farm where they spent the rest of their day. In the farm, they cleared hoed or weeded.

Sometimes the women went to farm with their children who helped her with the work. Harvesting of crops was still done by this same woman who still had to find time to sell or buy in the nearby market.²⁷⁷ Money gotten from the sales of surplus crops was used to buy such basic household needs as oil, salt, soap and foodstuffs not locally grown like rice. Part of this hard earned money was usually given to the husband for the education of the male children. In early colonial years, women generally did not go to school.

There were few women who dropped from school during the colonial period because they were either pregnant or were forced into marriage. The woman's place was at home with the family.²⁷⁸ Women were even encouraged to meet and socialize outside the family. Visits were discouraged because men believed that such women were promoters of prostitution. Women had to stay at home to satisfy the needs of their husbands and children.²⁷⁹

The plight of the royal Bafut women touched some female elites who came together to help their sisters to progress. They established women's associations as the *Nka'a Mamfor*, the *Akoni* and the *Nkah Nka'ar* female groups, from which mutual aid activities were involved and other njangi groups were formed. These groups helped women to save money.

a) The *Nka'a Mamfor* Female Group

The group made the education of the Bafut woman one of its main concerns. Education was needed to liberate the woman from her plight. Their aim was to foster the

²⁷⁶ Interview with Numfor Brigitte, 43 years, Farmer, Bujong, 13th January 2022.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, Trader, Bujong, 12th January 2020.

²⁷⁸ Idem.

²⁷⁹ Idem.

development and alleviation of poverty amongst women. The objectives of the group were to develop women culturally, socially, morally and economically.²⁸⁰ It hoped to achieve this objective by educating women on hygiene and health.

The *Nka'a Mamfor* group encouraged group work and assisted women to form cooperatives that would facilitate the marketing of their craft and farm produce. The group also worked to improve farming methods by acquainting women with some unfamiliar crops like soya beans. They also developed methods of preserving and conserving produce. The group tutored women on the processing of some basic household needs like soap and oil. The group also gave talks on health and other issues like pre-natal and infant care.²⁸¹

The self-reliant group of dynamic women got its finances from dues, sales and levies. With the money they had, they wanted to build a multipurpose women's centre where Bafut women generally could meet monthly for lectures and seminars on issues which would be beneficial to them. Their women could also meet with the *Mamfor* and work together on issues concerning them, particularly on health and agricultural matters.⁶³ The venue could also be used to operate a women's cooperative ware house where women could sell or store farm produce like beans, groundnuts, corn, irish and sweet potatoes for later marketing.²⁸²

b) The Akoni Female Group

The *Akoni* female group was another example of women farm groups. They also had the *Mamfor* as their matron. This group started existing since 1994 with a membership of 17. This group has been involved in collective farming. Membership was not strictly for women from the same quarter, family or age but open for all. Here, tools like hoes, and cutlasses were used to cultivate cassava and yams.

The members of the *Akoni* Female group produced garri, and other cassava products like *water fufu* and *kumkum* (cassava flour). These women cleared, hoed, planted and harvested the crops by themselves. After the harvest, the profit from the sales were saved and

²⁸⁰ Interview with Numfor Brigitte, 43 years, Farmer, Bujong, 13th January 2022.

²⁸¹ Interview with Ngum Helen, 43 years, Farmer, Manji, 16th January 2022.

²⁸² Idem.

at the end of the year, they shared amongst the members. Those who invested more capital received more yields.²⁸³

The *Akoni* group was particularly concerned with the production of soya beans, which helped to subsidize the protein in-take in the families. They saw this as the way to maintain a regular supply because sometimes supply ran short and supply became irregular. The *Akoni* group felt that rather than always depending on supply from anywhere else, it was necessary for them to learn to produce it themselves. They knew that if the harvest were good, excesses could be sold even to schools which demanded the product in large quantities.²⁸⁴

They also experimented with the production of new species of plantains, which grew faster. This species of small size plantains was planted during the dry season because its roots could hold firm into the soil before the rains came. It matured faster than the ordinary plantains and could be harvested more frequently. It brought more income to those who produced it for sale. Apart from plantain and soya beans, the group also grew vegetables which were sold. It also produced cocoyams, yams and cassava.²⁸⁵

c) The *Nkah Nka'a* Female Group

The *Nkah Nka'a* was another group concerned strictly with producing vegetables, because foodstuff like maize, beans and yams took a lot of time to yield. They knew that vegetables like waterleaf, sweet bitter leaf, *anche*y and *okonggowbong* were short-term products, which were always in demand. These vegetables matured within a period of between three weeks and two months. The group also invested in animal husbandry, rearing animals like pigs, goats, chicken, ducks and rabbits.

The animals the *Nkah Nka'a* female group reared provided manure for the vegetable crops.²⁸⁶ These animals were also sold in the local markets. Proceeds from both animals and vegetables were loaned out as interest to business men and other groups. They used the interest from the loans to buy materials for marking and embroidering traditional dresses. The

²⁸³ Interview with Ngum Helen, 43 years, Farmer, Manji, 16th January 2016.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Mary Lum, 58 years, Wife of quarter head Mambu, Mambu, 4th June 2016.

²⁸⁵ Idem.

²⁸⁶ Idem.

group even enrolled in NOWECA, the North West Craft Group, in order to learn embroidery skills and techniques.²⁸⁷

These groups had the *Mamfor* as their matron. She was always invited to their meetings, to advice and furnish them with new ideas. The *Mamfor* always invited health experts who gave talks on HIV and methods of protection and prevention. She encouraged women who were most vulnerable to this disease to do the tests and to bring their daughters for counseling. They also provided free health amenities such as vaccination against diseases like meningitis, hepatitis B, cholera, tetanus and tuberculosis.²⁸⁸

Today, we find many women and girls involved in education, commerce, associations and cooperatives. These activities helped in the growth of the Bafut fondom. The work performed by the *Mamfor* in the groups discussed has been very fundamental to the growth, empowerment and emancipation of the women.

C2) Mamfor and Women in Mutual Aid Groups

The *Mamfor* formed *njangi* societies as they were commonly called, and encouraged women to take part in it. These *njangis* provided funds to carry out different activities. The *njangis* were mostly comprised of two funds: the fund for solidarity purposes and that for economic purposes. The solidarity fund was to help members in times of difficulties like the death of a family member, disaster or destruction.²⁸⁹ The fund for economic purposes was used by members for their diversified economic needs and for development. This shows how important *njangi* societies were to Bafut women. Examples of women's groups in which the *Mamfor* was directly involved were: the Nka'a Mamfor, the Akoni, the Nka'a Nka'a, the Vertures Womem, Unity is Strength women.

During the 1980s, women improved on the organization of their *njangi* groups. The activities of such groups were influenced following the recognition of village structures such as traditional councils and developmental unions by the state. Law NO67/2F/19 of June 1967, which authorized the existence of developmental unions, enforced this recognition. It was due to this law that joint stock groups became registered with the administration as development unions so that their activities could be recognized and their members' interest protected and

²⁸⁷ Interview with Mary Lum, 58 years, Wife of quarter head Mambu, Mambu, 4th June 2016.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Veronica Mankaa, 67 years, wife of quarter head Mbebili, Mbebili, 4th July 2016.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Phoebe Nchang, 57 years, Farmer, Bujong, 12th January 2022.

secured. These groups developed into thrift and loan groups. Female mutual associations were now aimed at promoting trade and commerce of local women.

