

Defence and Security Exigencies amidst Conflict in Bafut North West Cameroon, 1888-2023

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Abstract

Bafut is a heterogeneous polity and an incorporative kingdom. Its characteristic is that it was enlarged or expanded by conquest. The warriors in charge of the expansion and defence of the land constituted a group called *manjong*. For internal security, *kwifor* acted as the police force. Its vigilance and maintenance of law and order conditioned the people to be part of the machinery of internal security. Militia units like the *ngwarenwi* provided the Fon's security. These structures ensured that Bafut people, property and territory were protected from aggressive neighbours. Today, the *manjong* has been transformed into a cultural and development association to "fight wars of peace and development" of the Bafut people, thus giving a shifting paradigm to the definition of war. With the rebirth of the *Amba* revolution in the English-speaking parts of Cameroon in 2016, Bafut youths joined the fight and constituted militia groups such as "Bafut Seven Kata" under the guise of liberation forces. They claimed to defend the land and protect people and their property from invading predators. The insecurity, violence, bloodshed and reign of terror inflicted on the Bafut community by these militias caused us in this paper to re-examine the concept of defence and security of local communities in the face of conflict and to analyse the role and impact of the *manjong* warriors vis-à-vis the Bafut Seven Kata militia in Bafut history. We exploited both primary and secondary sources and adopted a chronological approach to the historical discussion here. Working within the frame of conflict and peace development in local communities, we concluded that war and security are concepts directly linked to human existence. Issues emanating from them sustain conflict with immense impact on the lives of people. The situation in Bafut today is precarious and needs to be addressed squarely for peace and security to return to the community.

Keywords

Defence, Security, Conflict Bafut, Northwest, Cameroon

1. Conceptual Frame

Defence, in our context, is the act of protecting someone or something against danger, attack, or harm. It requires a person or thing to provide such protection. The Bafut people from origin needed protection against their aggressive neighbours, such as the Bali Chambers and the Mankon people. Hence they needed an internal structure that was to protect them from danger, attack or harm. The arm of the Bafut political system called warriors was then constituted. A warrior is a soldier or one who has both experience and skill in fighting.

The Bafut warriors were constituted in groups to accomplish specific or assigned task for the community. The main group that existed was the *manjong*. This group had the mission to defend Bafut people and their property from enemy invaders and predators and also to defend the boundaries of Bafut land. In this way insecurity was dislodged, social peace, cohesion and economic development occurred in Bafut.

2. Background

The Bafut *fondom* is a heterogeneous polity and according to Fortes' and Evans-Pritchard it is, a centralised system with a centralised administrative machinery and judicial system (Fortes & Evans-Pritchards, 1940). In the view of Vansina, Bafut is an incorporative kingdom. The characteristics of such a kingdom, according to him, were: firstly that it had been enlarged by conquest; secondly, that the conquest started from a nucleus; and thirdly that the impetus to the conquest was given by an immigrant group (Vansina, 1962). The conquest and consolidation of the kingdom was facilitated by the Bafut warriors.

According to oral evidence, that is, dynastic traditions, collected by Niba in 1980 from a group of *kwifor* elders in the Bafut Palace, the Bafut group came to Ndop after leaving Tikari. Following the death of their leader, a succession dispute, arose between two sons, Nkenjoh and Aghanjoh. Aghanjoh left with his group of supporters towards what is today Bafut, while Nkenjoh founded the neighbouring chiefdom of Babanki (Niba, 1981; Hawkesworth, 1926). On arrival, Aghanjoh was received in the village of Mbebeli by Nibachi, the Chief. After staying with him as a guest for some time, Aghanjoh won over Nibachi's subjects by his lavish generosity, because Nibachi was a "selfish and crafty ruler."

So when the council of elders grew tired of Nibachi's parsimony, they conspired with Aghanjoh and urged him to depose their chief and seize the throne. Later on, one of Aghanjoh's successors moved the palace from Mbebeli to its present site at Bujong in Mumalaa. Then the immigrants used their warriors to subdue the Bukari and Buwe people, who, apparently along with the Mbebeli people were the

autochthonous inhabitants of Bafut.

Next was the chiefdom of Bawum. According to the traditions of the Bawum people, their chief, Ntoh, and his people were living with Nibachi as his guests when Aghanjoh arrived (Mfonbekoh, 1969). When Nibachi was deposed, Ntoh and his people moved to the present site, Awum where they apparently remained an independent chiefdom until the Bafut (warriors) subdued it and made it a tributary state. However, details of how this was done are lacking.

The expansion of the Bafut *fondom* from its original nucleus to its present size was aided by its warriors. One important external factor that threatened the security of Bafut was the incursion of the Bali Chamba into the Bamenda area at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This incursion affected the balance of power in the area. It brought them into conflict with the bigger chiefdoms and drove the smaller ones to seek refuge under the bigger chiefdoms. After initial clash with the Chamba, the Bafut warriors succeeded in wadding off the danger and Bafut became a rallying point for refugees from the south and southwest of the Ngemba area (Tweed, 1926). Some of them eventually returned to their areas after the danger was over but others who stayed were the Mambu and Mankanikong who claimed the same area of origin, namely Mberewi (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967a). These chiefdoms became tributaries of Bafut through voluntary submission.

The expansion of the Bafut *fondom* northwards into the Mentchum valley after the Chamba incursion, sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century was dictated by land hunger as well as by a desire for tribute. In a series of raids, the Bafut warriors subdued some of the peoples of the area, such as the Otang, Buwi, Bugri and the rest of them (Mbekong, Manta and Butang) had to voluntarily submit. Another area which Bafut brought under its control was Banji (Njimuya - across the Mezam River) with its rich savannah farming and hunting grounds. The Bafut warriors subdued the inhabitants and forced them to pay tribute. The Bafut people also began to settle there (File NW/QF/1933/1, 1933). Thus, on the eve of the German annexation of Cameroon in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Bafut warriors (see **Figure 1**) had done a lot to expand the *fondom* to its present size, and equally assumed her present composition. It was a heterogeneous *fondom*, ruled by an immigrant dynasty, prepared to defend her territory and sovereignty as a conquest state.



