

## Original Paper

# Traditional Rule in the Face of Emerging Elitism in Bafut North West Cameroon, 1970-1982

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### Abstract

*In Bafut, leadership, power and authority resided in the hands of traditional rulers who administered the people according to native law, custom and traditions. The leader was called mfor befeu (translated as fon by colonialist). The fon in his political setting was surrounded by a cream of traditional advisers and institutions such as kwifor and takumbeng, made up of noble men from commoners' origin and royal family properly rooted in the traditions and customs and needed no other form of training to rule the people. Colonial rule introduced western education with the intention of training young Africans to assist them in administration and governance. Independent African governments inherited the system and spirit. The consequence was the mindset of the educated African tamed against his own customs and traditions. A dichotomy was created in society leading to social class discrimination and power usurpation in local political systems. The educated people hijacked the power machinery from the traditional leaders whom they tagged with stigmatizing words as "illiterate". This syndrome created what was generally called an "elite class" which regulated power with no recourse to the position of the traditionalists. This paper examines the conflict that ensued in Bafut from 1970 as a result of handing over power to the indigenous westernised and educated elite and imposing them in local affairs and administration. We contend that the involvement of fabricated post-independent elite in leadership positions created conflict given that power tussles between them and the traditional rulers caused societal virtues (as peace) to be trampled upon. We adopted a chronological approach here and from our sources we concluded that elitism in the context of western education acquired is the root of conflict in local politics. Elitism as a concept needs to be carefully tailored to enhance sustainable development and lasting peace in our local communities.*

### Keywords

*Traditional rule, Elitism, Bafut, Northwest, Cameroon*

## 1. Introduction

Elitism in our context here is a concept which developed as a result of Africans acquiring western education and culture. This occurred during colonial rule and Africans who acquired the western education now developed the tendency to influence all sectors and strata of life in their local communities of origin. Traditional politics and local administration fell victim of the caprices of elitism. The educated and acculturated Africans did all to infiltrate the traditional political institutions of their communities in a bid to take over local administration and leadership from the natural rulers. In this attempt, as witnessed in Bafut, conflict occurred within the traditional political system thus impacting the community negatively. This conflict surfaced in Bafut within the early decades of post-colonial rule and till date, the community has hardly gained stamina, especially when it comes to power politics and leadership.

## 2. Background to the Political Organisation of Bafut

The Bafut *fondom* is a heterogeneous polity and according to Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, it is a political structure built on a centralised administrative machinery and judicial system (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940). To 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).

At the head of the political structure was the Fon. He was both the political and spiritual head and also exercised both executive and judicial authority over his subjects. His position was re-enforced by the near-sacred nature of his personality (Ritzenthaler & Ritzenthaler, 1962). The Fon had multiple political, judicial, religious, and social duties. He controlled external relations with other peoples, making wars and treaties. Internally he made laws. All justice was in his name and he was the final court of appeal and had the power of life and death over his subjects. As chief priest of the *fondom* he offered sacrifices to his ancestors and interceded with them for the welfare of the people. In summary, the Fon was the visible manifestation of the Bafut body politic, but at the same time he was merely the tip of the political iceberg.

The Fon of Bafut was assisted by some royal relatives. At the beginning of each reign, a queen mother (*maamfo*) was appointed. She was usually the Fon's mother or in her absence one of his sisters. She advised the Fon, exerting a moderating influence on him. In addition there were two brother assistants to the Fon, namely, the *ndimfor* (elder brother) and *muma* (younger brother), who also served as advisers. There was another brother adviser. This was *Tabufor* (father of *fons*). He was usually any son of the late Fon who happened to have been born before his father was enthroned as Fon. By the circumstances of his birth therefore, the *Tabufor* had no ambitions for the throne, hence his role as

father to the new Fon. Also, none of the royal advisers acted as regent when the Fon died or was absent from the palace.

The body which shared power with the Fon and acted in his absence was the council of elders or *kwifor*. Literally, *kwifor* means holder or supporter of the Fon. It was an institution common to all the Grassfield kingdoms and was called different names. Thus it was called *nwerong* in Nso, *kwifoyn* in Kom, *nkwifon* in Mankon and *ngumba* in Bali, all studied by Chilver and Kaberry (Chilver & Kaberry, 1961, 1967; Kaberry, 1959). The members who must have reached the *bukum* rank were hierarchically ordered and this was rigorously maintained. At the head of the body was the *tandakwifor* (head of the house of *kwifor*). The strength of *kwifor* lay in the fact that it acted as a check on royal power. The Fon acknowledged this and tried as much as possible to avoid confrontation with it.

The functions of *kwifor* were carried out through different agencies or lodges. The innermost and most secret of them was *ndangore* (ordeal house). It took important decisions concerning both the internal and external security of the realm. Its most important function was to act as a council of kingmakers. Other duties of *kwifor* included the burial and funeral of a Fon, enforcement of rules regarding land utilization. It also arranged sacrifices, festivities, community work and assessment and collection of tributes. Above all, it was the sole transmitter of the Fon's orders to the people.

Apart from *kwifor*, there was another council of elders, this time of princes only, namely, *nda-takumbeng* (house of thunder). It acted, though not always successfully, as a check to the overwhelming powers of *kwifor*. Its *raison d'être* was to protect the interest of princes since they were barred from membership of *kwifor*. Just as *kwifor* had its *ndangoro*, so *takumbeng* had its *ndacho'onka*, the highest or innermost lodge where important decisions were taken. The head of the *nda-takumbeng* was *ndimfor*, who was the chief adviser to the Fon.

At the level of territorial organisation and administration, the smallest territorial unit was the family or compound. A number of compounds constituted an *ayenganda* (buttock of the house) or a ward. A number of wards made up a quarter (*nukuru*), and a group of quarters constituted a village (*nte*). A village was the smallest autonomous unit. The villages made up the Bafut *fondom* (*Ala'a Bufu*). According to the reports of Hawkesworth in 1926, there were 23 villages in Bafut. A few years later in 1934, R.J. Hook listed 26 (Hawkesworth, 1926; Hooks, 1934).

Bafut had two types of settlements. First there were the semi-autonomous villages each with its own chief (*atangchuo*—war planner). The villages were linked to the centre under various conditions governing their relationship. According to Hook's list, as mentioned above, 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. There was Bukari and Buwe, being among the oldest villages in Bafut located to the northeast of the capital. To keep in touch with these villages, the

Fon appointed liaison officers who lived near the palace to receive the tribute from these villages (Nchotou, Personal Communication, May 26, 1999).