Members were trustworthy women who were able and committed to pay their fixed levies regularly. Each time they met, the member who had to receive the mutual aid parcel, which was usually a large sum of money made up of a fixed contribution of each member, was required to entertain the rest of the members with food and drinks. This was also the case with other mutual assistance in other Cameroonian traditional societies. The receiver was expected to begin or develop a business, buy a piece of land or assist their husbands to construct houses or sponsor children's trips abroad.²⁹⁰

In these *njangi* societies, all members were supposed to host the meeting and the members usually assembled in one of the member's house to pay in their contributions and the sum was immediately handed to one of its members. The turn of each of each beneficiary of the contributions was fixed according to the internal regulations established by the elected members of the association and taken into consideration the desire of different members.

In some *njangis* societies, they donot have specific amount of contribution. A member contributed what she had.²⁹¹The advantage of this contribution was that the money was contributed in parts and received in lump-sum. This permitted the beneficiary to carry out a serious project with the amount received. Some of this money was used to invest in businesses and to trade in large scale.

With some *njangi* societies, at the beginning of each academic year that starts in September, members were bound to start saving their money in preparation for the next academic year.²⁹² At the beginning of the next academic year, a woman was entitled to saving in addition to the interest which depends on her savings. This money collected enabled the women to prepare their children for school by paying the fees, buying their books and other school necessities.

In other *njangies*, money saved by members was used to buy farm needs like fertilizers, hoes and cutlasses, pesticides and insecticides. In this case, members started contributing at the beginning of each planting season in March and at the beginning of next

²⁹⁰ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, Trader, Bujong, 12th January 2022.

²⁹¹ Interview with Siri Winifred, 42years, Teacher, Mambu, 12th January 2022.

²⁹² Interview with Ndeh Micah, 43years, Farmer, Bawum, 28th January 2022.

planting season, members collected their savings which enabled them purchase their farm inputs.

Loans were given out to women to solve their problems. Consequently, income was generated from the loans as it was refunded to the njangi group with some interest.²⁹³The interest made in the njangi society resulted from loans given to members within the year. These amount of money given to women as loans were never greater than their total savings with relatively little interest rate of about two to three percent. Through this activity, women were encouraged to continue saving money as they generated additional money on what they contributed. Thus contributing to a positive growth in the economy of Bafut.²⁹⁴

A *njangi* group was one of the important means by which women could loan and save money. The activity carried out by the njangi societies, played an important role in the education of youths, which proves the efficiency of women's production. These njangi societies made it possible for women to have resources for their businesses or needs. Through njangi societies, women became educated, and learned how to behave in public, manage their homes and how to manage their income. This has actually enhanced unity which enabled women to pull their resources together for the growth of their economy.²⁹⁵

These *njangi* societies had an impact on the economic growth of Bafut as women played a great role in it. Men were specifically concerned with activities like building of houses and the cultivation of cash crops such as coffee and cocoa while women were involved in the cultivation of food crops such as beans, maize and potatoes.²⁹⁶With the fall in the prices in the world market, there was also a fall in the prices of cash crops in Bafut. As a result, men who were mainly involved in the production of cash crops now had little or no income.

The education of the youths depended almost entirely on women. What the women did was that they sold part of their produce and saved the money in njangi societies because they had confidence in them. The women saved their money based on the kind of project they want to take within the year.²⁹⁷The living standards of these women in particular and the

²⁹³ Interview with Nchang Lovelyne, 51years, Farmer, Manji,4th February 2022.

²⁹⁴ Idem.

²⁹⁵ Idem.

²⁹⁶ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, Trader, Bujong,12th January 2022.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Mankaa Jullien ,40years , Teacher, Njinteh, 2 February 2022.

Bafut population in general was improved upon a result of their income generating activities. The profit got from these trading activities was too minimal.

Money was saved for a year. Consequently, the women got involved in *njangis* so as to be able to save money in order to do something substantial. This permitted the women to plan for its future use. When some of them took their savings, they paid children's fees, carried out projects which required some money. Some reinvested this money in their businesses thereby expanding them. As these businesses expanded, they subsequently grew to stores, and then to shops and that was how the Bafut economy developed due to the contributions made by women in the Bafut community.²⁹⁸

Women were encouraged to belong to one or more *njangi* societies where they saved their money. Due to lack of banks in the rural areas and because of the confidence they have in these *njangi* groups, they decided to save in them.²⁹⁹ Some of these small saving groups' *njangis* were sometimes referred to as "country meetings" where some amount of money was saved on a weekly basis. These *njangi* groups distributed the members' contribution or savings at the end of the year. This has been one of the traditional sources of income and financial support for women.

These groups usually constitute women from all walks of life who exchanged ideas on issues like how to start small businesses (*buyam sellam*) and other income generating activities. This was made easier because, they could use funds from the *njangi* and improve on their financial and social activities. This important economic activity thus made them very popular, especially the ones who were willing to finance small businesses.

The women preferred to be indebted to local women where debts and savings were paid in installments and in fixed amounts than to wealthier neighbours who preferred their money to be paid in bulk.³⁰⁰ Members who became indebted to the group paid the money when it was their turn to receive the *njangi* packages and they usually paid this money with very little interest. With such funds, these women became liable to start and sustain small businesses, and undertake other financial responsibilities

²⁹⁸ Idem.

²⁹⁹ Idem.

³⁰⁰ Interview with Ngum Helen, 43 years, Farmer, Manji, 16th January 2022.

Bafut women involvement in income generating activities like trade, retailing of palm wine, and being members of *njangi* groups was done with the aim of earning some money. Despite price fluctuation and lack of capital to carry out large trade in large scale, the women of Bafut still earned some income from their trading activities and this promoted the economy of Bafut. This money was to purchase their needs and to meet their daily demands. As this money was generated and used in Bafut, it promoted the growth of the economy of Bafut in which women played a great role.³⁰¹

C3) Economic Impacts

The Bafut women have been actively involved in the economic development of their fondom due to their access to money and their control over means of production. Most of the small businesses, buildings found in the fondom were owned by women who were members of women's groups.

The impact of economic activities on the women can be seen in the fact that most of the girls in the Bafut fondom were in school or apprentices in particular trades. Meanwhile, most of the women were involved in one thing or the other. They were either doing small trading, running a restaurant, selling second hand clothes or farming.³⁰² Many women especially with their farm sales were autonomous and were able to pay fees for their children from nursery school to the university without the help of their husbands.

Women became authoritative and participated in decision making. Women of Bafut could share responsibilities with their husbands. The man was no longer perceived as a sole income generator in the family. Bafut women could not only clear the bush, till the farm, plant the crops and harvest as it used to be.³⁰³ Women could now inherit and own property which was not the case in the past. Also, women of Bafut were able to own and manage large businesses at local and regional levels.

³⁰¹ Interview with Achirimbi Claude, 56 years, Prince and teacher, Fon's palace, 14th June 2016.