Source: The Customs and Traditions of Bafut, p. 39.

Figure 1. Bafut Manjong Warriors.

3. Social and Political Organisation

As in the neighbouring *fondom* of Kom studied by Chilver and Kaberry, there were two main social classes in Bafut, namely, royals and commoners (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967b). Among the royals were the Fon, his royal adjutants (Ndimfor and Muma) and the chiefs (*batangchuo*) of the component villages. Some of the villages were semi-autonomous villages each with its own chief (*atangchuo* - war planner). The villages were linked to the centre under various conditions as mentioned earlier. According to Hook's list, seventeen villages fell in this category. They were Bawum, Mambu, Mankaa, Mankwi, Banji, Akofunguba (south in the *ntare* area); Beno, Buwi, Manta, Tingo, Mbekong, Butang, Bugiri, Aba, and Bukabunano (Obang). Most of them were located north in the upper Mentchum valley. Bukari and Buwe were among the oldest villages in Bafut, which was located to the northeast of the capital. These villages constituted their groups of warriors and in the case of a siege or danger they came together under the command of the head group at the central palace to repel the danger (see Figure 2). This happened in the combined Bali-German expedition against Bafut from 1901 to 1906. Before this, Abumbi I mobilised Bafut warriors to repel the Mankon people from Bafut land at Nsoh and take them to their present site. It was the same with the Nkwen people at Mubang; the Bambui and Babanki people at Nforntah and Keschu. Although Bafut was finally defeated in the Bafut-German wars, their territory was not subjugated under the Bali invaders. However, every success at war depends on the effective security system or organisation that is put in place.



Source: The Customs and Traditions of Bafut, p. 38. (Abumbi II, Fon of Bafut. 2016).

Figure 2. Bafut Manjong Soldiers in 1901 at the Bafut Palace.

4. The Security and Military Organisation

For security, Bafut could be grouped among those kingdoms which had a citizens' army which was called up when it was needed (Mair, 1977). Every able-bodied young man could be called up when the need arose. This was done through the state military organisation (*manjong* - army) which was headed by *Muma*. Each village had its own *manjong* group under its own leader (*tamando*) who was supposed to lead his own men to the palace when called up.

For efficiency, the army was divided into units or houses (*ndabumanjong* - houses of *manjong*), which went by different names, apparently according to the role they played. Thus there were houses with such names as *ndango'o* (house of stones) perhaps denoting their role as an artillery unit, and *ndamukong* (house of spears), as an infantry unit. There was *ndankwa* (house of medicine), apparently the medical corps. There were elite units like the Fon's bodyguard (*ngwarenwi* - scabbard) and the reconnaissance unit or scouts, *bugwe* (clowns), so named because they acted and behaved like clowns but indeed were spies of the Bafut military.

The army was usually summoned by the appropriate signal from a drum (*kwin*). This was actually a slit wooden drum placed in a shed in the plaza of the palace (see **Figure 3**). When the army assembled, it was briefed about its objectives. Each combatant provided his own arms, such as, spears, cutlasses, bows and arrows. When guns became available, it became a mark of prestige to have one and people exerted every effort to get them (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967a). In fact, all male adults in Bafut were expected to own at least a gun and to teach their male children how to shoot. In this way, a backup or reserve of Bafut warriors was ensured. Each village or quarter had its battalion of warriors that was ready for conscription by the central palace at war time. With the availability of warriors and guns, the Fon supplied the gun powder. The strength of the Bafut fighting force was tested in the encounters with the Germans at the beginning of the twentieth century as said earlier.

After the battles, people who had distinguished themselves by their exploits and the booty and prisoners brought home were adequately rewarded by the Fon. They were decorated with red feathers (*ngu u*) or given some specially designed cloths. They also collected substantial parts of the booty and were sometimes given wives by the Fon. An incident occurred in 1982, and the story goes that the village was threatened by a stray and mysterious female lion from Kom. It went about devouring animals in the village. The Bafut warriors were mobilised to hunt and kill it for the safety and security of the villagers. This took more than a month and it was finally shot at Acheni by an expert shooter, Atanga from Niko. This lion was slain and distributed at the central palace by the Fon. Atanga was decorated with one of the titles of Bafut warriors by the Fon. To symbolise the event and the reign of terror imposed on Bafut by the lion, it was inscribed at the entrance of the palace (see **Figure 3**). The Bafut warriors had therefore saved their community and people from danger and insecurity.



Figure 3. The Stray Lion symbol.

Bafut land was abounded with such big game as elephants, leopards, deer, buffalo, and smaller game as cane rats, squirrels, and birds which the people systematically hunted. At peace time the warriors organised themselves into groups and took turns to hunt these animals to augment the upkeep of the central palace.

Some animals such as leopards, buffaloes, pythons, elephants (for their tusk) were labelled royal animals because royal permission was needed to hunt them. After the animals were caught, the Fon was entitled to certain choice parts. Failure to bring any of these animals to the Fon constituted an act of rebellion and thus could lead to severe sanction or in extreme cases, war on the tributary chief who aided and abetted such an act. Bafut and the neighbouring chiefdom of Nkwen have traditions which refer to a war between them over the issue of a leopard. The Nkwen people at a certain period reneged on their obligation of taking enemy slain leopard to the Bafut palace. The reason why this incident keeps cropping up in the tradition is because of a one-legged Bafut man, nicknamed *tekolo* (without a leg) who distinguished himself in a battle by ambushing and killing many Nkwen fighters and hence enabling Bafut to carry the day.

