

Contesting Power and Identity in Mbumland: The Case of Moh And Nkambe Fondoms

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Abstract: *The Moh and Nkambe Fondoms of Donga and Mantung Division of the North West West region of Cameroon are two historically identifiable polities that have maintained an uneasy coexistence over the years. This lack of conviviality was informed by a historical power tussle translated a supposedly kindred people coexist on the Nkambe plateau as incongruous bedfellows. This paper seeks to examine the attempt of the Nkambe Fandom¹ to lord- it - over the Moh Fandom and how this hegemonic tendency generated issues of power and identity culminating into animosities between the two erstwhile kindred people. The paper describes and analyses the genesis of animosities between the Moh and Nkambe Fondoms. With the advantage of secondary authoritative sources in the main and complemented by interviews conducted with stakeholders in and out of the study area, the paper argues that the attempt of the Nkambe Fandom to denigrate Moh as a fandom instigated internecine conflicts urging the inhabitants of Moh to consistently and persistently argue and demonstrate that they were different and independent of the Nkambe Fandom. The complex colonial, post-colonial processes and the role of Fon Ibrahim Jabo Nfor of Nkambe also played a role in fanning the vendettas between the two fondoms. The study reveals that the conflicts climaxed when the Nkambe Fandom wanted to take advantage of their numerical strength and reduce Moh Fandom into a quarter within wider Nkambe and which by implication deprived the latter of the right to own a royal stool and regalia.*

Key words: *Mbum, Fandom, Identity, Authority.*

I. Introduction

The Mbum formerly and derogatorily referred to as the “Nsungli” occupy the northwest corner of the present-day North West Region of Cameroon.² They form part of the larger Tikar ethnic group of Semi-Bantu origin. They speak Limbum, the language, which is derived from two words *Li* meaning “language” and “Mbum” referring to “the people”. Limbum therefore refers to the “language of the Mbum”.³ Before 1949, the Mbum of Nkambe Plateau formed part of the Bamenda Division but were later split in 1949 to make up one of the three Divisions that made up the Bamenda Province of the Southern Cameroons (the others included Bamenda and Wum Divisions). After Southern Cameroon’s achievement of independence in 1961 by joining the Republic of Cameroon, the Mbum of Nkambe Division formed part of West Cameroon State of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In 1972 however, the Nkambe Division was re-baptized Donga and Mantung Division.⁴ From November 12, 2008 to present, the people constituted one of the six Divisions of the North West Regions of Cameroon.⁵

¹ Fandom is the equivalent of Kingdom in Western coinage

² NAB, File No. AC13, E.G. Hawksworth “Nsungli Clans, Bamenda Division” Assessment Report, 1924.

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³ PN Nkwi and JP Warnier, *Elements of a History of Western Grassfields* (The University of Yaoundé: Department of Sociology, 1982), 149-71. See also P.N. Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy: A Study of Inter-Chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon* (The University of Yaoundé: Department of Sociology, 1987), 27-8. Details about the history of these ethnic identities will be given in Chapter One of this study. 45

⁴ In the past, the North West Region was referred to variously as “the Bamenda Grassfields”, “the Western Grassfields”, “the Western High Plateau”, “Bamenda Grasslands”, “the North West Province” and of course, now, “the North West Region”.

⁵ Ibid

“Nsungli”⁶ was made up of three family groups or village areas- Clans. They included the the Warr Clan, the Ya Clan and Tang Clan.⁷ Each Clan is made up of a number of villages and falls under the sovereignty of Clan Heads. The Warr Clan is made up of Mbot (Clan Head), Binshua, Bogom, Bihnjeng, Chup, Mbaa, Moh, Njap, Njirong, Ntumbaw, Nkambe, Nwangri, Saah, Sop, Kungi and Wat. The Ya Clan villages include Ndu (Clan Head), Konchep, Luh, Mbipgo, Nseh Makop, Njimnkang, Njilah, Ngvulu, Sehn and Wowo while the Tang comprise of Talla (Clan Head), Binka, Bih, Kup, Ntundip, Ngarum, Sinna, Taku and Tabenken.