³⁰² Interview with Philomena Lum, 68 years, Princess of Bafut, Fon's palace, 17th June 2016.

³⁰³ Interview with Muchier Joseph, Age 64, Retired teacher, Mundum, 25th July 2016.

Women had developed industrious qualities that enabled them to manage their marital homes, communities and nation. They have become members of cooperative associations and big *njangi* groups. Hence, they were gradually recognized as important class of the nation.³⁰⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has been consecrated to the functions of *Mamfor* and women of Bafut fondom. It has critically examined the political activities of the *Mamfor* which included: the adviser to the fon, the representative of the fon, *Mamfor* as a judge. She took part in peace keeping and made sure fines levied on defaulters in the palace were paid as required. Socially, the *Mamfor* organized weddings of members of the royal house, she also organized inter-fondom royal marriages, she coordinates settlement of princes, *Mamfor* was the palace midwife to queens during childbirth. Economically the *Mamfor* encouraged women to participate in cash crop farming and to participate in local craft industry and her emancipation to empower women. As such, the administration cannot at any given point in time, run smoothly without involving her in their activities. Her activities in all these domains are well suited and can be effectively performed only through the *Mamfor*. She is greatly respected and admired as queen mother. The next chapter will examine the challenges of Mamforship and propose solutions to these challenges.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Marius Che, Age 65, Retired teacher, Mbebili, 19th July 2016.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES OF MAMFORSHIP AND, POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the difficulties or challenges faced by the *Mamfor* in the Fondom. Here, the challenges are explained in governance or political, economic and social domains, that is administration, financial, agricultural, land, commercial, religious, educational, health and cultural difficulties. A way forward to ensure better functioning of the *Mamfor* would be provided.

A) Challenges Faced by the *Mamfor* and Women of Bafut in Governance

The political activities of the *Mamfor* were carried out amidst problems. As concerns chieftaincy, the loss of institutional and titular rights posed a problem to the *Mamfor*. The fact that the leadership of Bafut was in the hands of the fon, greatly reduced the status of the *Mamfor*. As a Women, she remain administratively inferior to men and had little say in the government of Bafut. Hence, most of the *Mamfor's* proposals especially on the needs of women were hardly understood and/or implemented by men at village level.

The absence of women in the disciplinary session of each village during the pre-colonial period generally posed problems for the *Mamfor*. Their absence in the session showed that the problems of women could not be effectively understood and solved by these sessions. The presence of the *Mamfor* at that session to put forward women's problem was not enough to expose most if not all the problems of women all over Bafut.³⁰⁵

Another problem faced by the *Mamfor* resulted from the introduction of new systems of administration and justice during the colonial period. The judicial activities of the *Mamfor* were greatly reduced. With the introduction of the new judicial system, *Mamfor* who took part in the preservation of law and order was pushed to the background.³⁰⁶ The *Mamfor* was prevented from judging criminals in the society.

³⁰⁵ Interview With Constance Mankaa, 43 years, Teacher of G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016

³⁰⁶ Interview with Martin Ngalah, 46 years, Prince and teacher, Bujong, 19th June 2016

Following the introduction of Christianity during the colonial period the *Mamfor* was no longer able to judge female converts who violated Bafut traditional norms. This was because after such acts, the criminals ran to missionaries who protected them. Hence the authority of colonialists prevented the punishment of such criminals either by the fon or the *Mamfor*.³⁰⁷ This gradually reduced the judicial powers of the *Mamfor*.

Administratively still, the *Mamfor* had problems in controlling women especially during the colonial period. The *Mamfor* was bypassed when women were authorized by the British colonial masters to personally and individually report their grievances (especially concerning marriages) to British administrative officers. These colonialists who were against polygamous practices, authorized palace wives to divorce the fon of Bafut, who at the time had more than a hundred wives.³⁰⁸ These fon's wives who were usually controlled by the *Mamfor*, never sought her advice again and some of them divorced the fon. This brought a lot of destruction to the culture as the *Mamfor* and the Fon were no longer respected.

Moreover, during the colonial periods, female secret societies controlled by the *Mamfor* experienced a reduction in membership. As a result of the evolution in modern politics, many women regarded such societies as outdated gatherings. Those women who had become Christians regarded the society as pagan associations because of their mystical powers and their ritualistic attitude. This was common with the female *Takumbeng* or *Makumbeng*. Furthermore, the disrespect of the *Makumbeng* rules were common among its members and their effects were evident of the individuals and their families. Hence the female *Takumbeng* was regarded as a deathly society which scared away women from getting involved in its activities.³⁰⁹

B) Economic Challenges Faced by the Mamfor and Women of Bafut

The *Mamfor* was faced with the problem of inadequate finances which greatly hindered her economic activities. She lacked money to organize women conferences of empowerment and to carry out developmental projects in the Fondom. Also, due to poverty, the *Mamfor* could not buy enough agricultural inputs for women like good seeds, fertilizers,

³⁰⁷ Interview with James Akotoh, 72 years, Prince of Mambu, Mambu, 14th July 2016.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16th June 2016.

³⁰⁹ Idem.

insecticides and pesticides for insects and pest that attacked their crops and animals. All these reasons accounted for the poor yields obtained during the harvesting season.³¹⁰

Again, the *Mamfor* and the women lacked money to promptly transport their goods from farm to markets. After harvesting, farmers had to wait for sometime before transporting their farm products to markets in urban areas for sales at better prices. This time wasted in search of money led to decaying of crops before they could be sold. As a result of the poor state of goods by the time they reach the markets, these crops were dumped, that is, women were bound to sell them at very cheap prices with very little or no profit made.³¹¹ All these greatly affected women empowerment in Bafut which hindered the activities of *Mamfor*.

Another problem faced was that of the destruction of crops by animals like goats, pigs, fowls and cows. This led to continuous crises between cattle rearers and farmers especially those around the hills. Problems developed between these women and owners of goats and pig. This happened in situations where one had to pay for the destruction caused by his goat on a woman's farm. Most of the cases judged by the *Mamfor* were those between farmers and goat rearers.³¹²

The absence or poor state of farm to market roads in Bafut also posed a problem for the development of both agriculture and trade by the *Mamfor* and the women. Due to the poor state of roads that link farms to markets, women were forced to engage in small scale farming so they could be able to carry farm products on their backs in baskets for long distances. This slowed the transportation of goods to the market and this tedious task resulted in exhaustion, illness and consequently a shortened life span for women. Hence, the little money made from selling their crops was all spent on the treatment of their illnesses and thus retarded rapid development.

Also when vehicles were available, the roads were usually very muddy and slippery during the wet season.³¹³ In some very few cases, women had to pay group of individuals to transport their goods from the farm to the main road where they hired vehicles to carry the goods to either their houses or to the market. This difficulty discouraged many farmers who made little or no gain after so much efforts.

³¹⁰ Interview with Ngum Helen, 43years, Farmer, Manji, 13th January 2022.

³¹¹ Idem.

³¹² Interview With Constance Mankaa, 43 years, Teacher of G.S Njinteh, Njinteh, 18th June 2016.

³¹³ Idem.