On Cultural and social issues the, *abin-a-nfor* (dance of the Fon) festival was a weeklong celebration which took place around December at the end of the farming season. The ceremony or festival ended with military display and dance at the palace piazza (Nwana et al., 1978). Here, a special day was set aside within the week where the groups of Bafut warriors from the villages and quarters appeared in a war mood resemblance (military manoeuvres) to showcase the prowess of the Bafut *fondom* (see **Figure 4(a) (b) and (c)**). This activity was referred to as *kware-bemanjong*. The warriors fired their guns in the air and gesticulated some special styles of gun salute in front of the Fon sited at the palace piazza. The Fon retorted their salute with a similar style. Of course, as the number one *manjong* warrior, the Fon had launched the military show with two-gun shots from his double bar gun which no other Bafut man was permitted to own, except on special authorisation from the palace. All these animation or manoeuvres took place to the utter admiration of the population gathered at the palace piazza.



(a)



(b)

Source: The Customs and Traditions of Bafut, pp. 23-24.

Figure 4. (a) Manjong Adanghawa during Abine-Mfor Parade; (b) Nda Mukong Parade During Abine-Mfor.

During the funeral celebrations of late *fons*, the *manjong* warriors came out to show their case in honour of the deceased fon, the number one manjong warrior in the land. (see **Figure 5(a) & (b)** on the second royal funeral (commemoration) of Fon Achirimbi II in 1978).



(a)



(b)

Source: The Customs and Traditions of Bafut, pp. 52-53.

Figure 5. (a) Manjong from KooH Hill for Gun Firing to Commemorate Achirimbi II's Death; (b) A Manjong Group Returning from Mbamulung Hill in Njibujang for Gun Firing to Commemorate Achirimbi II's Death.

The Bafut warriors also played an important role in diplomacy and external relations. For instance, the German explorer, Dr. Zintgraff who reached Bafut in 1889, recorded in his account of his journey that he was received by Bafut warriors who welcomed him with gun salutes (Chilver, 1966).

On the eve of colonial conquest, the Bafut *fondom* was a heterogeneous polity, made up of peoples brought together under varying circumstances, cluster around an immigrant dynasty. It could effectively hold its own military among its neighbours. The *fondom* was held together through a complicated network of kinship relations, loyalty, and tribute with the palace (*nto-o*) as its hub. The palace also housed the all-pervading and powerful *manjong* regiment, the *kwifor* which, in collaboration with the Fon, made up the government of Bafut. The government was effective in maintaining order and in enabling both the rulers and their subjects to carry out their normal activities.

From colonial period up to independence and thereafter, war was discouraged amongst the people of the Bamenda grassfields. In Bafut, the *manjong* regiment was transformed into a development association to fight wars of peace and development in the *fondom* and not wars of destruction or conflicts. It was in this light the the Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association was formed in the 1970s. (Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association [MSCDA], 1973)

5. The Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association (MSCDA)

Abraham Neba Fube and John Shu Fontem (both students of the University of Yaounde) in March 1971 were inspired by the virtues of peace, unity and progress propagated by the Cameroon Government. Back home, they launched a campaign to educate the Bafut people on the importance of peace, unity, progress, and development. The idea soon spread among other Bafut students in the University of

Yaounde who supported and promoted it. They agreed to meet the Fon and Quarter Heads in the village during the vacation of 1971 to discuss the issue with them. The meeting at home was a success. Many people and Quarter Heads hailed the idea brought by the Yaounde students. The Fon himself described the initiative as “a great and quick way of bringing peace to us (Fontem, 1973).” He then kept close contact with the Yaounde students so that they could work out the organisational structure of a unifying association.

The period 1971 to June 1972 was therefore dedicated to sensitising Bafut people to be part of the “good idea.” The Fon used the traditional institutions in the palace to sensitise the Bafut community at home. Finally, the Fon, in consultation with the Yaounde students and the Bafut Traditional Council, convened a meeting from the 5th to 6th August 1972. This meeting was to plan for the development of the *fondom*. A good number of highly educated Bafut people were present in the meeting. Non-Bafut organisations—Government Services in Bamenda and churches at home were also in attendance. Three cardinal points featured in the Fon’s address during the meeting, namely, unity, progress and development.

This appeal for unity was coming at a time when the Bafut community had been torn apart by the events of the 1968 succession conflict and the abdication of the Fon in 1970. So there was really need for peace and unity in Bafut that would enable it evolve and develop within the context of a modern traditional society or state. Besides, development required financial, material and collective sacrifices from the Bafut people themselves. They were the ones to foster the development projects desired by the *fondom* before foreign or government assistance was sought. Having said this, the Fon then submitted a draft constitution, which if amended and approved would establish an organisation through which the development goals of the *fondom* would be fully awakened. On 6 August 1972, the constitution proposed by the Fon was unanimously adopted, giving birth to what was then called the Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association (MSCDA) (see pioneer Exco in **Figure 6(a) & (b)**)



(a)



(b)

Figure 6. (a) Pioneer Executive of MSCDA, 1972; (b) Pioneer Exco of MSCDA, 1972.

Source: P.N. Colour Star Photos studio, Commercial Round-About, Station Road, Mankon Mezam Bamenda, 1972. From left to right, Muma and Ndimfor Abumbi II (Special delegates), Abumbi II (President General) M.L. Niba (Secretary), M. Fusi Naamukong (Chairman), H. Neba-Fabs (1st Ass. Sec.), J.C. Wanzie (Social Sec.), I.N.N Mbonifor (Financial Secretary), J. Shu Fontem (2nd Ass. Sec.)

The aims and objectives of this new organisation were to promote peace, unity and progress in Bafut, work for the social, cultural and economic advancement of the area, mobilise Bafut people and other well-wishers in support of unity and development within the framework of national development. *Manjong* was to serve as a “think-tank” for the socio-economic development of Bafut. It had the responsibility of mobilising all sons and daughters of the *fondom* resident in and out of Bafut to contribute financially and materially towards development projects at home. Time had come when the might and energy previously used to fight wars had to be employed for the development of the whole community in modern times.

With this spirit, MSCDA proceeded to set up its economic development strategies and organisation. A number of projects were designed and adopted as MSCDA’s daring ventures in the promotion of development and progress in the *fondom*. Most of the projects were centered in the agricultural sector. This was explained by the fact that *Manjong* was influenced by the development policy and objectives of the unitary state at the time—the Green Revolution.