Before the arrival of the British among the Mbum, the Germans had already established contacts with them in 1902 shortly after their capture of Nso.⁸ However, the period of German administration virtually came to an end in 1914 following the outbreak of the First World War in Cameroon. From the period of the German departure in 1916, there was an interregnum characterized by a chaotic atmosphere in local administration among the Mbum from 1916 to 1922.⁹ The interregnum featured attempts by local traditional authorities to re-assert their sovereignty.

The coming of the British led to the re-establishment of an administration characterized by chieftaincy re-organization. Outstanding in the local administrative arrangement was the fact that the British reinforced the Clan system among the Mbum by creating three Native Authority Areas in 1935 corresponding to the three Clans that made up the Mbum. This hindered a united action among the people who according to Jones Tanko Mangoh felt “particularistic and tribalistic and did not have any sense of unity in issues of national interest”.¹⁰ Moh and Nkambe were all Mbum communities under Warr clan. When they settled, they set up separate traditional administrations: a centralized system of governance with the chief at the helm assisted by quarter heads, council and *Nwarong*. Moh and Nkambe had separate week days that were highly honoured, observed and respected within the different communities. The attempt by Nkambe to subjugate Moh and insert it as quarter answerable to the Nkambe *Fondom* and the resistance of the Moh triggered vendettas and conflicts.

II. Reasons for Conflicts between Nkambe and Moh

The co-existence between these two Mbum *Fondoms* of the warr Clan has gone through an avalanche of hurdles. All these could be attributed to existentialist struggles. Nkambe *Fondom* perceived and treats Moh as a mere quarter in her *Fondom*, but Moh regards herself as an independent Warr *Fondom* with due *Fonship* institutions. All these explain the reasons for years of animosities as they disagreed on the following.

III. Conflict over the possession of Royal attributes

The initial disagreement between Moh and Nkambe hinged on the possession of Royal attributes like *Nkeung* and *Ndapngong* recognised as emblems of sovereignty in Mbumland. Moh argues that on settlement she was in possession of *Nkeung* and *Ndapngong* (Royal Shrine) which were absent in Nkambe. According to Moh, Nkambe therefore skilfully came up with a union Known as *Juninkambe* in order to be part of the *Fonship* attributes.¹¹ The union initially involved Nkambe and Binju who migrated together but was enlarged to include Moh. Nkambe was never represented in the royal shrines which made it difficult to dictate its operations. It was for this reason that any conflicting action against Moh was channelled through the colonial court or reported to the administration. Unlike in Mbum where even when *Nwarong* was seized it was kept at the palace of the chief who ordered the seizure, Nkambe allowed that of Moh with the Gendarmes and later the police. This was the indirect way of recognizing the autonomy of Moh.¹²

⁶ The term “Nsungli” or “Nsungni” was an insolent and pejorative appellation used by the Nso to denigrate the Mbum. It was never accepted by the Mbum as their name. Note also that the Nso also used „wirikutum” to refer to the Mbum all out of spite.

⁷ 4 NAB, File No. AC13, E.G. Hawkesworth “Nsungli Clans, Bamenda Division” Assessment Report, 1934. 1.

⁸ NAB, File No. AC 13, E.G. Hawkesworth, ADO, “Assessment Report Nsungli Clans, Bamenda Division, 1924”. 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jones T. Mangoh, “The Wimum of the North West Province of Cameroon, 1700-1961”, (University of Ilorin: Long Essay in History, 1986), 165-66

¹¹ Cornelius Angoh, Hunter, 70years, 02/01/2017, Moh. He is the Prince of Moh.

¹² Godfrey Dogo, Farmer, 78years, 02/01/2017, Moh. He is Family Head of *Ntorr* quarter, closest to Moh palace.