The availability of land in Bafut increasingly became a problem to farmers as the population of Bafut rapidly increased over time. In Bafut, ownership of land was based mostly on traditional privileges which made people to be entitled to a particular area of land. As such, a relatively small number of people owned disproportionately large areas of fertile lands while other unfortunate ones owned little or nothing.

Also, land was mostly owned by old people who refused to give it out to others who could better use it.³¹⁴ These old people preferred to preserve these pieces of land for their future generation. Such behavior of land owners put the *Mamfor* and the women farmers in the continuous quest for land.

In addition, most land owners in Bafut refused to sell land to women because they believed that it was contrary to the accepted tradition norm which prevented Bafut women from owning land. Hence with many people demanding land due to the increase in population, women were not attended to by land owners. This prevented them from maximizing the utilization of land in such a way that valuable economic development of the society could be attained. The lack of land prevented women from effectively carrying out activities like animal husbandry and agriculture. In addition to the land scarcity, some women were also prevented by their husbands from rearing animals. All of this hindered economic development.³¹⁵

The *Mamfor* and her Common Initiative Groups in Bafut faced problems when it came to female membership. This stemmed from the fact that women did not have full economic independence from their husbands. Women were restricted by their husbands from joining economic groups.³¹⁶ This problem was faced mostly by women whose husbands were ignorant of the importance of common initiative groups. Such men saw such groups strictly as gossip gatherings. As a result, some women who could contribute much in the progress of common initiative groups were forced to stay always by their husbands.

The few women who were members of such groups, faced problems of inadequate material to facilitate their activities. They lacked enough assets like wheel-barrow which were used for feeding animals and carrying animal food. Women were obliged to rent such items from men and thus reduced their agricultural and economic profit as a whole. Also, the

³¹⁴ Interview with Wanki Mbachang, 56 years, Chief of Mambu, Mambu, 19th June 2016.

³¹⁵ Idem.

³¹⁶ Interview with Numfor Brigitte, 43 years, Farmer, Bujong, 13th January 2022.

lack of adequate modern tools like watering cans by groups that carried out market gardening reduced production. With the absence of such tools work was bound to be slow and difficult.³¹⁷

Commercially, local manufacturers and traders were discouraged by the behaviour of their customers. The general misconception of customers was that imported goods were superior in quality than locally produced goods. This made some local manufacturers unproductive and uncreative. Skilled workers like tailors complained of very low demand for their products because Bafut people preferred to buy second handed cloths imported abroad. The few people who demanded sown dresses did so at very cheap prices. This rendered the workers incapable of buying working materials.³¹⁸

Women who travelled to other provinces (regions) to supply or buy particular goods made very little gain. For example women who made long trips to the South West Region, Far North as well as Littoral regions for the buying of goods like dried fish, shoes, clothes and crayfish expecting to make huge gains discovered that the little profit they made could not enable them to transport themselves for the next trip³¹⁹This was because villagers could only buy these goods at low prices and at a very low pace too. This was also the case with women who sold foodstuffs harvested from their farms as they did so at low prices which discouraged them. For the prices at which their goods were sold were not considered enough even to compensate them for the energy expended during their cultivation³²⁰

C) Socio-Cultural Challenges Faced by the Mamfor and Women of Bafut.

Even though the Mumfor and her *Nkaa Mamfor* achieved a lot, they equally encountered several social problems. In the domain of religion, the coming of Christianity caused female converts to no longer show any respect and interest for the gods of the land. The practice of some important religious rituals were gradually disappearing from the fondom. At times, they were no longer practiced by the women. This affected the families in different ways.

³¹⁷ Idem.

³¹⁸ Interview with Salome Siri, 57 years, Trader, Bujong, 12th January 2022.

³¹⁹ Interview with Ndonwi Barnabas, 57 years, Trader, Mankwi, 7th August 2016.

³²⁰ Idem.

In situations where the family rituals were no longer performed because the family priest was a convert and thus termed these practices pagan, at times, an unqualified female in the family had to perform the rituals, and they produced unsatisfactory results. At times, especially in situation where the female convert refused to handover the items for rituals and/or no female was ready to assume the religious functions, such rituals died out and the subsequent misfortunes like illnesses and death embraced the family in question.³²¹

Also, with the advent of Christianity, women started leaving their polygamous homes because polygamy was seen as a pagan form of marriage. Such behaviour of women led to massive divorce in the society. Moral standard in Bafut deteriorated, unlike the situation before the advent of colonialism.³²² The desired intentions of women to uphold or project the respectable position of their husbands in the society prior to colonialism was destroyed by such anti-polygamy doctrines and their effects. This poor behaviour of women in Bafut greatly reduced the morals of the *Mamfor* as she was seen as not capable of performing her duties.

Another social aspect that disfavoured the developmental activities of the *Mamfor* in Bafut was the form of marriage in which women found themselves. Women in polygamous homes tried each to gain extra favours from their husbands against the others. This led to serious competition among the women. This competition led to squabbles and quarrels among themselves which led to hatred and even the killing of co-spouses or their children. Consequently, the unity that was expected and needed among these women to favour development was absent. As a result, time that could be used to peacefully carry out fruitful activities for the family and society was wasted in quarrelling and nursing of destructive ideas.³²³

Moreover, women in some situations were forced into marriages at very tender ages, better still when they were still minors. These women, in some instances were treated by their husbands more or less like children and not wives. The women looked upon their husbands as masters. This inferior status of women contributed in preventing them from initiating ideas

³²¹ Idem.

³²² Interview with Marius Che, 65 years, Retired teacher, Mbebili, 19th July 2016.

³²³ Idem.

and actions and/or advising their husbands in development—related issues that could have produced a greater positive impact on the evolution of the family and the society.³²⁴

Also the health situation of Bafut women, which could have been a vital tool for development was not the best. These women who were totally controlled by their husband had no say over health issues like birth control. Husbands decided on when to bear children and the number to be brought forth. At times, the men's decisions were contrary to medical advice, in situations where the woman's health was at stake. This prompted the woman to develop serious health problems more often especially in situations where she bore many children. Many women died during child delivery. In the case where the women survived despite the delivery of many children, her health remained at risk.³²⁵

Furthermore, the act of giving birth at short intervals did not give the women's body enough time to recover from one pregnancy to the next. Consequently, they were either always sick or very weak and vulnerable to illness. Such circumstances made women to lack enough time to engage in income generating activities which left the women and their families to be caught in a vicious circle of poverty. Moreover, Bafut women were generally very much exposed to sexually transmitted diseases and the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome [A.I.D.S.].³²⁶

Women who mostly found themselves in polygamous marriages easily got infected following the infection of one of their co-spouses or their husband. Many women who became victims of such diseases finally died since they were unable to either cure or control the diseases. Their sickness and death created a vacuum in the development of the Fomdom as the *Mamfor* found it difficult to find strong and sustainable women to work for development.³²⁷

Furthermore, the Mamfor and the women lacked access to information technology. This was one of the obstacles to women's development of skills and knowledge. Many of Bafut women who made up more than ninety-five percent of the population had never used a computer or internet. The women scarcely watch educative T.V. programmes or listen to the

³²⁴ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, Prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

³²⁵ Idem.