In fact, *Manjong* believed that Bafut had a variety of natural resources. The soil could produce both food and cash crops—coffee, palm oil, rice, kernels, cassava, plantains, groundnuts, cocoyam, beans, corn and a variety of fruits. However, the production of these items was done in small quantities due to a lack of means for large-scale production. The local people also lacked education and information on modern methods of exploitation and production. So MSCDA believed that if the resources in Bafut were fully exploited and carefully harnessed, they would

certainly help the local people in their development struggle.

Through agricultural schemes, good roads and jobs could be given to Bafut people by the state. Foreign bodies and donors could even come in to help expand or speed up development in the area. All these were crucial issues that *Manjong* and its members could not minimise, despise or shy away from. They were in a sense implicated and that is why a greater part of the Association's development projects were to revolve around these issues. As remarked by Assistant Financial Secretary, Stephen Ngwa, "It was only when the people [Bafutians at home] were properly fed, sure of an excess which they could exchange for cash that they could be better prepared for development at all." (*Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association [MSCDA], 1973*)

Hence, the economic priority projects designed by MSCDA included: opening up of agric palm seedlings nurseries in Tingoh, fuel (forest) plantation at Mforya, Swei and Akossia and the education of farmers on new methods of cultivation and large scale production. A team of agricultural experts was to be constituted and sent round the *fondom* to explain the new methods of farming and to encourage the people to grow more food and other new species of fruits and crops.

For the fact that Bafut was fast evolving, MSCDA felt that the community should have modern structures and streets. It was in this light that the Association resolved that a community grammar school should be established in Bafut and adult education for the less privileged Bafutians improved upon. For the fact that the "Bafut town" was fast expanding and linking quarters and villages at the outskirts or periphery of the *fondom*, new streets and roads in these villages and quarters had to be created. *Manjong* hoped to work in partnership with Community Development in Bamenda to construct new streets and roads, as it made its own modest contribution towards town planning and development in the area. MSCDA also adopted a pipe borne water supply project for the new Bafut Township and most of the rural areas. It also resolved to assist in the completion of the Mankaha water supply project, which was due to be completed by December 1973 (*MSCDA, Report of Economic Committee, 1973*). MSCDA undertook the formation of branches where two or three Bafutians were gathered.

On the part of culture, MSCDA felt that Bafut culture should be revived at home and abroad. In effect, all Bafut traditional dances and music were to be revived beginning from the quarter level. To attain this objective, annual competitions among the quarters were to be instituted and prizes awarded to victorious groups during MSCDA's week of trophies. For Bafut people to prove their pride of belonging as a people with a rich culture, the Cultural Committee of *Manjong* appealed that Bafut people should always come out in their numbers and participate fully in the Fon's annual dance, clad in appreciable traditional costumes. *Manjong* also encouraged the reinforcement of handicraft whose works of arts could be exhibited and sold during the Fon's annual dance and *Manjong* General Assembly. All language students in high schools and universities in and out of Cameroon were called upon to cooperate with early researchers like Rufus Ngwa and Gwe Wasang so that together, they could come out with an alphabet for the Bafut language. In fact, the project on

the Bafut language was the most important cultural project given that language is a powerful unifying factor among people. MSCDA revolved to use a common language alphabet to create more unity and harmony amongst the Bafut peoples (MSCDA, Report of Cultural Committee, 1973).

From this base established in the early 70s, *Manjong* gradually evolved through the 1980s. In this, the association struggled to foster the socio-economic development of the Bafut community in modern times thus proving it right that its transformation from a warrior (military) organisation in the past to a peace seeking and development orientated structure for the good of the Bafut people had its place. Unfortunately, the development plan and strides of *Manjong* were interrupted by the insurgence of yet another militia group of Bafut warriors in 2016.

6. The Bafut Seven Kata Militia (Warriors)

With the insurgence of the *amba* revolution in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon in 2016, Bafut youths joined in the fight. They constituted groups of militia under the guise of liberation forces. Famous amongst the groups was the Bafut Seven Kata (see **Figure 7(a), (b) & (c)**). This militia from outset claimed to protect the Bafut people, property and land from enemy predators or invaders. Hence, they asked Bafut people to quit the village for some time so as to permit them defend the land and repel the enemy. By 2018 a good number of Bafut people (both old and young) had left the village and became internally displaced people (IDP) in many towns in French speaking Cameroon. In the absence of the people, the Seven Kata militia instead of concentrating on the war against the Cameroon military, they turned to inflict pain and torture on their own people. This ranged from arbitrary arrest and gruesome killings, kidnaps for ransom, and looting of property they claimed to protect.

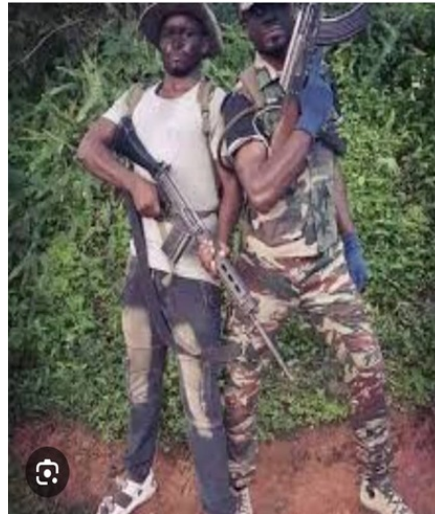


(a)

BAFUT 7KATA is still in control of every single activities in BAFUT thanks to our able amba boys in BAFUT and other villages



(b)



(c)

Source: JPF: IMG 20240414-WA0042; JPF: IMG-20240414-WA0044

Figure 7. (a) Bafut Seven Kata Militia in Combat Appearance; (b) Seven Kata Militia in Combat Position; (c) Seven Kata in Control.