IV. Disagreement over the right to the ownership of the Nwarong

Nwarong was the highest symbol of authority in Mbumland. This was the institution that dethroned *Fons* when they went contrary to the laws and customs of the land. The *Nwarong* also inflicted punishment to recalcitrant members of the community. The institution was believed to be traditionally all powerful because its foundation was laid on human blood and mystical initiation sacrifices.¹³ Any palace in Mbum traced the origin of her own institution to a particular place.¹⁴ Nkambe traced the origin of her *Nwarong* from Lassin-Noni.¹⁵ Moh traced the roots of her *Nwarong* from Mbot village. The genesis of the rift between Nkambe and Moh was over the right to own *Nwarong*. Nkambe maintained that Moh had no right to this Fonship institution since she considered the area as a detachment of the Nkambe *Fondom*. It was on the basis of this that Fon Ibrahim Jabo Nfor of Nkambe solicited the help of the post independent administration of Donga and Mantung under Kanjo Musa and the *Nwarong* institution of Moh was seized in 1983. Though the *Nwarong* was seized from Moh, they continued with its operational activities unabated. The *Nwarong* week days continued to be respected, and other subsidiary institutions like *Wan Mabou*, *Chumbuh* and the *Likang* continued their operations unperturbed. Tension however, continued to rise on both sides as Moh was not ready to put an end to the *Nwarong* Society's related activities.¹⁶ The SDO realised that the tension could result to bloodshed and sought the mediation of the then Parliamentarian for the Nkambe central constituency Peter Ngi Nsakwa.¹⁷ Despite all attempts, the question of whether or not Moh was privy to *Nwarong* continued to split the two polities apart.

V. Attempt by Nkambe to meddle in the affairs of Njema

An attempt by Nkambe to meddle in the affairs of Njema also caused the rift between the Nkambe and Moh *Fondoms*.¹⁸ To Moh, Njema was her quarter and no other *Fondom* had the right to enthrone sub chiefs in her fief no matter the situation. Nkambe however, considered the two as part of what constituted the Nkambe *Fondom*. Infact to the Nkambe, Moh and Njema were quarters within Nkambe on the basis of being recognised and gazetted by the administration.¹⁹ Moh refuted all these arguing that though both of them originated from one place, the course of migration dramatically changed everything as each created a separate socio-political institution.²⁰

VI. Fon Ibrahim Jabo's support of the Mbororos against Moh Women

Chief Ibrahim Jabo's support of the Mbororo against Moh women in a farmer-graziers' conflicts of the 1980s after his role in depriving the Moh of the *Nwarong society* raised tensions between both communities. The Moh had problems with Mbororos over the destruction of her crops by cattle. Chief Ibrahim supported the Mbororos and farm huts with crops were burnt. Some of the women were later sent to prison in Bamenda. Nkambe support for the Mbororos was as a result of the fact that Moh possessed the *Nwarong* as an autonomous polity.²¹

The problem of *Nwarong* erupted between 1983/1984 and aggravated in 2007 when Chief Nko Pedro (Mbembe IV) passed on to eternity and Chifu Edwin was enthroned as Mbembe V to replace him. The *Nwarong* of Moh was seized in the early 1980s by the administration on the request of the Fon of Nkambe. It was not taken to the Nkambe palace but left with the Gendarmes and later the Police.²² When Chief Edwin Chifu was enthroned the people of Nkambe realized that the *Nwarong* of Moh was functional and so crisis started again. The Administration sent administrative warnings to Moh insisting that Moh should stop the activities of *Nwarong*.²³

¹³ Shey Nfor, Farmer, 57years, 13/07/2020, Nkambe.

¹⁴ Fai Ndikontar, Welderer and traditional ruler, 60years, 26/06/2021, Bamenda.

¹⁵ Elias Asenge, Community Engineer, 60Years, 10/07/2020, Bamenda.

¹⁶ Tantoh Sule, Farmer, 60years, 27/10/2020, Moh. He is the head of *Nwarong* regulatory society.