³²⁶ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, Prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

³²⁷ Idem.

radio, given that they were not available. This was coupled with tiredness since many were farmers. This has led to backwardness, ignorance and inferiority complex in women.

Educationally, most of the *Mamfors* and Bafut women lacked access to formal education, hence illiteracy remained a mammoth problem in Bafut. Bafut people believed that women were only fit for marriage and child bearing. However, with the passing of time, some parents became sensitized and sent some of their female children to school. Those who were opportunely to go to school, faced the problem of unwanted pregnancy and its related effects on the society, the most obvious being the small number of girls that attended and completed their primary education.

lack of education of many women greatly slowed down the rapid socio-cultural development of Bafut since women remained the largest population of the fondom. They did not just remain ignorant of their rights, but also of basic development skills which they needed to fully participate in the political, economic and socio-cultural development of any sound society.³²⁸

Also, some aspects of the Bafut custom were a great obstacle to the evolution of the *Mamfor* and women and their contribution in the development of the fondom. The Bafut custom ordained the woman with an inferior status as compared to the man who acted as the greatest source of subjugation of women by men. Since the pre-colonial period, women were deprived from eating particular food items like the gizzards of birds and particularly parts of animals like; the heart, the liver, lungs and boiled blood of goats. Any³²⁹ act of a woman contrary to this was termed a taboo and was believed to have negative effects on her childbearing organ (better still, will render her barren).

The inferior status of a woman further affected them during the colonial period. Most women were regarded as uncivilized. During this period, female children were discriminated against when compared to male children. Boys are offered formal education while girls were mostly directed towards marriage. As the result of their educational limitation, women were hindered from participating fully in the Bafut society.³³⁰

³²⁸ Interview with John Suh, 80 years, Prince of Mbebili, Mbebili, 16th July 2016.

³²⁹ Idem.

³³⁰ Interview with Ndi Barnabas, 53 years, Teacher, Ntarinkon, 28th July 2016.

However, generally speaking, since the pre-colonial period, women without authority (commoners) were perturbed from letting their voices to be heard in crucial matters when they were discussed by men. It was considered a sign of disrespect for the men if a woman behaves contrarily to their cultural expectation.³³¹ The *Mamfor* found it difficult to effectively gather women to discuss ideas as women were afraid to go contrary to the norms of their culture by disrespecting their husbands.

It was also noticed that the women lacked a collective decision-making arena. They were not united in the way they took decisions affecting the women folk. This explained why some women's groups came for adult literacy classes and empowerment during seminars while others did not. Hence this has been a major setback in development.³³² Also, women who were income earners created an inferiority complex in some men in the Bafut fondom given that their humility and respect towards men dropped.

The empowerment of women socially, economically and politically has made some women to be financially powerful. Hence the women turn to earn more than their husbands. This has led to complex in some men and even divorce.³³³ Therefore the empowerment of women socially, economically and politically and the civil societies organizations and their teachings on women emancipation has been a curse to some extent, given that most women who were financially independent tend to disregard their husband, and some cultural aspects. The *Mamfors* have had changes in their activities and life patterns over the years. During the colonial period, the *Mamfors* were never involved in politics.

Lately, the *Mamfors* actively participated in party politics. Recent *Mamfors* actually mobilized women, including queens and princesses, to participate in political activities. They lectured women about the importance of registration and voting at election. The *Mamfor* has been very active in partisan politics, advising about the importance of women voting in favor of the party the fon belonged to and how to go about it.

Formerly, partisan politics was no business of the *Mamfor*. Neither the fons or the *Mamfors* took part in partisan politics. As socio-cultural leaders they had the duty of standing above political parties because belonging to a party could affect the loyalty of his subjects

³³¹ Interview with Nchang Helen, 52 years, Teacher of G.S Mankaah, Mankaa, 3 February 2022.

³³² Interview with SaLome Siri, 57 years, Trader, Bujong, 12th January 2022.

³³³ Interview with Achirimbi John, 85 years, King maker, Njibujang, 19th June, 2016.

who were not of the same party. Thus they were not supposed to take side in any aspect of divisive politics but to rule justly and without bias.³³⁴

Modernity has destroyed many socio-cultural values in Bafut. *Mamfors* no longer stay in the palace as before. Out of the palace, they definitely did not keep direct regular contact with the villagers and thus affects the execution of her duties effectively. They were not always available when needed. What made it even worse was that while those who were privileged to had the modern cell phone call directly, the unprivileged had to wait until she is available or go in search of her where she lived. This situation was even difficult for the fon who needs her opinion before taking certain actions. Under these circumstances one wanders about her effectiveness as Mamfor.³³⁵

The advent of Christianity also led to the *Mamfors* ignoring their traditional role. *Mamfor* did not perform certain traditional rights because she was a Christian. As such, some traditional norms of the village set-up were lost. This is particular the case with the burial ceremony of the *Mamfor* where burial rites were strictly to Christians. Besides modernity has forced the *Mamfor* to always dress in an attire that suits her. She made her hair and even styled it.

There was really nothing that identified her as a *Mamfor* on ordinary occasions. It was common to bypass a *Mamfor* without knowing and respecting her for who she was. She dressed and moved around like any other woman. Formally, the *Mamfors* shaved their heads clean and dressed traditionally. They wore traditional bracelets and necklaces that identified them.³³⁶ In the past, every woman cooked food and brought to the *Mamfor*, who used it to entertain her visitors. Now, women barely manage their own homes due to financial difficulties.

The *Mamfor* from time immemorial has had limitations in her activities. As a woman working in a male dominated traditional set-up, she was restricted from participating in the activities of some secret societies. These included the male *Takumbeng* and *Kwifor*. These two associations were the ones which decided important matters in the fondom. Even the fon was answerable to them. Decisions taken by them whether good or bad, could not be reversed unilaterally by the fon or *Mamfor*. The *Mamfor* could participate in cases concerning treason,

³³⁴ Interview with Veronica Mankaa, 67 years, Wife of quarter head Mbebili, Mbebili, 4th July 2016.

³³⁵ Interview with Christopher Suh, 68 years, Head of kwifor, Mbebili, 16th June 2016.

³³⁶ Idem.

boundary disputes, land matters, abominations and traditional rituals. She could not intervene in purely men's affairs unless she was invited. She could not even eat the gizzard in the presence of men.³³⁷

D) Possible Solutions to Challenges Faced by Mamfor and Women of Bafut

The problem faced by the *Mamfor* during disciplinary session can be solved by selecting some women to go with the *Mamfor* during disciplinary sessions. This will make men to understand the weight of problems faced by women as they will support the *Mamfor* when she poses the problem and will come up with proposed solutions problems they are facing.

To solve problems posed by the new system of administration and justice, the fon of Bafut who is the custodian of customs and tradition should go back to the old system of administration and justice before the colonial period. This will enable the *Mamfor* to regain some of her powers in the fondom. Also the Fon should encourage freedom of worship in the fondom to avoid violating norms. Men and women should be free to choose either to belong to Christianity or tradition or to Christianity and tradition. This will help the *Mamfor* not to bother trying to punish defaulters of norms.