The second type of settlement constituted those villages clustered around the palace, and ruled directly by the Fon. These were: Mbebali, Mbebeli, Manji, Njibujang, Bujong, Njinteh, Niko, Mankaha, and Nchum (Hook, 1934). The inhabitants here consisted mostly of the Tikari immigrants, who were closely allied to the Fon. These villages had no chiefs with any hereditary title as such but an appointed head (*tanukuru*—father of the quarter) existed. He was appointed by the Fon among the *bukum* of the village, that was, any one of them whom he deemed competent. In some cases, a prince was appointed. That was one way the Fon involved his relations in the administration. The *tanukuru*, along with the other elders of the village constituted a governing council (*butabenukuru*), which met often to deliberate on matters of immediate concern to their village. The matters might be the implementation of the Fon's directives, collecting and transmitting their own tribute to palace and arranging for community projects. To be appointed *tanukuru*, an aspirant had to demonstrate his suitability in terms of ability and loyalty (Mair, 1977; Rowe, 1975). It was also the prerogative of the Fon to create new villages, by appointing heads to new settlements. It was by doing so that he had more villages under his direct control.

On Judicial administration, the Bafut judicial system ensured that justice was decentralised as much as possible and the Fon only dealt with serious cases. Disputes were usually submitted for arbitration and settlement in family circles, from the extended family up to the lineage, depending on the nature of the case. Beyond the family, quarter and village heads dealt with some cases between families such as thefts, assaults, and land matters. More serious cases such as murder, arson, witchcraft, destruction of property, and aggravated thefts were referred to the Fon who dealt with them in consultation with *kwifor* (Chilver & Kaberry, 1963; Cullock, Littlewood, & Dugast, 1954).

Depending on the gravity of the case, investigations were carried out by *kwifor*. In a land case, for instance, some *bukum* would be sent out to investigate. While the case was sub-judice, the area in question would be put under the *kwifor* ban. The insignia was a stick with a slit top in which a palm frond was inserted (*ajube kwifor*) and pinned on the disputed piece of land. On the appointed day, both parties to the dispute came to the palace. Evidence was taken separately from them by *kwifor* messengers (*nto kwifor*). This was relayed to the Fon who, on the advice of *kwifor*, arrived at a decision. On another day, the Fon would deliver judgement in the audience hall (*nsang*). Criminal cases were dealt with in the same way. *Kwifor* would carry out the investigations, the Fon delivered the judgement, and the appropriate arm of *kwifor* would execute the sentence.

Sanctions followed the moral, ritual, and legal guidelines as analysed in the cases of some West African political systems by Brown (Brown, 1951). In Bafut the category of sanctions depended on the gravity of the case. In the case of witchcraft, there had to be exculpation by ordeal in the *kwifor* inner lodge

(*ndangoro*). The suspect brought a fowl to which poison was administered. The death of the fowl signified guilt. This was similar to trial by ordeal as discussed by Ikime in the case of some Delta tribes in Nigeria (Ikime, 1965). The guilty person was then either executed or exiled. In the case of murder, the murderer was publicly executed by being tied to stone monolith in the plaza and clubbed to death by a masked *kwifor* executioner (*mubu'u*). Assault was punished by demand of compensation. The punishment for theft was public disgrace and mockery. Cases of treason, that is, those against the person of the Fon and abominations such as adultery with a Fon's wife warranted instant death in the hands of *kwifor*.

For internal security, *kwifor* acted as the police force. It was believed that the eyes of *kwifor* were everywhere. Moreover by their vigilance and concern with the maintenance of law and order many of the people themselves were part of the machinery of internal security. Force was used, for instance, in the confiscation of the property of people who might have refused to participate in community work, the punishment of people guilty of treason and other offences. In such circumstances, the use of force was the prerogative of *kwifor* who acted through its agents (Mair, 1965). For the Fon's security, 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 (Yancho, Personal Communication, January 6, 2003). In summary this was the political and administrative set up of the Bafut *Fondom* (under the leadership of the Fon and his cream of traditional authorities) before the arrival of the colonial masters and the institution of western education and administration.

### 3. Post-Colonial Government Perception of Traditional Rule

With the coming of independence, the Prime Minister of West Cameroon intimated that many things had begun to change following the rapid social evolution ushered in by independence. But there was a major problem centred on the fact that the authority of *kwifon* (a traditional arm of governance) was not recognised within the context of the social change at the time. Yet, it was not also possible for *kwifon* to go back to its old form because the “present generation” does not agree with the old practices of *kwifon* which they considered out-mode. *Kwifon* was not also worse than the other corrupt forms of authority (native and magistrate courts) which the white man had introduced to replace the village authority (1). To the P.M., time had come for Africans to build up some form of authority for the village too. Unfortunately, the only existing form of authority in the village at the time was the *fon* or chief, some few recognised by the government and others not. Since the “*kwifon*” at the time was only used for sacrificial purposes, it must be made to help the *fon* maintain peace and order in the village as it used to do in the past. For this reason, each village should have a “Traditional Council”. (File Ja(1965)2, 1965). This traditional Council became the path used by educated people and political elite to infiltrate traditional institutions, politics and leadership in their local communities.

The functions of the Traditional Council as prescribed by the Prime Minister were as follows. It was in charge of the day to day running of the village. Thus its orders were to be respected by all villagers particularly as the structure was recognised by the State Government. The Council was to maintain peace and order in the village, ensuring that each Quarter Head administered his quarter properly, settled all disputes arising from inheritance of property. In the view of government, neither the court nor the Local Authority councils could be as well informed on such matters as the Traditional Council, which knows the unwritten traditions and laws of the village. The Traditional Council was also charged with the responsibility of revising traditional laws and customs in the attempt to throw out those that were repugnant to human life and to maintain the good ones that fostered human development.

One of the P.M's instructions stated: "Nowadays people put on clean clothes and it no longer suffice to ask them to sit on stones in a chief's palace. It is the Traditional Council to stop this as the *fon* cannot on his own decide to do away with any form of tradition". (ibid.) Any change had to be carried out under the cover of the Traditional Council. A few Quarter Heads and some literate progressives like Paul Tangang were co-opted into the reorganised Traditional Council during this period. The intention was to bring in educated and enlightened people to assist the traditional authorities (rulers) in the system. In fact, it was within the general frame of local government administration that a post-independent elite emerged in Bafut (File C2784, 1968).

#### **4. The Post-independent Elite**

From 1970, many more Bafut children attended primary, secondary, high schools, and universities abroad. Back at home, from the 1980s, with the increase in the number of primary schools and opening of secondary schools, western education was intensified.

With regards to higher training and university studies, before independence, some Bafut students were studying in American and English colleges and universities. They were spotted in various fields such as medicine, administration, government, engineering, social science and domestic science. After independence, a teacher training college established by the government near Bamenda added to the number of teacher-training institutions established by the Christian Missions. A Federal university was also created in Yaounde in 1962. As far as the enrolment of Bafut students in this university was concerned, Nebasina gave a figure of about 78 Bafut students in the University of Yaounde and its affiliated institutions during the 1980/1981 school year (Nebasina, 1984). Curiously enough, Abumbi II (often considered as the modern Fon of Bafut) was amongst these students at the time. One thing worth mentioning about these students is the special concern attached to the well-being of their local communities and development in general (Ntumgia, Personal Communication, April 7, 2010). University students at the time were eager to promote and propagate African traditions and culture. But as the saying goes "charity begins at home". The students had to begin the sensitisation from their local

communities of origin. It was against this background that in the early 70s, Bafut students in the University of Yaounde worked hard with the Fon, Abumbi II to disseminate the notion of economic and social development amongst the Bafut people back home. Their single goal was to unite the Bafut people in the struggle to change the face of the Bafut society within the context of modernism. The ideas which the students brought together, especially under the *Manjong* development association, helped a great deal to stimulate various changes or innovations in the Bafut community including traditional rule.