¹⁷ Ignatius Weyih, Farmer, 67years, 27/10/2020, Moh.

¹⁸ Shey Nkevi, Farmer, 75years, 27/10/2020, Moh. He is one of the priests of (*Ndapngong*).

¹⁹ Shey Nkevi, Farmer, 75years, 27/10/2020, Moh.

²⁰ Emmanuel Nfor, Electronics Engineer, 53years, 30/08/2021, Yaounde.

²¹ Angeline Biewa, Farmer, 80years, interview by William Foncha, 16/12/2020, Moh. She served prison terms in Bamenda as a resultant consequence of the Farmers-Graziers problems. She is related to chief Ibrahim Jabo of Nkambe and Married in Moh.

²² Edwin Ngege, Teacher, 53years, 13/07/2020, Nkambe.

²³ Idem.

VII. The Award of Titles by the Fon of Nkambe to Moh Elites

The award of titles by the Fon of Nkambe to some Moh elites like Mathew Wacho Shey, Genesis Nformi Mbatu and Cyprain Ndage was not well received in Moh. The three persons had no history of chieftaincy in their families but took advantage of the differences between Nkambe and Moh to acquire titles of sub chiefs under Nkambe. Nkambe needed such confusion to achieve her goal of disintegrating the Moh fondom.²⁴ Shey, Mbatu and Ndage though enthroned as sub chiefs in Nkambe, never received any recognition and respect from the Moh palace. Though the three laid no claim to any successorship of any Sub chieftain in Moh, they took sub chief titles of *Ngah Bornya*, *Tarlah Nkfunko*, *Ndi Bomsa* in Nkambe in 2002, 2003 and 2012 respectively.²⁵ The palace of Moh did not recognize them as part of the royal class. They were rather considered as ordinary indigenes and addressed by their birth names.²⁶ When Mathew Shey died as an enthroned sub chief, Nkambe never organized any royal funeral nor burial for him. Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor, the author of his enthronement, never enthroned the successor of Mathew shey and so, the position remained vacant. When Cyprain Ndage became insane, Nkambe dethroned him as sub chief instead of seeking medical assistance. He was not replaced and the position like that of *Ngah Bornya* remained unoccupied.²⁷

VIII. Conflict over observation of week days

Moh had fixed days for the *Mfuh* and *Nwarong* which were highly respected and observed. The thorny issue was the observance and respect of the *Mfuh* weekday in Moh which coincided with that of the *Nwarong* of Nkambe. The *Nwarong* society of every village in the entire Mbum had a week (*Nkah Nwarong*) day on which it operated. On such a day people did farm work but no iota of noise was expected from drum or musical set. Noise was expected only from the members of the *Nwarong* society who chanted.²⁸ On the day that provision was heavy especially when provided by the *Tantoh*, the *Nwarong* itself was heard operating from the inner chambers of the palace. On the fixed day of the *Nwarong* (*Nkah-nwarong*), no sound of the drum, music or splitting of wood was expected within that given village. The fixed day for the *Nwarong* of Nkambe was on “Ye” a day immediately after the Nkambe market day (*Nkapye*). Such days were chosen based on the foundation of the *Nwarong* society of a community. The day set aside for the *Nwarong* of Nkambe prohibited the sound of the drum or music as well as the splitting of wood from all the quarters belonging to the Fondom.²⁹ Defaulters of the day were dealt with according to the prescribed laws and customs of Nkambe. *Nkoh* or *Chumbuh* were mandated to follow defaulters who paid heavy fines in forms of goats, fowls and raffia wine to the *Nwarong*.³⁰ Though the week day “Ye” was observed and respected in Nkambe it was not the case in Moh as *Mfuh* was hosted on the same day. While there was total silence in Nkambe, Moh was noisy with *Mfuh* and sounds from musical sets and xylophone. Every effort by the chief of Nkambe and the administration to suspend the *Mfuh* of Moh on several occasions failed.³¹