The problem of administration can be solved by constantly reminding women about village protocol, and the Fon should make it clear that any bypass of protocol is punishable. Heavy fines should be levied on those who bypass protocol in the fondom. This will make women to see the importance of the *Mamfor* as cases supposed to be treated by *Mamfor* will be brought to her. Also, palace women should learn to be role models in the fondom by respecting the *Mamfor* and this will encourage others to do same.

To solve this problems faced by female secret societies, women should be given freedom to choose to join the society and those involved should be constantly reminded of the rules of the association and the consequences that follows defaulters. Women should also be advised not to discourage choices made by others and the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to the association should be clearly stated.

³³⁷ Interview with James Akoto, 72 years, Prince of Bafut, Mambu, 14th July 2016.

The problem of lack of finances can be solved by asking for funds from other tribal women's groups out of the village for the purchase of agricultural inputs. Also, methods of food preservation should be thought to women to reduce the rate at which their yields gets damaged. Farmers should also seek help from the government for the construction of good farm to market roads to ease the transportation of produce to the markets to avoid damages.

Part of profit made from sales should be used to buy good seeds, pesticides and insecticides for insects and pest which attack crops and animals. Also, Profits should be used by women's groups to contribute to the realization of village development projects like the construction of roads. The *Mamfor* should also encourage women through women's groups to take part in community works when roads and bridges are constructed.

The problem of lack of farm to market roads can be solved by farmers seeking help from the government for the construction of good farm to market roads to ease the transportation of produce to the markets to avoid damages. Also, the *Mamfor* should encourage women's groups to use profits to purchase vehicles for quick transportation of produce to the market. The various women's groups should sensitize members on good health maintenance to keep the body healthy and fit for developmental projects.

To solve the problem of land, the fon should provide land for registered common initiative groups with good objectives. Women should also be given rights to buy and own land in the fondom. Women should not only try to purchase land around developed areas but they should move to area far from the inhabited part of the village. In addition, the method of acquiring land through applications can be used for large scale farming.

Also to solve the problem caused by stray animals, owners of these animals should not be allow them to move carelessly in the fondom. Fences should be made for pigs and goat owners should make sure their animals are tied to prevent crops of farmers from being destroyed by animals. Owners of these animals can equally apply for grazing land around Mfoya, Mfonta and Swie. This will also help to reduse problems between farmers and grazers in the fondom.

Problems caused by form of marriage can be solved by the *Mamfor* by advising women especially in polygamous homes to live in peace with each other, giving them the disadvantages of living a competitive life in the home and sanctioning members with bad

characters which could lead to war. Early marriage should also be discouraged and its disadvantages should be explained to parents. The *Mamfor* should encourage teaching of men on how to treat wives at home and out of home.

In order to solve problems caused by cultural norms, men should be encouraged during gatherings to permit their wives to attend educating meetings which would help in the development of the community and enable them to assist their husbands at home. The problem of education can be solved by choosing educated princesses as *Mamfor* and encouraging illiterate princesses who are chosen as *Mamfor* to possibly attend adult classes which will enable them to read and write hence carry out their functions and contribute in the development of the fendom. Women and young girls in the fendom should also be encouraged to attend school and complete their studies to improve on their standards and status in the society.

To solve the health problems, educational talks be given to men on the consequences of too many births at very short intervals. Women should be also sensitized on how to live amongst A.I.D.S patients and infected persons be advised on how to live among people and to always take their medication in order to save their lives.

Conclusion

In closing up this chapter, it must have been understood that the *Mamfor* did not carry out her functions without difficulties. However it should be observed that problems faced by the *Mamfor* were in the political, economic and social domains. Solutions to these problems which can help the *Mamfor* to better carry out her function have been proposed. Meanwhile we also observed in this chapter proposed solutions for problem to help the *Mamfor* better to better carry out her functions that is, selecting women to go with the *Mamfor* during discipline sessions, going back to the old system of administration and justice, punishing those who bypass village protocol, using profit made from sales, seeking loans, seeking help from the government to create farm to market roads, discouraging some village norm and giving educational talks to men.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter is a brief recapitulation of the whole work and thus highlights the main points that form the core of the study. This study, presented the Bafut Sub-Division geographically and gave the human back ground of the study. It was observed that the topographical features of the area especially its numerous plains, plateau and streams were forces that influenced the effective activities of *Mamfor*. Also the humid tropical climate, sudano-savanna type of vegetation and fertile soils were all contributing factors to the effective activities of *Mamfor*.

Besides, the study analyzed the succession issues and installation of the *Mamfor*. The study also investigates the burial rights of *Mamfor*. More so, the study explored the difficulties encountered by the *Mamfor* in playing her role in the Fondom, and a way forward to ensure better functioning of *Mamfor* in the fondom. The Queen Mother in Bafut, the *Mamfor* in her official duties, contributed much to the development of her society, particularly in helping the women. These activities were political, economic and cultural in nature.

Politically, the *Mamfor* was the personal adviser to the fon. This function was peculiar because she was the only person apart from the fon who was quite versed with the inner politics of the palace. Also, she acted as regent in the absence of the fon. During such times, the *Mamfor* became the major decision maker in the palace. She had the authority to settle disputes, which were within her competence, especially disputes among women, disputes in families and disputes among princes and princesses. In case of a very delicate matter, she listens keenly and tries to temporarily appease the parties concerned until the fon returned to make a final decision.

The *Mamfor* sometimes assisted female *Takumbeng*. She took part in judiciary cases. She carried out this judicial function by sitting in the palace court and listening to cases that came up. She usually adjudicated disputes between stray animal owners, and village women, concerning the destruction of farms or crops. Other cases included family and marital problems. The *Mamfor* also ensured that there was peace and stability among the queens, princes and princesses. It should be noted that women in developing Bafut, played little or no role in the political domain. The role of Bafut women in the development of Bafut was greatly revealed in the socio-economic domains.

Socially, the activities of women are felt areas of education, spirituality, health and sanitation. In education, more than half of the total population in every school in the Bafut Sub-Division is made up of girls. These girls and even women who because of their multi-functions could not attend normal day schools, went to evening schools while others attend adult classes organized by the C.W.F and Common Initiative Groups. This was the indication that the Bafut woman has realized the importance of education, to the life of everyone and especially the women. Educational institutions in the Bafut fongom are flooded with girls, some of these institutions are headed by women and this has been a booster to the women education.

In the health sector, the same situation is obtained as we had women who ensured the prevalence of good health through the use of herbs, and divination. These female traditional doctors treated physical and spiritual illnesses in the Bafut fongom which restored the health of the people for societal development. With conventional medications, women served as nurses and midwives. Most health training institutions, hospitals and clinics are flooded with women. Women sensitized the Bafut population on ills of diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, dysentery, HIV/AIDS.

Medical experts were at times invited to come and speak to the women. Since health is wealth, the Bafut women were very attracted to it especially as they were the custodians to family well being. Women in addition to the above mentioned duties were still responsible in taking care of their children, the sick, the elderly, orphans in the community through movement like the C.W.F. These women donated sums of money towards construction of roads making all the quarters accessible.