The militia established reforms, laws and restrictions which all Bafut people had to obey and respect. Any opposition or defaulter was severely punished. Nobody ever new the kind of punishment the militia reserved for him or her until it was announced and executed. The militia law and tribunals were dictated by the whims and caprices of their leaders called Generals. Famous amongst these generals were: General Suhkong, Tiger and Aladji. They started by placing a band on Bafut people outside the village not to return home except on special authorisation from them. The militia claimed that Bafut people resident in French speaking territory were in essence dining and cooperating with the enemy predator they are after. Based on this, the militia came up with descriptions such as: 'sell out; black leg' to tarnish the image of Bafut people living out of the village and to justify their acts or decisions.

The Bafut militia equally sympathised with their brother groups in English speaking Cameroon and in solidarity, imposed the respect of Monday-ghost town on the Bafut people. Any violation of this restriction was synonymous to kidnap for ransom or direct execution. Insecurity and reign of terror loom large in the Bafut *fondom*. This did not occur without consequences on the people.

7. The Impact of Seven Kata Militia in Bafut

The operations of Seven Kata had enormous consequences on individuals and the community as a whole. Individual property was looted off. A case in hand was Ngwa Samuel Neba at Agyati. He was a retired police officer who had worked with the Cameroon police core in Douala where he retired. Ngwa Samuel came back home a few years before the outbreak of the 2016 *amba* revolution. From the start the Bafut Seven Kata took a decision to confiscate guns from all uniform people

(in active service or retired) and hunters in Bafut. In fact, any Bafut man identified to be in possession of any type of gun was asked to surrender it to the Seven Kata militia. As a retired uniform officer, Seven Kata went to Ngwa Samuel and erroneously requested for the gun he brought home at the end of his service in the police core. Ngwa Samuel had to prove beyond palpable evidences that he did not return with a gun before his life was spared.

With respect to the Seven Kata orders that people should quit the village, Ngwa Samuel decided to return to the littoral region where his ailing ill health was aggravated. In his absence, the Seven Kata boys broke into Ngwa's house and carried away all property including even the marriage gifts of the daughter who recently celebrated her wedding in Bafut. No single pin was left in the house and the clear evidences were the iron doors, window shutters and louvers that were removed and carried away.

News about the incident reached Ngwa Samuel on his sick bed in Douala. It came at a time when he was seriously sick and unable to return home for stock taking. Afraid of what Seven Kata militia might do to his children during his funeral in Bafut, he willed that he should be buried in his compound in Bamenda town (see **Figure 8(a) & (b)**). Ngwa's fear was genuine given that the Seven Kata militia were fund of harassing family members and taking them to the bushes for ransom during funerals. Even on the day of his burial militia boys were there with a mission to ambush family members and take them to the bush for ransom. Good a thing, the family members were smart enough and vamoosed before the militia noticed their disappearance.



(a)



(b)

Source: (a) Photo Archives of Ngwa Samuel's Widow; (b) Archives of Late Ngwa's Widow

Figure 8. (a) Burial of late Ngwa Samuel at Musang Bamenda; (b) Lowering of Casket.

Angered by this, the militia decided to focus on the widow who stayed behind to spend at least the night her husband was laid to rest. The night was a sleepless one following the gun shots that rained around the vicinity. At day dawn the widow successfully sneaked herself out and returned to the Littoral region. This incident was just one of many Bafut people buried out of the village for fear of torture and pain from Seven Kata militia.

Next was the ordeal of Colonel Ngonghela, a retired senior military officer of the Cameroon defence forces. He had returned home some years before and settled at Agyati, where he enjoyed some quiet moments of retirement before the *amba* revolution of 2016. In September 2018, a group of seven Kata militia intercepted Colonel Ngonghela at three corners of Njinteh Bafut. His car was burnt to ashes and the militia whisked him to an unknown destination. It was alleged by Seven Kata militia that he was in connivance with the Cameroon military as he took elements round the village to identify the hideout of the boys to them. This allegation fitted well in the plan of the Seven Kata militia to blackmail some targeted Bafut elite (especially those of the uniform core) and eliminate. This is justified by the fact that till date, the where about of retired colonel Ngonghela is not known. Sources close to Seven Kata militia however hold that he was gruesomely executed. This further complicated matters for family members who till date have

been asking for the corpse (if at all he was killed) to no avail.

Politicians were also targeted by the Seven Kata militia. Generally, the *amba* groups in North West and South West Regions of Cameroon (NOSOW) adopted a policy towards the political elite. Any person who sympathised or cooperated with the alleged “colonial government of la Republic”, was indexed as a “black leg.” Whatever that meant, the fact is that chiefs and politicians who militated in the CPDM ruling party and the SDF opposition party became targets for *amba* kidnaping, ransom, killing and destruction.

The *amba* militia asked all the chiefs of NOSOW and politicians of both opposition and ruling party to boycott all activities with the Yaounde “colonial regime”. Any chief or politician who ignored this call was tagged a “black leg” to the militia. In 2020, CPDM militants in Bafut ignored the call and courageously carried out campaigns for their party during the municipal and legislative elections. They used armored cars to reach areas considered as no-go-zones in Bafut to campaign and canvas votes for their party. At the end of the elections, the CPDM won the municipal elections and rooted the SDF in the council seat in Bafut. Mayor Ngwakongoh Lawrence and his team of Councilors were officially installed on 9 February 2020.

The Seven Kata militia were angered by this act and in their view it was an exaggerated disrespect of their authority. Hence, a man-hunt for the CPDM politicians was launched. The political elite in general was subjected to insecurity and danger in Bafut. Nobody could estimate what will happen to he or she the next minute. Mayor Ngwakongoh was amongst the first victims. His house at Agyati was demolished to foundation level. George Tajung, the most senior Councilor (*doyen d'age*) and president of the CPDM Sub-section in Niko (kidnaped and released earlier), finally took refuge out of the village. Tanda Jacob, a staunch militant and Secretary of the CPDM was molested and he finally decided to take refuge in the USA. The house of Mbonifor Kennedy, one of the CPDM barons and Councilor, was burnt in lower Bafut and the palm plantation sealed. The Family was compelled to abandon the plantation in the hands of *amba* militia. Another Councilor was kidnaped and asked to pay a ransom of three million Francs CFA before she was released.