IX. Conflicts over Development Associations

The Moh Development Association (MODA) was formed in 1993 following the liberty laws of December 1990 as an Umbrella association. This association had as goal to develop the village in the economic and socio-cultural domains. Moh was lagging behind in development following many years of conflicts with Nkambe over autonomy.³² The formation of MODA acted as a booster to the neighbouring villages that also formed their different development outfits. MODA had not yet developed branches so her sons and daughters living out of the village especially in Bamenda enrolled in “*Tara*” which grouped most people from Donga and Mantung Division.³³ The group was formed in the early 1980s, and brought together indigenes of Nkambe, Binshua, Kungi, Moh, Bih, Binju and even friends who were non Mbum indigenes.

²⁴ Gladys Munjir, 85years, Farmer, 20/05/2011, Moh. She is aunt to Ibrahim Jabo Nfor. She was also imprisoned in Bamenda as a result of the Farmer-Grazier conflicts.

²⁵ Kizito Ngie, Photographer, 45years, 05/02/2021, Bamenda.

²⁶ Suit No. NM/19.C/08 OF 07th January 2009, Court of First Instance Nkambe.

²⁷ Kizito Ngie, Photographer, 47years, 05/02/2021, Bamenda.

²⁸ Chanting was a recollection of things happening in the community and well as memories of the deaths.

²⁹ Ngwang Ngebi, Farmer, 74years, 28/10/2020, Nkambe. He is member of *Nwarong* of Nkambe.

³⁰ Augustine Weyih, Farmer, 56years, 28/10/2020, Nkambe.

³¹ Lawrence Ngala, Municipal Councillor, 55years, 02/01/2017, Moh.

³² Nicolas Nfor, Traditional ruler, 53years, 02/01/2017, Moh. He is sub chief enthroned by Moh.

³³ *Tara* is a type of dance that consumes much energy because the entire body is involved. The dance was borrowed from the Mbembe area to most villages around the Nkambe central like Kungi, Nkambe, Binshua, Moh, Konchep and Bih. A group was formed in Bamenda called *Tara* that rallied all the sons and daughters of Nkambe, Binshua, Kungi, Moh, Konchep, Bih, Binju and even non Mbum indigenes. The group was formed

On 11 January 1998 the name of the group changed from *Tara* to Nkambe Cultural and Development Association with the acronym NKACUDA. According to the initiators, it was aimed at bringing together all sons and daughters of Nkambe, Binju and Moh for development. This therefore caused members who were not from Nkambe, that is, Binju and Moh to withdraw their membership. The advent of NKACUDA automatically dissolved the *Tara*. The creation of NKACUDA was a manifestation of authority because it still considered Moh a quarter of Nkambe.³⁴ Its Motto “Trio for development” still hinged on the legendary narrative of two brothers and a step who left Mbirboh.

NKACUDA was created when MODA was five years old with Motto being “Unity Love and Development”. Moh was part of NKACUDA owing to the fact that she was a member of the *Tara* before it was suppressed. She noticed when NKACUDA started holding congresses that everything was more about Nkambe and Binju, and less of Moh.³⁵ The association violated its constitution by splitting Moh and Njema who at creation was considered as a whole entity. The reason advanced by the Nkambe led administration, was that the former was too large in term and hence will demand greater of developmental attention.³⁶ Again the decision to host one of NKACUDA’s congress in Njema that was allegedly part of Moh with consulting the latter, made her to conclude that organisers of the event only completed what Nkambe had conceived as *Juninkambe*, *Juninkamoh* and NKACUDA to perpetually hold Moh and Njema as her quarters. Moh saw it as a determined attempt at assimilation and/or annexation, and so backed out of the union.³⁷

Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor as the traditional leader of Nkambe’s presence dominated most of NKACUDA’s meetings. He arrogated powers to himself and even over-shadowed the president, Paul Ngabir. His speeches at NKACUDA were reminiscence of the aged conflicts between Moh and Nkambe. His intention and that of some acolytes of the elite class was always to cause Moh to succumb to the status as a quarter within Nkambe and not as an independent polity. This interest was brilliantly displayed with the advent of NKACUDA. The exit of Moh as a way of protesting the inferior status assigned to her and her detachment from Njema, financial embezzlement of funds meant for her development, affected the unity of NKACUDA.³⁸ MODA disengaged and became committed to her home development. The commitment of MODA led to the realisation of or the construction of a hall, pipe-borne water and award of scholarships to pupils and students. NKACUDA and some of her elite took MODA commitment as a challenge and raised some money which was used to build two classrooms at Government School Moh all in a bid to sustain the endangered union. During the inauguration of the classrooms, Moh was not informed nor invited and so no body from Moh attended the ceremony.³⁹

Indigenes of Nkambe had realised that efforts at maintaining Moh in a union as a quarter under her *Fondom* was not yielding fruits. Hence they formed *Nka-Abee* in 2005. The association brought together only sons and daughters of Nkambe excluding Moh for the wellbeing and development of their village.⁴⁰ Indigenes of Nkambe invested their interests in *Nka-Abee* and reduced their participation in NKACUDA activities. Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor was made honorary technical adviser and *Nka-Abee* concentrated her development activities in the Nkambe *Fondom*. Binju, an initial member of the union, *Juninkabe*, had requested unsuccessfully that the name NKACUDA be changed for it signified only Nkambe and formed her family meeting called *BIFAME*.

around 1980 and a member could opt to host for a number of years. Hosting here refers only to housing of the members and their instruments. *Tara* was a weekly meeting that held every Sunday in the afternoon. Members were served with *Shaa* and Kolanuts provided by a rotatory member as provision. Savings and other financial transactions were being carried out during the weekly gathering. The objective of the group was to assemble people and attend to their needs in times of marriage, births, ill health and deaths. Emphasis was often placed on death as the transportation of corpse from Bamenda back home was expensive especially with the state of road. The transportation of the mortal remains of a member for burial in the village of origin was its modus operandi since created in 1980.

³⁴ NKACUDA 2005 Sixth Congress Report.1.

³⁵ Moses Shey, Trader, 43years, Trader, 27/05/2021, Bamenda. He is Member of *Tara*, NKACUDA and currently the National Financial Secretary of Moh Development Association.

³⁶ Paul Ngabir, Former National President of NKACUDA, 70years, 14/07/2020, Nkambe.

³⁷ Shey Moses, Trader, 43years, 27/05/2021, Bamenda.

³⁸ Julita Kimbi, Farmer, 67years, 02/01/2017, Moh.

³⁹ Emmanuel Njeng, Engineer, 56years, 11/04/2022, Bamenda.

⁴⁰ James Ngenge, Mechanic, 54years, interview by Mary Penva, 24/05/2022, Bamenda. He is president of *Nka-Abee*.

⁴¹ when she realised in 2006 that *Nka-Abee* was created exclusively to handle development issues independently from NKACUDA, she transformed *BIFAME* to Binju Cultural and Development Association (BICUDA). The alteration of *BIFAME* from a family meeting to a cultural and development association was a demonstration of equality and sovereignty with NKACUDA.⁴² The hosting of NKACUDA congress at Njema in 2008 as a manifestation of authority over Moh, instead helped to empower the former to also create her development association after the event. After the Congress, Njema Development Union (NDU) was formed for developmental issues separate from Moh and Nkambe. Njema stressed that immediately she was provided the hosting opportunity she created her association in 2007 and only presented to the public in 2008 after the congress. The creation of NDU did not only strained relationship between the two communities but within the Njema polity. Two groups emerged with a portion loyal to Moh and the other to Nkambe. Though there was division within the community, Njema, after the hosting of NKACUDA never considered herself as a quarter in Moh but a village under Nkambe fondom.⁴³