However, politico-culturally, the Bafut women were active in areas such as; marriage, birth and death customs, dances and they were involved in local administration and politics especially in the family, secret societies, local politics and the judiciary. As for dances, most traditional and Christian songs were performed by women for different purposes and different occasions. Bafut women became involved in both traditional and modern politics as they competed in parliamentary and municipal elections.

As an added impetus, the economic activities of the women have improved enormously following the influence of factors such as administrative changes, infrastructural development, the advent of Christianity in Bafut. The C.W.F, Common

Initiative Groups have highly impacted the lives of the Bafut inhabitants. These women have proven their worth socio-economically in areas of farming, animal husbandry, local industrial arts like; oil extraction, weaving local brewery, pottery, internal and external trade. Women preoccupied themselves mostly with agricultural activities which helped greatly to sustain the economy. Their agricultural products served as the basis for livelihood as they were used to feed the families, as items for trade and other social amenities.

The cultivation of crops of different species improved the diet of the Bafut people which positively affected their health situation. This contributed highly to the development of the Bafut fendom since good health was very vital for the mental and physical development of any society. New farming methods which were introduced by missionaries, colonialists and other agricultural experts were also practiced by the women. The act of animal husbandry which was also carried by women contributed to the material and financial development of the society as a whole since meat was used as a food item, a trading item and as a ritualistic item.

Nevertheless, women faced some problems in carrying out their socio-economic, cultural and political development which affected the speed of development. Politically, there was a reduction in the powers of the female secret societies. And there was political ignorance, economically, these women lacked money to pay for improved labour, destruction of their crops, by stay animals, poor states of farm to market roads, and no access to land title.

Socially, health, maltreatment, low social status as compared to men, domestic violence were some obstacles faced by women. Notwithstanding, women in the Bafut fendom remained a great force in the development of the fendom. Their role could be seen in the political, economic and socio-cultural development of the Bafut fendom as a whole. These problems were not without possible solutions amongst which were; encouragement freedom of worship, freedom to choose to join the society, selection of women who should always go with the *Mamfor* during disciplinary sessions.

The Bafut women from 1900 to 2007 have enormously contributed to the socio-economic, cultural and political domains. So many factors greatly assisted women as they went to school and even became good orators eventhough some were still housewives which is still very important. At lease from school, they learned other ways of living, which was not common before. They knew they were part of the home because in the pass, they were always

relegated to the back and most and most at times, they felt as inferior strangers. They were considered as child production machines, cooks and farmers. With the advent of education, they could discuss ideas in their homes.

It should be noted that the Mamfor through the assistance of Common Initiative Groups, C.W.F, Women Empowerment Centers and the Beijing conference has greatly assisted in the transformation of women's status. Nevertheless, women nowadays are misinterpreting the goals of the conference and that of the international day of the woman. Given that it has brought a lot of marital and domestic problems in the family. Most women misinterpreted the day's meaning and instead resort to wayward and immoral activities.

Also, career women who out to be role model because of their level of education, turned to look down on their husbands causing them to be inferior and feel insecure. Their level of emancipation has distorted certain aspects of the cultural heritage of the Bafut people. Cultural practices like polygamy are reduced in the fondom, humility and respect from women to men has dropped. Worst of it all is that women turned to contest the authority of their husbands as they clamour for gender equality.

By and large, this research will go to supplement the existing knowledge on the activities of *Mamfor* and women of Bafut in developing the Fondom and probably spur further research on the history of *Mamfor* in the Fondom. The study, through its identifications of problems faced by *Mamfor* and the proposals for the way forward, could help the fon chart a way forward to ensure better functioning of *Mamfor* of the Bafut community and elsewhere where the institution of the *Mamfor* is rife which will be synonymous to economic growth and development.

APPENDICES

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN

PAIX-TRAVAIL-PATRIE

UNIVERSITÉ DE YAOUNDÉ I

FACULTE DES ARTS, LETTRES ET
SCIENCES HUMAINES

DEPARTEMENT D'HISTOIRE



REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

PEACE-WORK-FATHERLAND

THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I

FACULTY OF ARTS, LETTERS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Site: Annex Building FALSH-UYI, Beside AUF

RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

I the undersigned, **Pr. BOKAGNE BETOBO Edouard**, Head of the History Department of the University of Yaoundé I (FALSH), attests that, **SHU Glory BINFOR**, is a registered Master II student of the 2014/2015 academic year and currently carrying out research on the proposed topic: *“The “Mafor” in the Bafut Governance”*, under the supervision of **Pr. MFOMIN (Professor)**.

We authorized her to the authorities and those in charge of documentation centers, archives, and all national and international research institutions in order to facilitate her research. We will be grateful if you could accord the concerned the necessary assistance to carry out the task.

In witness whereof, this present attestation is issued to her to serve whenever and wherever need be.

09 DEC 2021

Done in Yaoundé, on

The Head of Department



Bokagne

Bokagne Betobo Edouard
Maitre de Conférences

MALLAN ISA PANTI
 R.T.C. NFONTAH
 BAFUT FONDON,
 BAFUT SUB-DIVISION,
 14TH MARCH, 2001.

HIS ROYAL MAJESTY,
 ABUMBI II
 FON OF BAFUT.

AN APPLICATION FOR A GRAZING LAND.

I HAVE THE HONOUR MOST RESPECTFULLY TO APPLY FOR THE ABOVE CAPTIONED.

I AM A GRAZIER IN NFONTAH R.T.C. CATTLE RANGE FOR MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS BUT THE NFONTAH R.T.C. AUTHORITY HAVE ASKED ME TO TAKE MY COWS OUT OF THEIR RANGE LATEST 31ST OF MARCH 2001. I WILL BE VERY HAPPY YOU GIVE ME YOUR FAVOUR SO THAT I CAN TAKE MY COWS OUT OF THE RANGE.

I HAVE ALSO ACCEPTED TO FOLLOW THE TRADITION OF THE BAFUT PEOPLE CONCERNING GRAZIERS IN THE FONDON.

MY REPLY CAN COME THROUGH YOUR SECRETARY GENERAL IN YOUR OFFICE AND THE SENIOR QUARTERHEAD OF NFONTAH.

I AM A HOLDER OF THE CAMEROON NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD NO. NW2/1145/91 OF 20 - 8 - 91 AT TUBAH.

THANKS FOR KINDNESS

ISA.

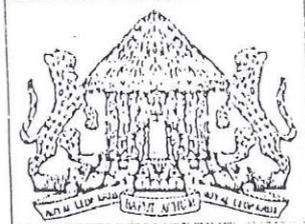
SIGN: _____

MALLAN ISA PANTI.

CC.

- PRINCIPAL R.T.C.NFONTAH
 - SENIOR QUARTERHEAD OF NFONTAH
- FOR INFORMATION.

LEPHONE:
LACE: 36.38.15
TECC: 36.38.65
X:



FON'S PALACE
P. O. BOX 2051 BAFUT
VIA BAMBENDA CAMEROON
WEST AFRICA

REF:

DATE 20 JULY 2012

LAND ALLOCATION

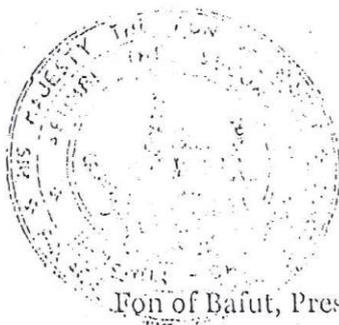
This is to certify that the Bafut Traditional Council has allocated a piece of land to SHU ELVIS NEBA holder of National Identity Card No. 102845122 issued on the 2nd day of July 2003 at NW07<2.