In the 1980s, President Biya opened more university centres in Douala, Ngaoundere, Dschang and Buea. The Buea University Centre opened its doors to students in the early 80s ( Ngoh, 1987). Some Bafut students were admitted in this centre while some other Bafut people were made lecturers. In later years, the University Centres were up-graded to fully fledged universities. This saw an increase in the number of Bafut students seeking admission into various fields of study. It can therefore be said that from 1962 onwards a good number of Bafut students have pursued university studies up to post-graduate level. They eventually constituted elitist groups like Bafut Elite Association (BELA) and have proven their worth as powerful potentials in the service of Bafut community. In fact, education was one of those forces of social change that brought a number of innovations in the social order that existed in the *fondom*. However, these innovations impacted traditional rule in one way or the other.

First many Bafut university elite began to hold positions of importance in the society. The teaching profession for instance, offered a preparatory ground for some teachers to embrace politics as a career. Being the most influential of the Westernised educated elite, teachers like M.M. Fusi, J.M. Nyamboli, Stanley Ayonghe and Nforngu gained positions of importance in Native Authority administration, local government business and politics. They also became very vocal when it came to traditional political issues in Bafut in the 1970s.

Independence was indeed synonymous to the devolution of political power to the educated people. In Bafut, some tried their hands in party politics and became councillors in the Local Council in Ndop. Some aspired to become members of Parliament. Still, others became influential members and leaders in the various political parties where they militated in the country. Such was the case of M. Fusi Naamukong, J.C Wanzie, William Moutchia and Neba Fabs. These were some of the most educated and seasoned politicians of Bafut origin whose activities and influence could not be minimised in the Bafut community and traditional political system.

For instance, Fusi Namukong was a West Cameroon parliamentarian and member of KNDP in the early 60s. He later became Municipal Administrator of Bafut-Tubah Rural Council in the 70s. Joseph Che Wanzie was West Cameroon Secretary of State for Basic Education between 1968 and 1969. Moutchia was West Cameroon Secretary of State for Public Service in 1970 and Henry Neba Fabs was the Vice President of CNU, Bafut Sub-section in the 70s. These were educated political elite who could use their

knowledge and position to effect changes in Bafut. However, our observation is that, the influence of the educated political elite in Bafut was greatly felt when it came to party or traditional politics, as well as related chieftaincy matters. Certainly with their presence, things were not going to be the same as of old.

If there is one thing related to university and higher education in Bafut, it is the impact it had on traditionalists after independence. The increasing ranks of university graduates caught the attention of some traditionalists in Bafut who interpreted the new phenomenon in various ways. One of them was the new Fon, Abumbi II. He had succeeded his father's throne in 1968 when still a college pupil in form three. He later on continued with his education to the university level, earning a law degree. In essence, the Fon was a blend of tradition and Western education in modern times. With such values, the youthful Fon was able to cause a number of changes in Bafut. For instance, it was through his initiative that the *Manjong* social and cultural association was created in August 1972 (Niba, n.d; MSCDA, 1972). The enthusiasm demonstrated by the Fon to bring change was equally reflected in many other educated persons in Bafut during this period.

However, in the view of Divine Ngwa, the presence of the educated people here created more problems than solution to the community. The elite interfered so much in local affairs (Ngwa, 1999). Their outlook on the society rather revealed a negative appreciation of traditional values in modern times. The westernised elite, acquired new habits, new fashion and style of life. He also tilted away from tradition and some of its practices on pretext that they were repugnant to modern life style. In rejecting tradition from the outset, he refused to participate in traditional activities and ceremonies. By so doing, he had indirectly created a rift in the community given that his refusal to participate in traditional activities was interpreted as refusing to work with the traditionalists. According to his Christian education, tradition was labelled "paganism" (Fontem, 1975). Consequently, Western education and tradition became parallel forces in the same community. The uneducated people now looked at the educated ones with suspicion. In this way, many changes that were initiated in the society through education were either considered as a concoction of sweet and bitter pills.

We mentioned earlier that in the 1970s, the educated youth developed interest in the study of his tradition and the values attached. This sounded like a sudden twist of the mentality of the educated African towards his society and tradition. In the University of Yaounde a new orientation to the study of African traditions and values was set in motion. Inspired by this, university students and professors of Bafut origin ironically championed the campaign for the promotion of their culture and tradition in the 1970s. The educated Bafut elite completely reversed his negative outlook or impression about his tradition and society. This time around, instead of outrightly rejecting tradition and its practices, they saw the need to blend it with modern education. This was done under the pretext of fostering development and social innovations in Bafut (Niba, n.d). The question as to how this fusion fostered



social change or development can be answered within the context of the self-help and cultural development associations, which the educated people formed in the 1970s. But what is evident here is that the on-going process of fusing traditional and Western educational values became the basis of conflict between tradition and modernism in the Bafut community. Yet the educated Westernised elite had to blame for the choice or trend they chose to effect change in the community.

In spite of all these, one thing that Western education did to Bafut, was the emergence of modern or enlightened self- help associations in the 1970s. These associations were formed by reputable Bafut students and elites who seemed to possess special talents and qualities. They were imbued with the spirit of unity. The flame of socio- economic development actually burnt in them as they sought various ways to improve on the life conditions of the populace in the *fondom*. The two self-help associations that emerge during this period were: the Bafut Students' Association (BASA) and the Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association (MSCDA). Following the important contributions these structures made in Bafut during this period, we thought it necessary to examine them detailly in this work.

#### 4.1 The Bafut Students' Association (BASA)

According to John Shu Fontem, BASA was created in 1959 with the aim of bringing together students of Bafut origin to work for their common interests (Fontem, 1975). Thus, during holidays, Bafut elements in post-primary institutions in and out of the country met to know themselves and also exchange ideas with each other. Such meetings created opportunities for the students to find ways and means of encouraging their younger brothers and sisters still in primary schools to work hard and enter secondary schools. From creation, BASA maintained a steady rise in numerical strength as well as recognition. The association reached its peak in the 1970s when it was able to influence decisions and changes in the *fondom* for the general good of the Bafut man.

Here, BASA did not only work hard to cause the formation of the first ever development association in Bafut (MSCDA) discussed below but also promoted the virtues of unity amongst Bafut people. According to one time Secretary General of BASA, Walters Che-Mfombong, during their days, BASA had as objective the desire to promote unity and solidarity amongst its members and work towards the unity and development of the entire Bafut *fondom* (Che-Mfombong, Personal Communication, April 8, 2010). At least, short of actually providing financial assistance towards developing the *fondom*, their ideas could contribute to bring change in the area. It was in this light that during summer holidays, BASA organised community work in all the quarters and villages in Bafut. For instance, under the leadership of Raymond Asombang as president of EBSA (2) in 1973, the Bafut students assisted in the Mankaha water supply project. They participated massively in digging the trenches for the water pipes. In 1974, they dug and transported stones from the stone pit at Njinteh which were used for development projects in the quarter. Under the auspices of what the students called "EBSA national

projects,” in 1974, they organised work and clean-up campaign at the palace of Chief Ntoh of Bawum and the road leading to it. After the national projects, students went back to their quarters and villages and organised work on bridges, culverts as well as cleaned up the roads and surroundings (Asombang, Personal Communication, December 22, 2009).