The interest of chief Ibrahim of Nkambe was always to be in alliance with anybody who could segment the Moh especially as chief Pedro Nko of Njema had estates in Gembu-Nigeria and spent most of his time there. He only came in from time to time but the village was in the hands of the traditional council.⁴⁴ During the hosting of the first NKACUDA Congress in Nkambe, Mathew Shey Wacho of Moh demonstrated his *savoir-fair* in *Ngoro* (shield display) and was shortlisted by Nkambe as one of the emblematic figures. He was also a charismatic orator and a crowd puller. Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor saw in him a person who could digress the population from Moh to Nkambe⁴⁵ He was enthroned in 2000 by the kingmakers at the Nkambe palace as a sub chief. He was the very first to be enthroned as a sub chief since the migration and settlement. His enthronement was a great achievement by chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor in his efforts at disintegrating Moh.⁴⁶

The newly enthroned sub chief adopted the name *Ngah Bornya* which was different from the sub chiefdom of his quarter *Bo-Ngvu*.⁴⁷ Though royal respect was not accorded him like those enthroned in Moh, he visited and recognised the palace but still maintained his sub chief title to the Nkambe Fondom until his death. News of his demise was reported to chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor who enthroned him but he did not show deep sympathy for the deceased and did not take part in his funeral rites. He instead blamed him for having increased the already existing animosities with Moh. As a converted Moslem, faithfuls from Nkambe, Konchep and Moh buried him according to their religious customs. He was not given a royal burial in line with the Mbum tradition of burying sub chiefs. No royal masquerade from Nkambe announced his demise as was done to other deceased sub chiefs. The chief of Nkambe remained silent over the death and never enthroned anybody to replace him. Moh also maintained silence over the issue and was keen to observe the actions of Nkambe in filling the vacuum left by the demise of *Ngah Bornya*. He was never replaced and the Moh did not either. The family had waited in vain for over a year for a royal response from Moh or Nkambe and so offered a memorial mass at the Catholic church Moh on behalf of the deceased to bid him farewell.⁴⁸

The next effort by Nkambe was the enthronement of Nformi Genesis Mbatu who took *Fai Tarlah Nkfunko* as his sub chief title.⁴⁹ Unlike *Ngah Bornya* who caught the attention of the chief of Nkambe to

⁴¹ Binju Family Meeting.

⁴² Isaac Afor, Designer, 43years, 24/05/2022, Bamenda.

⁴³ Ivo Nforbah, Farmer, 54years, 12/10/2020, Njema.

⁴⁴ Nformi Ngenge, Farmer, 70years, 02/01/2017, Moh. He is member of Moh traditional council.

⁴⁵ He was the first indigene of Moh to be enthroned as sub chief by Nkambe. He was not enthroned in Moh but Nkambe. His enthronement was done by kingmakers of Nkambe. He was born a Christian and later converted into Islam same like chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor. He had three wives and many children. No sub chiefdom had ever existed in his family but he was crowned as one. He was given the name *Fai Ngah Bornya* and he established a sub palace in his home. His title was not recognised by the chief of Moh and the population.

⁴⁶ Shey Nkevi, Farmer, 70years, 14/07/2020, Moh.

⁴⁷ Sih Takwe, Farmer, 70years, 30/12/2021, Moh. He is member of the sub chiefdom *Bo-Ngvu* quarter where Wacho Mathew Shey violated and took a different title. The sub chiefdom of *Bo-Ngvu* quarter is Ndi *Gwanya*.

⁴⁸ Titus Nko, Security Agent, 45years, 02/01/2017, Nkambe.