This piece of land is situated at Nibe, Bafut bounded to the North by the Bafut Traditional Council measuring 106m, bounded to the South by Fuhsoh Gabriel measuring 42m, bounded to the East by the Bafut Traditional Council measuring 155m and bounded to the West by Prince Achirimbi Johnson and measuring 140m.

SHU ELVIS NEBA shall own develop the land in any way he wants.

Attached is a site map of the land.

This attestation is issued to serve where need be.



Abumbi II

Fon of Bafut, President Bafut Traditional Council

Appendix III

Ngwa Florence Akwen
 Ndamukong Street
 Banawa Central Sub-division
 Zohu March Road,

Chairman
 of Traditional Council

An Application for a piece
 of farming land at Afontah.

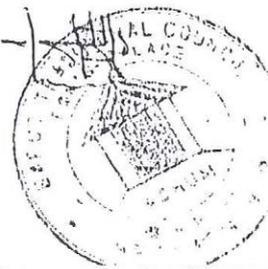
I have the honour most
 respectfully to apply for a piece
 of farming land at Feker Afontah
 Bafut.

I will do all what tradition
 will require and I will be very
 happy if this my Application
 is granted.

Sgn NGWA FLORENCE AKWEN

Recommended for Council approval,

Source : Bafut palace Library



AMBE PETER SAAMON

NTABUWE-BAFUT

24TH JAN 2010.

PRESIDENT

BAFUT TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

HIS MAJESTY

ABUMBI II

Application for a portion of land at Swie special land

I have the honour most respectfully to apply for farming land at Swie Bafut.

I am the successor of Prince Saamon and I am the Chairman of Ntabuwe Traditional Council.

I respect Bafut Tradition and am a man of good conduct as regard to this allocation

Thanks for accepting

Sign

Ambe Peter Saamon

Approved

Full



SOURCES CONSULTED

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A) Archival Sources

i. National Archives Buea (N.A.B)

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File NoA62, Hawkesworth, E.G; Assessment Report on the Bafut area, Bamenda Division, Cameroon Province, 1926, N.A.B. Buea.

File No 1303, Intelligence Report on the Associated Village Groups Occupying the Bafut Native Authority Area, 1935-1934, Ab/c (3059)3,(N.A.B)

File No cb1924/3, Annual Report from D.O to Resident 1927

File No cb1932/2, Annual Reports 1932-1933, Bamenda Division, L.L. Cattle; D.O and R.J Hook, D.O NAB

File No 5351 “Disputes between Bafut Chief and his Subjects” (1954/5359/1b), N.A.B

ii. Regional Archives Bamenda (R.A.B)

File NW/sold/1978/3/BK, Achirimbi II Fon of Bafut, Dr. Aletum Tabuwe,1978

B) List of Informants

N°	Informant	Age/ Years	Social status	Place	Date
1	Abumbi II	66	Fon of Bafut	Fons palace Bujong	17 June 2016
2	Barnabas Ndi	53	Teacher	Ntarikon Bamenda	28 July 2016
3	Bili Neba	48	Farmer	Agyati	6 Feb. 2022
4	Brigitte Numbor	43	Member of Nkaa mamfor female group farmer	Bujong	13 Jan. 2022
5	Bukum Ngwa	64	Member of Takumbeng	Fons palace	17 June 2016
6	Change Helen	52	Teacher G.S Mankaah	Mankaah	3 Feb. 2022
7	Christopher Suh	68	Head of Kwifor	Mbebili	16 july 2016
8	Claude Achirimbi	56	Prince and teacher of GHS Bafut	Fons palace	14 june 2016
9	Coco Neba	58	Farmer	Musah	17 th Jan. 2022
10	Emmanuel Ndonwi	57	Trader	Mankwi	7 August 2016
11	Felix Suh	34	Chief of Bukari, painter	Bukari	28 June 2016

12	Helen Ngum	43	Secretary of Akoni womens group farmer	Manji	16 Jan. 2022
13	Isaiah Che	56	Nurse	Nso-Bafut	16 January 2022
14	James Akotoh	72	Prince of Mambu, Bafut	Mambu	14 July 2016
15	James Nsalah	49	Farmer	Asong	19 July 2016
16	John Achirimbi	85	King maker	Njibujang	19 June 2016
17	John Suh	80	Prince of Mbebili, retired pastor	Mbebili	16 July 2016
18	Joseph Muchier	64	Retired Teacher	Mberewi (Mundum II)	25 July 2016
19	Joseph Shusi	65	Member of Kwifor	Asong	18 july 2016
20	Joseph Suh	43	Farmer	Mbebali	11 June 2016
21	Julien Manka'a	40	Teacher of G.S NJINTEH	Njinteh	2 nd Feb. 2022
22	Julius Ndemfor	67	Taper	Asong	5 Feb. 2022
23	Kare Nfor	57	Member of Takumbeng	Fons Palace	17 june 2016
24	Labeh Neh	79	Member of Makumseng	Bujong	17 Jan. 2022
25	Loveline Nchang	51	Farmer	Manji	4 th Feb 2022
26	Marius Che	65	Retired teacher	Mbebili	19 July 2016
27	Martin Fuh	53	Prince builder	Mankanikong	23 July 2016
28	Mary Lum	58	Wife of quarter head Musah Mambu Bafut	Mambu Bafut	4 th June 2016
29	Mbojem Neba	43	Taxi driver	Mankanikong	23 July 2016
30	Micah Nde	43	Farmer	Bawum	28 Jan. 2022
31	Micheal Che	63	Member of Takumbeng	Bujong	17 June 2016
32	Nebachi	54	Fon of Mbelli	Fons palace Bujong	17 June 2016
33	Philomina Lum	68	Princess of Bafut	Fons palace	17 June 2016
34	Phoebe Nchang	57	President of virtues women	Bujong Bafut	12 Jan. 2022
35	Salome Siri	57	Trader member of virtues women	Bujong Bafut	12 Jan. 2022
36	Silocica Ngum	46	Trader	Mankaah	18 Jan. 2022
37	Simon Akah	88	Farmer	Mbebili Bafut	11 June 2016
38	Siri Mumah	80	Member of Makumbeng	Bujong	17 June 2016
39	Tah Ojuku	79	Member of Kwifor	Fons palace	17 June 2016
40	Veronica Mankaa	67	Wife of quarter head Mbebili	Mbebili	4 July 2016
41	Veronica Nforsi	58	Teacher G.B.H.S Yaounde	Damas Yaounde	7 Dec. 2016
42	Viviah Lum	56	Secretary of Nkaa mamfor female group farmer	Bujong	15 Jan. 2022
43	Wanki Mbachang II	64	Chief of Mambu nurse	Mambu	19 June 2016
44	Winifred Siri	42	Teacher, member of unity is strength	Mambu	12 Jan. 2022

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