On the one hand, the SDF opposition party was not free in the hands of the Seven Kata militia. Actually, *amba* militia in NOSOW had asked the SDF national chairman, Ni John Fru Ndi (late) to withdraw all his parliamentarians and senators from the “la Republic’s” assemblies. He was also asked to stop all forms of personal and party relations with “la Republic government.” The refusal by Fru Ndi and his party to heed to the call of the *amba* militia made them enraged and hostile towards the SDF. A man-hunt was equally launched against SDF militants and officials. This affected their performance in the 2020 municipal and legislative elections as many lost their positions to the CPDM party.

In Bafut, Fusi Nahmukong, the SDF parliamentarian for Bafut-Tubah suffered prejudice as he was threatened and kidnapped for ransom. He was barred

from going out for campaign during the 2020 legislative elections. He finally lost the parliamentary seat to the CPDM. His house at Mankwi was burnt by Seven Kata militia. Langsi Abel Ngwasoh, the SDF Mayor of Bafut was forced by the insecurity and threats of life to seek refuge out of the village for three years. He too was unable to do campaigns during the 2020 municipal elections. He eventually lost the Bafut Council municipality to the CPDM. The kitchen part of the mayor's house was burnt and one of his cars damaged.

The house and business place of Ngwa Petus, the SDF Councilor for Njinteh and staunch militant of the party was ransacked and valuable property taken away. His car (R4) was carried away and his business collapsed. In the face of mitigating circumstances he had to relocate and start another miserable life elsewhere. The uncertainty and terror that reigned in Bafut at the time, caused the SDF Councilor for Niko, Atangcho Wilfred Fube to move out of the village with his family. Coupled with the fact that his party lost the municipal Council in Bafut, and his businesses were grounded, he decided to seek refuge elsewhere.

As if that was not enough, the Seven Kata militia shut the doors of the Bafut Council even to the CPDM elected Council. They looted iron and cement that was kept for the construction of the Council Hall to mount a barricade at Nkare (see **Figure 9**). Mayor Ngwakongoh and his Councilors were compelled by the insecurity in Bafut to operate the Bafut Council out of the village. This led to what we refer to here as the "Bafut diaspora municipal council." This council borrowed accommodation from the Bamenda I Council premises up station from where they have been operating till date. In fact, the Seven Kata militia reversed the political order in Bafut a few steps behind so too was its economy.



Source: JPF IMG 20240414-W A0016

Figure 9. Seven Kata Defence Barricade at Nkare.

Before the *amba* revolution in 2016, the Bafut economy was blossom. This was justified by the commercial activities and transport circulation in Bafut. The transport facilities caused many workers who would have loved to reside

near their jobs in Bamenda town to relocate to Bafut. They constructed their houses in the village and every morning they attended to duty call in Bamenda. During weekends, the road to Bafut was saturated with vehicles that transported Bafut people to the village for weekend enjoyment. Many also came down to attend funerals of love ones, hold family meetings or visit friends. Without any exaggeration, it could be said that weekends in Bafut before 2016 were sweet and amazing. The nostalgia for home was high amongst Bafut people. The income for transporters also increased thus augmenting the welfare of their families.

From 2016 henceforth, things took a different twist in the transport sector in Bafut. Seven Kata militia created road barricades, check points and toll gates where they extorted money from drivers and passengers under the pretext of supporting the struggle. Their toll gate prices for all transporters and vehicle owners were fixed. Any person who dared to resist the payment had his car burnt and he was ferried to the bush for torture and ransom. It was also at *amba* check points that many people were removed from cars and taken to the bush for ransom or execution.

By 2018, *amba* militia in NOSOW banned the use of CEMAC number plates in the two English speaking regions. This was replicated by the Seven Kata militia in Bafut. All cars that did not respect the ban or were plying the roads on “ghost town day” (*contrisunday*), were burnt or seized by the militia (see **Figure 10**). Till date, the lone car commonly seen around with a CEMAC number plate is that of the Governor of the North West Region. Of course, he is heavily guarded by a strong security team of the Cameroon defence forces.





Source: JPG IMG-20240419-WA0152 & IMG-20240419-WA0153.

Figure 10. A Car Burnt on 19 April 2024 in Bafut by Amba Militia on their Declared Ghost Town Day. (*contri* Sunday)

By 2020, the Bafut Seven Kata militia imposed a ban on taxis (with the yellow colour), prohibiting them from plying the roads to Bafut. Any taxis with the yellow colour seen in Bafut was burnt. Till date, no yellow colour taxis goes to Bafut. The insecurity imposed by the laws and activities of Seven Kata militia in the transport sector scared drivers and Bafut people in general. The circulation of goods and people to Bafut dropped drastically as it was considered a no-go-zone. Commercial activities were grounded and the roads were abandoned to fallow in grass. (See **Figure 11(a) & (b)**).



(a)



(b)

Source: IMG-20240414-WA0024 & IMG-20240414-WA0025

Figure 11. (a) & (b): Villagers Clearing the Overgrown Grass on the Main Road to Bafut.

Before 2018, Bafut could boast of three micro finance institutions and one Express Union branch at Njinteh. Amongst the micro finance institutions was the Unity Cooperative Credit Union (Unics). The Bafut branch of Unics was located at three corners Njinteh. Seven Kata militia intimidated the workers and ordered the closure of the bank. With the insecurity and threats of life on staff, Unics authorities decided to close the branch in Bafut till date. Financial transactions that often helped poor mothers and fathers at home came to a stop. The part that Unics contributed to the economic growth of Bafut was destroyed. The Unics building at Njinteh was abandoned and it eventually grew in grass. The Express Union service in Bafut closed down as well.