In the domain of culture, the display of Bafut culture in various ways featured prominently on the agenda of the cultural week and jamborees organised by the students in and out of Bafut. In fact, BASA students in both Universities and secondary schools displayed the culture of Bafut through traditional attires and dances on special occasions, such as National Day and Youth Day celebrations. They also organised exhibitions of traditional Bafut dishes and excursions to traditional sites such as the *nefo-o*. All these went a long way to promote Bafut culture at home and abroad. The student body often chose one of the quarters or village of their choice that would host the annual gala at the end of the cultural week. These were rare occasions where Bafut traditional authorities and elite were invited to attend and “showcase” solidarity with their children. In one of such occasions in 1973, the students were honored by the presence of the Fon of Bafut, Abumbi II at the gala organised at RCM Hall in Mambu. In another instance, a BASA annual assembly was held in Mankanikong. For the fact that the Fon, Sub-chiefs and other traditional authorities attended these occasions, that alone showed the degree of romance between the traditional rulers and the educated elite.

In sum, one positive point remains about BASA, that is, its mobilisation spirit when it comes to issues of culture, tradition and development in Bafut. Their human investment gestures in the villages of the *fondom* portrayed the eagerness and desire of the educated Bafut youths to fully engage and develop their homeland if more opportunities and means were placed at their disposal. Asombang buttressed this point when he said:

*The students had the spirit of human investment (community development) in Bafut. If they did not have enough money to carry out giant development projects in Bafut, they at least had the idea of development which did not only mean building skyscrapers for the people but understanding that the people needed a clean environment to live in, they needed good health and good portable water. Of course, a healthy body was the first step of development in a community (ibid).*

Little wonder then that the idea of forming a grand cultural and development association for Bafut in 1972 was hatched by students of Bafut origin in the University of Yaounde at the time. In fact the mobilisation spirit of the students towards this association attracted the attention of other Bafut people and this stimulated them to be part of the formation of the Manjong Social and Cultural Development Association (MSCDA) in Bafut.

#### *4.2 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. They eventually launched a campaign to educate Bafut people on these virtues. Other students in the university such as Pius Mforbekoh and Titus Mfornah were co-opted to join them in the venture. The idea soon spread among 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, p. 23)”. 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 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> August 1972. 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.

The appeal for unity was coming at a time when the Bafut community had been torn apart by tensions, old generational conflicts and recently, 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. 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).

One important objective of MSCDA was to mobilise Bafut people and other well-wishers to support unity and development in the *fondom*. In fact Manjong was to serve as a “think-tank” for the socio-economic development of Bafut (Ntumgia, Personal Communication, April 7, 2010). 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.

The ability of MSCDA to succeed in the development of Bafut depended on the proper functioning and organisation of the Association itself; its relations with the traditional authorities and institutions in the central palace. Thus, the administrative organisation previewed a general assembly, a president, a

steering committee, which comprised of a chair- man, secretary general, financial secretary and other posts. There were also branch executives and standing committees that facilitated the task of the executive or steering committee. With this arrangement, general elections were conducted as prescribed by the 1972 constitution. The Fon of Bafut was made President of MSCDA for life. He had to co-ordinate the functions of members of the executive, and summon meetings of the Steering Committee after consultation with the Chairman and the Secretary General. He was the first signatory of the association's account and was empowered to "do all such things that would foster the interest of the association as he shall deem fit and proper (Fontem, 1973)".

In fact, as a "modern Fon" enthroned four years before, Abumbi was expected to lead Bafut people to development and modernity. At this time of the formation of MSCDA, he was a young student and was therefore considered as a member of the modern elite by achievement and traditional elite by choice (3). This blend of modernism and tradition in a youthful Fon of Bafut at this time was seen as great gift to the people. Such a Fon at the head of a society punctuated by modern and traditional traits stood a better position to use his skills of the two systems acquired to balance or stabilise the forces of tradition and modernism wherever they conflicted in the society. The Fon had proven this skill or ability when he embraced the idea of the university students of Yaounde and translated it into reality. In fact, it was through the dynamic initiative of this youthful Fon that Manjong was inaugurated in August 1972.

However, the idea or game plan designed by the founding fathers of MSCDA was that the actual administration of the Association was to be in the hands of an executive chairman who headed the Steering Committee composed of elite. Hence, Martin Mfombe Fusi Naamukong was elected pioneer Chairman of MSCDA. The Chairman presided over all meetings of the General Assembly and Steering Committee. He presented annual reports to the Assembly. According to the Constitution, the General Assembly was convened once a year in the Fon's palace. It was the supreme organ of the Association and each time it met, each branch sent in 5 delegates to represent it. The Assembly adopted the activities, programs and projects of the Association. A permanent Secretariat headed by a Secretary General located in the Fon's palace ensured the execution of the decisions of the Assembly. It also maintained close contact with the branches (MSCDA, 1973e).

The Steering Committee was the policy making body of MSCDA. It conceived plans for development and controlled the finances of the Association. In terms of branch organisation, it was agreed that wherever a Manjong group was founded in the country or abroad, such a branch had to be ruled by an executive committee made up of a chairman, secretary, treasurer and financial secretary. Membership of Manjong was opened to all Bafut people, indigenous groups and all Cameroonians who were interested in the social economic and cultural advancement of Bafut (see pioneer executive managers and traditional leaders of MSCDA in Figure 1 and Figure 2).

With the above arrangements made, a complete blend of modern and traditional rule in the Bafut

community has been ratified and MSCDA proceeded with the setting up of its economic development strategies and organisation. Most of MSCDA's daring ventures and 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.



**Figure 1. Pioneer Executive of M.S.C.D.A, 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 (1<sup>st</sup> Ass. Sec.), J.C. Wanzie (Social Sec.), I.N.N Mbonifor (Financial Secretary), J. Shu Fontem (2<sup>nd</sup> Ass. Sec.)



**Figure 2. Pioneer Executive of M.S.C.D.A, 1972**

*Source:* P.N. Colour Star Photos studio, Commercial Round-About, Station Road, Mankon Mezam Bamenda, 1972. From left to right Muma, Ndimfor, Abumbi II, M.L. Niba, Fusi Naamukong, H. Neba –Fabs, I.N.N. Mbonifor and J. Shu Fontem

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. As remarked by the 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], 1973a, 1973f, pp. 4-6)”.

Hence, the economic priority projects designed by MSCDA included: opening up of 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 the Community Development in Bamenda to construct new streets and roads, as 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 (ibid.). MSCDA undertook to form 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 resolved to use a common language alphabet to create more unity and harmony amongst the Bafut peoples (MSCDA, 1973b).

From this base established in the early 70s, Manjong gradually evolved through the 1980s. It struggled to foster the socio-economic development of the Bafut community in modern times (MSCDA, 1973d; Fontem, 1973). However, the extent to which Manjong succeeded in its objectives of developing Bafut in various domains, since creation, constitute a focal point for discussion. The problems encountered by the association, especially with the traditional authorities are discussed below.

## **5. Traditional Rule and Modern Elitism**

It is worth noting that when the central executive of MSCDA was formed in 1972, apart from the Fon who held the honorific position of President-General, all other positions from chairman downwards to the advisers were held by literate people (see plates 1.1 and 1.2). This arrangement was indicative of the fact that tradition and its attendant institutions and administration was to take a second role position within the association. Many things in MSCDA were expected to be done with a clear vision of matching them side by side with the changing times and modernism, and within the context of government policy and prescriptions.

Secondly, MSCDA was born in the midst of political quarrels, land disputes and other conflicts that plagued the Bafut community. Abraham Neba Fube is quoted in John Shu Fontem to have remarked that:

*The wave of political quarrels, poverty and spleeny family and land disputes which always resulted to court cases [...] contributed to the lack of progress in the area. We thought that bringing the people together would help them understand this and solve their problems themselves. Other people have come to believe that Bafut was unfortunate [...] local political wrangles seem to have contributed a lot too, to Bafut's backwardness. Its representation in key administrative positions was too weak to cause any Government aid for developing the area* (Fontem, 1973, pp. 27-28).

This remark from Fube painted a general picture of the environment or scenario under which Manjong and its elite were to operate in Bafut at the time. The question at stake was how to trot along with these problems. Eventually, conflicts germinated from the Bafut community and affected the Association and its development projects in the area. The elite in pursuit of peace, unity and economic development in Bafut got entangled in local political issues that could hardly permit them to attain their objectives than run into conflict.

From all the arrangements made beginning with the Constitution of MSCDA, formation of central and branch executive structures, formulation of objectives and development projects, one salient observation is made. It is the fact that out of what was considered as an initiative of university students of Bafut origin emerged a powerful modern elite and intelligentsia in Bafut. Their high intellectual standing from a university background was to bring a new vision or orientation not only towards development prospects or strategies but also in some traditional practices in Bafut. This was to give a different orientation from what had existed under the traditional system and even the colonial era. The elite were to engage in development issues not only at the local level but also at national level. They were also to be concerned with local political issues and petty conflicts that were impeding peaceful coexistence and unity among Bafut people. But the question was how to integrate and accommodate the Manjong (led by the modern elite) in the political hierarchy or set-up of the Bafut *fondom*.

A number of questions cropped up in 1973. Firstly, did the traditional leaders or authorities in Bafut sincerely welcome Manjong? Secondly, what was the place or status of the new organisation and its leaders within the Bafut body politics? It was in the attempt to answer these questions that we got the following facts. Manjong was handicapped from the very beginning in her efforts towards development amongst the Bafut people. The involvement of the palace authorities in the business of MSCDA finally turned out to be the beginning of its doom and failure. This can be explained from many angles.

In 1973 a conflict of authority cropped up between MSCDA and the traditional institutions of the palace, which were ruling the *fondom* in the absence of the Fon. The main issue at stake was the



integration of MSCDA in the existing traditional structure or hierarchy. In other words, the position or status of the elected executive of MSCDA vis-a-vis the Traditional Council members, *kwifor* nobles and *takumbeng* princes had to be defined. This was not going to be limited to the palace alone. It had to extend to the various villages and quarters where the titled chiefs (*atangchos*) and quarter heads were present. This was actually imperative if the impact of MSCDA had to be felt amongst the populace at the grassroots.

As it turned out to be, the traditional authorities were not prepared to relinquish an iota of their authority to any new comer or institution being introduced within the existing traditional structure. Some sub-chiefs manifested their disgust by turning down all invitations that were addressed to them by MSCDA to attend a meeting of the Association at the Fon's palace. This attitude was decried in the report of the cultural Committee in 1973. The report stated: "We [...] note with regret that all *atangchos* have not appeared for the Manjong meeting. We call on the Fon and *kwifor* to iron out the differences that the *atangchos* say exist between the Fon, *atangchos* and the Traditional Council (MSCDA, 1973b, p.2)". It was therefore evident that MSCDA could not succeed in the villages of such chiefs without their support.

At the level of the central palace, *kwifor*, *takumbeng* and the Traditional Council raised eye-brows against MSCDA and its Steering Committee. The fear of losing their positions to MSCDA executives made it in such a way that, in spite the plans and good intentions of the Association, it never really took off at home. The traditional conservatives within the political system at the palace saw modernism advocated by MSCDA as a threat to their positions, traditional practices and habits. Before the 1973 General Assembly broke up, there was a sudden clash between MSCDA and *kwifor*. One of the members of the Association during the meeting suggested that *kwifor*'s activities be carried out in public or in the open instead of being secret as was the case at the time. Members of *kwifor*, backed by those of the royal family, retorted with a threat to sabotage Manjong. The argument ended in confusion. To J.S Fontem, this was the beginning of serious conflict of authority between MSCDA and the traditional institutions in the palace (Personal Communication, February 9, 2009). *kwifor* and *takumbeng* saw the wide-ranging attacks on their activities by Manjong as a threat to their dissolution. Besides, most members of the palace institutions (*juju* houses) were elderly and illiterate people. They saw MSCDA as an association of youths who lacked respect for their elders and who wanted to usurp their positions in the community. Thus relations between the two groups deteriorated and MSCDA had to suffer in the long run because the palace institutions refused to support the Association fully.

Abumbi himself had signaled this predicament in his opening address in 1973. He did not hide his feelings when he warned the so-called "young people or literate youths" to be careful with their utterances and criticisms of traditional practices. In that address, the Fon condemned the word "out-moded" used by the Bafut youths and literates to describe Bafut customs. He declared that a

number of social, economic and cultural practices, together with problems were handed down to the present generations. The dominant problem at the time laid in the adjustment of Bafut traditional government institution and customs so as to meet up with the demands of modern civilisation that was progressing rapidly in Cameroon. Abumbi remarked that Bafut intelligentsia had often described some of the traditional practices and customs as archaic, degrading and redundant. To them, these practices should be abolished in modern times. But most Bafut people would want to conserve their traditions and customs on grounds that their identity as a people laid within the bid to preserve these rich traditions and customs. In the end, the Fon particularly drew the attention of MSCDA to the fact that its leaders, especially the chairmen of Manjong branches were to be people with general knowledge of the Bafut people, their associations and other organisations similar to the Manjong. They must be people of good temper, conscious of the duty of reinforcing the rules of Manjong and other Bafut traditional institutions and organisations (MSCDA, 1973c).