A similar situation happened to the fuel station at three corners. The station went bankrupt and it was alleged that Seven Kata militia used the fuel at the station to fuel their motorbikes for operations. We cannot ascertain this allegation here, but what is clear is the fact that the station ran out of business and that to an extent handicapped transport business and circulation in Bafut. Also, the fact that one could be kidnapped at any time and taken to the bush for ransom and torture, instilled fear and insecurity in Bafut people who had to close down many businesses. People lived in suspense and to avoid false accusation for violating an *amba* law, many deserted the village.

The Sister of Emmanuel Hood is an old religious institution of the PCC created in Bafut in the late 1960s. It was a business-oriented institution that employed

several Bafut people (old and young) into the cattle rearing, piggery, clothing, bakery and agricultural services of the institution. On the eve of the *amba* revolution in 2016, the development strides around the vicinity of the Sisterhood were immense. The Seven Kata militia constructed one of their camps around the sisterhood. This increased the insecurity in the vicinity (a sacred place) given that a confrontation between the Cameroon military and the Seven Kata militia could occur at any time to disturb the spiritual activities of the sisters.

Faced with rising security concerns, the Sisters decided to relocate out of Bafut to Foumbot in the West Region of Cameroon. A development weapon for Bafut people had therefore been destroyed. Also, the road project on the Bamenda-Wum road that had gathered momentum in 2016 came to a halt. Bars and restaurants which used to flourish with activities at Njinteh, Nsanimunwi and Atimuluh-Mambu grew in grass.

The Saddle Hill resort hotel was not left out. This was a magnificent resort edifice that brought pride to the tourism sector in Bafut. It was a resort of both national and international reputation and standard. Visitors came from USA, Europe and other regions of Cameroon to have quiet moments of relaxation at Saddle Hill (see **Figure 12(a) & (b)**). This structure generated income for the Bafut economy. Seven Kata militia ransacked the resort and transformed it to a rest house (residence) for *amba* Generals and their entourage. Today a one-time edifice and pride of tourism in Bafut lies in ruins (with one part burnt completely and another part looted and abandoned).



(a)



(b)

Source: JPG IMG-20240414-WA0019 & IMG-20240414-WA0020

Figure 12. (a) & (b): Saddle Hill Resort Structure before the Seven Kata Siege.

The Bafut palace (an embodiment of the Bafut culture) and touristic attraction grew in grass alongside the quarters and villages (see **Figure 13(a) & (b)**). It was also the case with administrative structures and institutions affiliated to the state government such as the DO's office, the post Office at Agyati and the Bafut Council. To the militia, such institutions were tentacles of the “la Republic colonial government” in their land.



(a)



(b)

Source: Awah Lucas Photo Collections, 2023.

Figure 13. (a) The Bafut Palace Museum in Grass; (b) The Post Office grew in Grass.

Grazing activities at Ntaaya carried out by the Fulani community became grounded. Such areas were used as hideout for the militia. The cattle breeders were constantly harassed for ransom both in money and material. It is alleged that Seven Kata militia seized the people's cows and slaughtered for their food.

Social life and activities in Bafut were also affected by the dictates of Seven Kata militia. Schools were closed down indefinitely and that was synonymous to increasing the level of illiteracy and other social ills in the Bafut community. Idleness amongst the youths led to drug consumption and many admired the financial booty and riches *amba* militia made out of their operations. The school boys were tempted by the love for money and riches to join the ranks of the Seven Kata. For the female children, many of them became lovers or wives of *amba* militia for whom they were pregnant. Many children were born, either, out of illegal relationship with *amba* militia or cases of rape. Tears and cries were heard in families lamenting how *amba* militia have destroyed their girl children.

Yet no one could dare to send a child to school in Bafut. It is in this light that many school children left to attend school in French speaking regions of Cameroon. The number of IDPs kept increasing at geometrical rate in these regions. That too had its own consequences as poor standards of living and misery set in. The people were dying in silence with the kind of law and actions taken by *amba* militia in the land. More fear was instilled in the people by the treatment meted

out on school authorities by Seven Kata militia. A case in hand was the Principal of PGSST Bafut who was taken out from his house and whisked to a bush around Mile 18 Nchum where he was tortured and his body maimed.

In fact torture and kidnap was a common practice in the agenda of the Seven Kata militia. Some body could be tortured just for any reason be it genuine or not. A glaring example is that of Ester Asoh, the widow of late Chebi Samuel Ndamukong. A young man in the quarter (Nebe) had lost the sick daughter due to lack of health care and negligence. Unable to explain the cause of the daughter's death, he attributed it to witchcraft. The young man then reported the case to the Seven Kata group at Nebe, accusing Ester Asoh for witchcraft practices that took away the life of his daughter.

Without wasting time, the *amba* militia went to Ester Asoh's residence and whisked her off to their camp. The torturing process began with an attempt to force her to prove her guilt or innocence mystically by means of some concoctions and charms they prepared for her. When she insisted that she knew nothing about the death of the young girl, the Seven Kata militia gave her snake-beating of her life time. In fact, the torture was intended to kill but for the timely intervention of the cousin of Ester Asoh who freed her from the hands of the militia. She immediately left for the Centre Region and has never returned to the village permanently. The ailing health condition of Ester Asoh today cannot be dissociated from the brutal torture and heartless treatment received from the *amba* militia.

Many people died of torture and pain inflicted on them by the militia. Another deplorable case was the gruesome killing of the successor of Prince Sama at Manji, who was shot death on his way back from a CMF occasion (with the CMF uniform on him). This particular case touched the Fon of Bafut so badly that he was forced to make a public pronouncement, condemning the atrocities of the Seven Kata militia, and appealing on them to refrain from such acts.

At the level of funeral ceremonies, Seven Kata militia had to be settled before any burial took place in Bafut. They had fixed dues ranging from 50,000frCFA and above. Funerals that concerned "bush fallers" from the USA, their dues were special and could range from 200,000frsCFA and above. Besides, all funeral arrangements prepared a special pack of food and drinks for *amba* militia. Failure to do these, the burial was disrupted and family members taken into captivity.