In fact, this declaration of the Fon portrayed that the vision which he had about a modern development association in Bafut was one where modernism had to evolve alongside the traditions of Bafut. But the question which the Fon did not think of was what becomes of these two forces if they clashed along the line. This was where the bone of contention laid. There were instances where tradition conflicted with modernism and its leaders (the elite). Under such circumstances, the tendency was for tradition to triumph or dominate. The traditional authorities in the palace sought to impose tradition on the modern society and its organisations. Eventually, in a system where there was more of imposition than compromise, things could hardly work out well. This attitude of the central palace authorities contributed in killing the spirit of development in MSCDA and its modern elite. The clash between MSCDA and *kwifor* in 1973 was clear evidence that the application of modern administration and new ways of doing things would hardly work in so far as the customs and traditional conservatives in the Bafut community were concerned. In other words, they acted as speed brakes or obstacles to modern changes and development in Bafut. Manjong became a victim of this predicament.

However, elite like M.L. Niba are of the opinion that MSCDA to an extent was to blame for the predicament that befell it. According to Niba, when time came for the central and branch executives of MSCDA to be formed, they were composed exclusively of the new elite. The reason for this arrangement of leaving out the traditional elite stemmed from the naive notion that only the Western educated people had the answer to Bafut problems. This was the mentality inherited from the colonial master who equated tradition with conservatism and stagnation. So any meaningful planning for the future of Bafut was the business and prerogative of the new elite. To Niba, this was a wrong notion which merely portrayed the idealism of the founding fathers of MSCDA. It was no surprise therefore that Manjong soon ran into difficulties. The parallel arrangement soon set the modern and traditional elite against each other. It was not long before group interest sparked rivalries, especially with palace

institutions, like the *kwifor*.

On another occasion, the Fon's two brother assistants, the Ndimfor and Muma openly protested that they had been deliberately left out of the Manjong set-up despite their high standing in the traditional hierarchy. At the local level, things were no better. In Bafut itself, MSCDA branches never took off at the village level because they were considered as parallel governments. Outside Bafut where MSCDA branches were supposed to thrive, problems were rife on two fronts. First, there were rivalries between the Bafut "elders" who played the roles of *butabunukuru* or quarter-heads and the Manjong executives. Secondly, there were outright personality clashes for the top posts. All these inevitably weakened the Manjong branches. Moreover, as the number of Bafut people increased in the urban centres, it became difficult to manage such large numbers. Village or family and interest group meetings were becoming increasingly popular. The MSCDA branches merely vegetated. This syndrome reflected itself in the centre as the central executive had not been recognised since its first election. In other words, Manjong found it difficult to integrate itself within the Bafut hierarchy both at home and abroad. The result was that MSCDA was reduced to a replica of its traditional counterpart, namely, a forum where the rabble of Bafut elements meet monthly to exchange gossips and drink. Once more, the issue of a strong Bafut organisation became a disturbing factor to many of the new elite (Niba, n.d).

Besides, most members of MSCDA failed to heed or take precaution to the warning given to them by Abumbi II in 1973. Here, Shu Fontem asked a pertinent question to the Fon of Bafut which read thus:

*Your Highness, the strongest traditional organisation in Bafut is the kwifor – the powerful secret juju house. Already the relationship between this juju house and Manjong is very poor. Do you think that such conflict can wreck Manjong which is only a development association?*

The Fon's response to this question was straight and categorical. It also read:

*Yes, if Manjong does not control its attacks on kwifor, then people's support for Manjong will be weakened. I have already taken a series of measures to check this. Nothing about kwifor shall be discussed in the MSCDA General Assembly. Anybody can propose any thing concerning kwifor [...] through his Manjong branch to the steering Committee of the Association which then discusses it and empowers me [the Fon] to follow it up with kwifor* (Fontem, 1973, pp. 18-19).

This was a clear signal that any future or eventual involvement of the palace traditional institutions or politics in Manjong business was to generate conflict that could destroy the Association.

In another instance, the Fon was asked: "Your Highness, could you define the relationship between the Bafut Traditional Council and the Manjong Development Association?" The Fon responded:

*It is quite difficult and the lack of a definition has resulted in a conflict between the two. Let me say right away that without the Bafut Traditional Council Manjong would not be effective. The Bafut Traditional Council implements Manjong's decisions. As far as development is*

*concerned Manjong is supreme, while on matters of administration, the Bafut Traditional Council is supreme (ibid., p. 19).*

There were some traditional proceedings and practices that were affecting the well-being of the Bafut community negatively in modern times. Such was the case of customary court judgments related to land disputes, marriages and other traditional issues. When this issue was presented to the Fon, he acknowledged that the difficulty or bone of contention was with the adjustment of these traditions to match with modern ways of living. However, this was not to say that change was impossible. Adopting a gradual process or approach towards these traditional practices was much better than trying to change them violently. If the “traditionalists” were made to understand things in a peaceful manner, they would readily change their traditional ways or practices (ibid.).

Yet the intelligentsia in MSCDA were bent at ensuring that some traditional practices were rapidly reformed or changed so as to enhance the welfare of the people and Bafut culture (as a whole) in modern times. This was especially the case with practices that were related to marriages, births and death celebrations in the *fondom*. At one point, *kwifor* felt that the elite in MSCDA were stepping too hard on its toes. Hence *kwifor* resisted any changes proposed by Manjong on the Bafut traditions and customs. In actual fact, resistance to changes by the traditional authorities was a stumbling block to social, cultural and economic development in the area. Development generally entailed change from one old thing to a new one or change from old ways of doing things to new ones. Since the traditionalist was resistant to change, MSCDA was frustrated in her development objectives. Its leaders were intimidated by *kwifor* nobles who claimed to be the ones in command of the Bafut community at the time. It became difficult for MSCDA to steer the development machinery in Bafut. Most of the development projects ended on paper while some were abandoned halfway. In all these, the Bafut Traditional Council quickened the speedy collapse of MSCDA and its projects. This can be explained.

As seen in the interview conducted by Shu Fontem with the Fon in 1973, Abumbi II was asked to define the relationship between the Traditional Council and the new Manjong development association. The Fon responded that without the Bafut Traditional Council, Manjong would not be effective. The Council implements the decisions of Manjong. As far as development was concerned, Manjong was supreme, while on matters of administration, the Bafut Traditional Council was supreme (Fontem, 1973). When it came to deliberations over development projects in the General Assembly meeting of 1973, the Economic Committee appealed to MSCDA that if all projects in the *fondom* had to depend on the availability of money, then it would be difficult to realise them. Instead, if many hands were put together, they could do a lighter job. For this reason, the Committee appealed to the Traditional Council to mobilize all Bafut people in the *fondom* to be ready to provide the necessary manual labour as part of their contribution to the development of the *fondom*. The Committee also noticed that the rigid system of land tenure in Bafut was going to be a threat to economic development if it was not carefully

revised.

An appeal was thus sent to the Bafut Traditional Council, which was the body in charge of land matters to execute some of these recommendations or reforms. For the economic projects to succeed, the Committee proposed that a local based subsidiary committee be formed to work in collaboration with the Traditional Council, especially in the implementation of future projects. The Committee expressed the necessity to mobilise the Bafut population to actively get involved in all development projects envisaged by MSCDA. The chiefs and other traditional authorities in the quarters and villages (who were by right members of the Traditional Council), were charged with the duty of educating their people on the importance of Manjong and its policy of development envisaged for the *fondom* (MSCDA, 1973a). (4)

Unfortunately, the appeals made by MSCDA fell on deaf ears. The Traditional Council interpreted its involvement in Manjong business as though it was an attempt by the association to usurp its functions, reduce its powers in Bafut or subject its authority to that of Manjong. This assertion was confirmed by Shu Fontem when he writes:

*Even the Traditional Council thinks its powers are about to be reduced. It accuses the [...] Association of assuming too much authority [...] the struggle for power and authority among constituted groups in Bafut is conspicuous. This enigma was to gradually sprout to destroy Manjong* (Fontem, 1973, p.64).

From the above, it is clear that MSCDA could hardly succeed at home because of the presence of the Traditional Council, which was out to defend its interests within the Bafut political set-up and the community as a whole.

For instance, before 1973, the Council performed certain functions or duties, which they felt were to be taken away from them following the creation of MSCDA. The Council had a development committee which took care of the general development of Bafut, especially in the domain of road construction and maintenance of markets. Agricultural workers were co-opted in all the villages to be part of this committee so that they can help the villagers on aspects of crop cultivation. Before the creation of MSCDA, the Traditional Council had arranged the community in such a way that once a week, the villagers devoted themselves to cleaning their individual compounds, latrines, private roads and houses. One day in a month was devoted to cleaning all quarter roads and public places. Every Bafut man or woman was called upon to attend development work on the fixed days allocated by the Traditional Council. Those who absented themselves from development work were tried and fined to pay either money, fowls, goats or palm wine to the Council. The Council dealt with every aspect of the people's life, handling every issue related to social, economic and cultural affairs of the community. The sub-chiefs, quarter heads, *kwifor* nobles, and *takumbeng* princes who constituted the Traditional Council benefited or reaped fruits from these activities.

Therefore, it became obvious that MSCDA was going to be a victim of traditional politics and polemics in the palace. The traditional authorities at home, in spite the appeal of MSCDA, were not really motivated to join the wagon of the Association for fear of their positions and interest. A role conflict thus occurred between the Traditional Council and MSCDA. This was especially so because the Traditional Council did not see MSCDA as a partner in development but as a “usurper” of its duties or functions in the community. Furthermore, the two bodies operated on different lines of thought or ideologies. While the Traditional Council operated purely on native law and custom, MSCDA was composed of educated men who hoped to operate the structure based on modern trends of administration or ways of doing things. Native customs and modernity were like “day and night”. That is, they were two incompatible phenomena such that up to 1973 they had not agreed on a point of harmony between them. That is why all the efforts made by MSCDA to cajole the traditional authorities in Bafut to get into its wagon ended up in a fiasco.

In fact, MSCDA had foreseen this conflict. That is why the Association did not oppose the activities of the Traditional Council directly, but appealed for collaboration (partnership) with them. In all the reports presented by MSCDA Committees in 1973, one message was echoed time and again. It was the fact that the collaboration of the Traditional Council was very imperative because without it, things were going to be difficult for MSCDA in her efforts to carry out projects at home. In the absence of the Fon at home and with many MSCDA members scattered all over the national territory, the Traditional Council was the only appropriate structure permanent at home to implement the decisions of MSCDA. Unfortunately, this turned out to be the contrary. The Traditional Council rather saw the presence of MSCDA as a threat to its position and authority in Bafut than as a partner in development. In the absence of a competent administrative structure and people of strong will and devotion at home, MSCDA was bound to fail in its objectives and development efforts.

The traditional authorities in Bafut were partly responsible for this predicament. While these traditionalists were less interested in the realisation of development projects in Bafut, they were more excited or attracted by projects, which they knew had great sums of money to execute. Since they were the ones at home to execute the projects, it was certain that money would enter their hands. Consequently, most of the projects envisaged and adopted in 1973 never saw the light of day. The point of focus was not financial misappropriation per se. it was the impact which the involvement of traditional authorities in the financial business of Manjong had on MSCDA and the Bafut community as a whole. Much money was spent by MSCDA on palace up-keep, entertainment, renovation and related traditional issues than was actually spent on development projects in Bafut. This feat was facilitated by some MSCDA leaders and members who soiled themselves in traditional issues and polemics at the central palace.

The rush for traditional titles and chieftaincy at the central palace orchestrated by some MSCDA

members contributed to the downfall of the Association. While the struggle to integrate the organisation into the political hierarchy in Bafut was on, some top ranking elite of MSCDA instead used the association as a passage to obtain traditional titles and positions for themselves. This act could be likened to what we referred to here as the “transformation of the modern elite into traditional elite”. A glaring example was the case of the national Financial Secretary of MSCDA’s Steering Committee, I.N.N. Mbonifor. This was a senior civil servant in the Department of Taxation and the son of a staunch Christian commoner in Niko Bafut. Mbonifor was appointed second class chief of Nsem quarter in 1982. The traditional titles were not in themselves bad, but they served as avenues through which the focus, objectives and development efforts of MSCDA were either derailed or soiled in local traditional politics and polemics at the central palace. This became dangerous for the existence and survival of MSCDA. This assertion can be explained.

First, as mentioned earlier, the combination of modern and traditional elitism would have been a good blend of skills and talents required for development in Bafut. But those who went searching for these titles compromised the objectives of Manjong. They either concentrated on their traditional issues in the palace or they were used as stepping stones by the traditional authorities to tap the financial resources of MSCDA for their personal interest and entertainment. John Shu Fontem lamented on this predicament when he states that it was not uncommon to find an elite of MSCDA who had not paid the token annual development fees of 5000 F CFA but had spent huge sums of money to acquire traditional titles at the central palace (Fontem, Personal Communication, February 9, 2009).

Within the Bafut traditional system, to rise to a full noble (*nkum*) or royalty (chief) was by no means a small affair. The rise to prominence or top of the political and social ladder involved heavy ceremonies and feasting of members of the central palace institutions. The payment of such palace dues was not an issue of choice for those seeking such traditional titles; it was incumbent on them to fulfill all the obligations involved in each stage. According to Vincent Amancho, the hundreds of thousands often used for such occasions would have been injected into MSCDA to spur development projects in the *fondom* (Amancho, Personal Communication, August 28, 2009). Perhaps it is important we take a pause here and look at the procedures and what it took to belong to the ranks of those Niba refers to as “traditional elite”.

The qualification of an individual as traditional elite was based on the fact that the status or title in question was recognised and accredited by the palace or the Fon. This status was either ascribed, that is, if one was born into it and inherited it or acquired, that is, if one earned it by hard work. Those born into the elite class were the Fon and his family who comprised the royal class at the top of the social structure. Next was the nobility (the *bukum*) who consisted of commoners raised to this rank by virtue of their services to the Fon and the *bukum*. Then the ordinary man came next, and finally the slaves. By this arrangement, the traditional elite status in Bafut was for the most part acquired and not ascribed.