Even when all the *amba* requirements were met, the militia still appeared in some funerals to hunt family members whom they whisked into the bush for more ransom. This attitude scared many people from going home for the burial of love ones. The fear of torture from *amba* militia caused many families to bury their dead ones in the area where they settled in French speaking regions of Cameroon.

In matters of justice, the Seven Kata militia took over the rule of law and imposed their dictates in the community. The *kwifor*, *takumbeng*, the Fon, village and quarter Heads had no authority over the community anymore. The role of these traditional institutions was substituted by the militia. Their Generals were

obeyed and worshiped amongst the people. Failure to do this was synonymous to sanction because the victim was indexed as “black leg”.

All litigations which were initially the jurisdiction and competence of the traditional leaders were now taken to Seven Kata tribunals. The verdicts pronounced by these courts were hardly in favour of the accused nor did they show signs of justice and equity before the law. This created an opportunity for people to report their enemies to Seven Kata courts for trial. Those who could not withstand the pain of torture fled the village before the militia arrived to arrest them.

Those who appeared before the courts for trial were first of all tortured and subjected under mental, psychological and physical stress. Then followed by a verdict which was often a severe financial or material sanction against the accused. Many Bafut people were falsely accused and innocently victimised in Seven Kata tribunals (*ibid.*).

8. Conclusion

This study examined the defence and security exigencies amidst conflict in Bafut. We focused on the role of the warrior organisations that existed in Bafut from origin. At the end of the study a number of questions and observations are made. First, we observed that the Bafut warriors—the *manjong*, fought wars for development and progress for their people and community. The *manjong* warriors had played an important role in defending and consolidating Bafut land in the face of predators and invaders. This was the case against Bali, Mankon and Germans. The security and protection Bafut warriors gave to its people and community made the *fondom* a rallying ground for those who needed refuge or security in the area. In fact, Bafut was renowned for its defence and security mechanism which guaranteed security to the oppressed in the Bamenda area. The *manjong* warriors were at the centre of events ensuring that their exploits were maximised for the security of the people and the socio-economic development of the community.

When it became clear that war was no longer a relevant tool for the development of a people, Bafut quickly adapted to the virtues of peaceful development and relations. To march words with action, the *manjong* warrior organisation was transformed into a social, cultural and development association (MSCDA) with the mission to fight “wars” for development and peace and not senseless wars of destruction. In fact, Bafut needed development warriors and not development killers in the name of warriors. Every Bafut child within the context of MSCDA was called upon to be a development warrior. The courage with which Bafut children confronted matters of development even amidst threats, insecurity and conflict, made them warriors for the land. Such efforts were rewarded by the highest authority of the land—the Fon (the number one warrior). It is in this light that the Mayor of Bafut, Ngwakongoh Lawrence was crowned with the title of the highest warrior of the land (see **Figure 14**). This was in recognition of his development strides in the Bafut community.



Source: Awah Lucas Nkwete Melah Photo Collection, 2024.

Figure 14. Decoration of Mayor Ngwakongoh by Fon Abumbi II of Bafut.

This permitted us to redefine or reflect on the meaning of warrior in Bafut in present context. A warrior is one who goes out to canvas sources of income, projects and material donations both at national and international level for the development of the Bafut community. A warrior is one who has the charisma to mobilise his Bafut brothers and sisters both at home and abroad to contribute generously for the development of Bafut land and people. Development here will include: building and equipping medical health centres for Bafut health care, construction of roads, bridges, schools; provision of portable drinking water to the population and promoting the culture of the Bafut people. That is the meaning of development in present Bafut context and any son or daughter of the land had to focus attention on these aspects of development. Security is synonymous to development and where insecurity dominates, development is destroyed.

The Bafut Seven Kata in essence constitute a category of warriors of the land. This is justified by the initial objective of their mission which was to liberate the people from oppression, defend the land from predator invaders, protect the people and their property as well as grant them security in mitigating circumstances. Besides Seven Kata militia were constituted by sons and daughters of Bafut who by birth rights, are warriors of the land purported to fight for its development and protection. This work permitted us to evaluate the contribution of the Seven Kata organisation at the time the Bafut people were in mad need of security and protection.

From our study and from every indication, the Seven Kata militia were an opposite of any group of warriors that had existed in Bafut history. The *manjong* warriors fought wars to defend the land and to provide security to Bafutians. They even transformed the land to a safe haven for other people in the area. Hardly did they involve the people in senseless expeditions. The development-oriented warrior association, MSCDA was focused on peace and the socio-economic and cultural development of the land. This they did in their own little way. The question

now is what legacy has Seven Kata left in the Bafut community.

No peace nor development was identified. Instead, there was a dramatic transformation of the militia (warriors) from a security and protective shield to a dangerous organisation that reigned terror and increased the people's tears and pain. It became clear that the Seven Kata militia fought a battle not for the interest of the people but for their personal interest and greed.

Bafut tradition reveals that when the people prayed for the warriors in the past, they won battles and victories of development. But where the ancestors heeded to the cry and agony of the people, the warriors perished. This might be the case of the Seven Kata militia (see **Figure 15(a) & (b)**) and it goes with the saying that one cannot fight against his own people and succeed.



(a)



(b)

Source: IMG-20240414-WA0022 & IMG-20240414-WA0023.

Figure 15. (a) General Tiger & Body guard fell in Battle; (b) General Aladji fell in Battle.

However, in a conflict situation, it is also the duty of the state to provide security for its citizens. The situation in Bafut showed that the state efforts in restoring peace and security were limited. Hence, a different approach was required to address the problem at stake. The laxity of the state in adopting a holistic and inclusive approach to the conflict in NOSOW has increased the magnitude of insecurity. The initiation of a frank dialogue with stakeholders is a better option. This is more assuring and we are tempted therefore to remark that in the face of a conflict, proper measures and strategies should be sort to defend the local communities and provide security to the population.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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