Every one including the royals worked for his or her status. The elite in Bafut traditional society were people who had distinguished themselves in the various fields of endeavour such as administration, crafts and arts. There were others who had achieved fame as war heroes, killing some dangerous animal or some other act of interest to Bafut.

At the head of administration was the Fon and his closest royal advisers. Then there were the members of *kwifor*. The prerequisite for being a *kwifor* member was that one must have attained the nobility rank after meticulous selection and training. The way of attaining such prominence was to start as a page (*nchinda*) in the palace. After a period of about ten-to- fifteen years, the person was graduated in the midst of elaborate ceremonies and feasting. He graduated into a *che-e* and stayed in that rank for two years and went around with the *bukum* seeing how things were done. Then he was raised to a full *nkum* and could become a *kwifor* member. But that was by no means the end of the road. There was still a long hierarchy in *kwifor* house to be followed. To rise in that hierarchy involved further ceremonies and feasting of members (Niba, n.d; Ritzenthaler, 1967). From this arrangement three salient points stood out clear.

Firstly, traditional elitism in Bafut was not equated with wealth accumulation. Secondly, it was not synonymous to knowing “book,” that is, the number of PhDs that one obtained in renowned universities that automatically qualified him for a traditional title, chieftaincy, or political post in the Bafut community. Thirdly, no one could come out of the blue and expect to occupy a top ranking position or chieftaincy title in Bafut. Apart from the royals and those decorated and raised to high ranks by virtue of their particular skills and heroic achievement, all others had to laboriously work their way into the elite group. The question now is how did the modern elite seeking traditional titles and power work their way into the traditional system.

From the explanation given, it is clear that most of the modern elite seeking top and high ranking positions in the Bafut palace and community did not pass through the stages we just elaborated. They used wealth and affluence to cajole the palace authorities to award them the titles. This was synonymous to using short-cuts to attain fame or gain positions and authority within the traditional set-up. All these were considered as unscrupulous methods and attitudes of MSCDA members, which could not foster its development objectives and only contributed to cripple the entire organisation. How else could one explain the fact that up to the early 1980s, MSCDA had not yet gained a comfortable position within the Bafut hierarchy whereas its members were already having chieftaincy and noble titles within the traditional set-up. This simply justified the assertion that some MSCDA members were out to use the Association as a leeway to accumulate both modern and traditional positions in Bafut.

Of course, the attempt to combine modern and traditional elitism, or better still, modern and traditional authority was not an easy task. The bone of contention was even with the original traditional elite who did not have the opportunity to acquire modern education or the status of modern elitism. Eventually



the traditional elite became afraid of their positions that were endangered by the “mad rush” for traditional titles unleashed by the modern elite within a set-up that belonged to the traditional elite. In fact, it was difficult to convince a traditional elite at the central palace that the title of *nkum* which took him several years to earn and was costly (feasting at the palace) would be awarded in “one day” to a modern elite because of wealth and affluence.

However, as the Bafut saying goes, something cannot enter the palace and go out again. The traditional elite at the central palace developed a strategy of dealing with the modern elite who dared to poke nose or trespass on soil that was not theirs. They collected huge sums of money and material things from these elite and gave them the titles they wanted. But as time went on, it was left for the individual concerned to see for himself that he had no position of any substantial influence within the traditional system and should therefore retreat quietly and lick his wounds in a private little corner ( Yaancho, Personal Communication, December 30, 2003) .

One thing remains and it is that, in the post-colonial era, the rate at which the modern elite sought traditional titles was alarming. This was not only rampant in Bafut but also in many other communities even in neighbouring countries like Nigeria and Ghana (Ikime, 1965; Lentz, 1993). Many educated persons who happened to have amassed a bit of wealth in the cities, went back home to acquire traditional titles. In doing this, they did not only squander huge sums of money that would have been used for development in the community but also caused tension and wrangles within the traditional system and the society as a whole. Bafut was therefore not alone in this predicament. It became obvious that MSCDA could not fare well under such conditions. Its development objectives and projects could hardly attain fruition under the circumstances.

In brief, it can be said that three important factors influenced or dictated the pace of events and the role the Bafut elite played in development ventures during this period. These were traditional practices, customs and palace politics. They served as impediments to development in a modern set-up. From the outset, the *fonship*, *kwifor*, *takumbeng* and other traditional institutions or organisations had made it known that they were uncomfortable with moves that tempered with the tradition and customs on which their authority and livelihood in the community revolved. One thing that was clear was that for Bafut to progress or develop within the context of the modern state, certain sacrifices had to be made. Tradition had to pay for modernism to come by giving up certain customs and practices that were becoming “repugnant” to development brought by MSCDA to the *fondom*. Resistance to change in some instances was synonymous to rejecting Manjong that had been accepted at the start.

The lukewarm or “shifting” attitude of palace authorities to serious development projects discouraged members of the Association. Yet before becoming educated or modern, the new elite were first of all Bafut by birth. They were expected to be rooted in their tradition and respect it as such, even if they were not compelled to respect customs and traditions which were a hindrance to development, unity

and peaceful coexistence among the people. As remarked by Owusu Brempong, any good tradition must be flexible and dynamic. That is, it must be ready to face the challenges of changing times. Aspects which fostered the wellbeing of the governed had to be strengthened and those which impeded progress and livelihood had to be discarded (Brempong, 2006). The attitude of the palace authorities towards criticism by learned people of traditions that did not help to foster development revealed that they did not see anything wrong with certain customs so long as their interests were maintained in the practices even at the expense of others. They believed that suggestions to amend or discard certain customs and practices were directed against them. This was the environment within which MSCDA operated. With such incompatibility, MSCDA faced a number of problems in Bafut.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has examined traditional rule vis-à-vis modern elitism in Bafut from the 1970s to 1982. The major agents or forces of change at work during this period were the state government, traditional authorities and the western educated elite. The results of change during this period (no matter the form it took) had both positive and negative impacts on the Bafut society. Today, in spite of the shocks that the forces of change emitted, modernism and tradition have come to stay. They are bound to co-exist side by side. This is a source of strength to both the Bafut rulers and people. It is up to them to select what is the most valuable thing in both the old and the new social order for the betterment of their conditions and society in general. Of course, all the conditions required for progress and development were enshrined in the schools, churches, intelligentsia, knowledgeable technicians and women of power and dignity. This is what social change represented in Bafut. As Ritzenthaler puts it, the people and generations to follow must learn to sift and winnow (1967).

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### Notes

- Note 1. Native and Magistrate courts had become corrupt due to bribery and the existence of Barristers at Law.
- Note 2. It is worth noting that in the early 1970s, the student association was renamed "Entire Bafut Students' Association" (EBSA) before the change was found irrelevant and so the original name – Bafut Students' Association was maintained.
- Note 3. From 1971, the Fon went back to college to continue with his education that was disrupted by the 1968 succession. From there he went up to university level, earning a law degree.
- Note 4. By 1973, the Bafut Traditional Council was made up of 100 men. Out of these, 15 Sub-chiefs were permanent members of the Council by virtue of their position. *Kwifor* and *takumbeng* members were also present.