⁴⁹ As revealed by Genesis Ngenge a member of the sub chiefdom of *Tarlah Nkfunko*, Nformi Genesis Mbatu was born and bred in Moh. He worked with the Nkambe Cooperative Union and was very industrious. He had three wives and one died. He was a member of the *Buri* adult male group. The group was so powerful and worked together with the traditional council in the absence of the chief. *Buri* handled mostly witchcraft issues that affected the village and judgment was delivered at the palace plaza. As the oldest member of *Buri* the

enthroned him as sub chief because of his Shield display, Nformi Genesis Mbatu showed bravery when he dispersed the population of Moh when Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor visited Moh for reconciliation. Nformi Genesis Mbatu did not only disperse the population but also told the chief of Nkambe that he was not qualified to decide anything for Moh. The title was therefore offered him only because the chief of Nkambe badly needed people in Moh who could facilitate the disintegration of the polity. Nformi Genesis Mbatu was one of the charismatic men of *Buri* notwithstanding. Nkambe trusted him as an additional force to Wacho Mathew Shey that could help dismember the kingship in Moh. He however lost the respect of the Moh community especially as he was enthroned sub chief in Nkambe by the very leader he sent away from Moh. The people of Buri expelled him as member and he lost the crowd that held him as leader.⁵⁰

The acquisition of the sub chief title of *Tarlah Nkfunko* was a surprise to Moh because the indigenes knew that the successor to the throne after his uncle (Musa Nforbah) was Fai Vincent. Vincent was enthroned as a child while in primary school and the mother pleaded for his replacement. The throne was handed to his uncle, Musa Nforbah to handle until he grew to maturity. He was enthroned under the reign of chief Nko Pedro and kept at the palace according to tradition before he regained his sub chiefdom. According to Moh tradition, an enthroned sub chief or queen mother spent some time at the inner chamber of the palace for fattening before he or she was presented to the public. During the period, the person concerned did no job and had just to bathe, eat and rest until the day of his or her presentation to the public.⁵¹

When the Sub chief Musa Nforbah died, Fai Vincent who was the chosen successor was out of Moh and Nformi Genesis Mbatu took the opportunity. He knew very well that Moh could not enthrone him and so decided to acquire the title from Nkambe. He was inspired by Wacho Mathew Shey who had earlier obtained the title of *Ngah Bornya* from Nkambe. The sub chief position taken by Nformi Genesis Mbatu as *Tarlah Nkfunko* was never respected in his community. Moh considered him as an ordinary indigene in the community while adults and children alike ridiculed him whenever they saw him going to or returning from Nkambe. He gained respect only from his immediate household and some people from Nkambe. He spent little time in his sub palace like other sub chiefs enthroned in Moh because he was rarely visited. He spent his daily life in Nkambe not at the palace like sub chiefs because he was not fully integrated there as one. When chief Nko Pedro disappeared⁵² (died) in 2007 and Edwin Chifu was enthroned as his successor, Nformi Genesis Mbatu imposed himself as the overall leader of Moh. The reasons advanced were that the sub chiefdom of *Tarlah Nkfunko* was next to the palace of Moh and the new chief was young and still to master the arts of leadership. He considered his enthronement by Nkambe royalty as a mark of superiority and so, felt superior to his contemporaries in the palace of Moh. This action jeopardised the relationship with his colleague, *Ngah Bornya* and the entire community.⁵³

The first action he took against Moh was the erection of a sign post at the entrance to his compound which he later transformed into a sub palace. On the signpost was written 'Tarlah Nkfunko of Moh, Nkambe Fondom'. The matter was reported to the chief and the traditional council who drew his attention to it but he was unwilling to discard the signpost. Chief Edwin Chifu and the traditional council gave instructions and the board was removed and kept at the palace. The chief noted that since the area was occupied by the Moh palace, the sub chiefdoms including Njema, were never indicated by a signpost. He stressed that it would have been an innovation if Genesis Nformi was enthroned by Moh and frowned at the inscription on the board. He

population hailed and respect him. The chief of Nkambe and some members of his council took advantage of chief Pedro Nko and visited Moh palace for reconciliation in 1990. As Moh gathered to hear the message that brought the chief of Nkambe, Nformi Genesis Mbatu ordered everybody to disperse. He told Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor to take off for Nkambe because he was insignificant to take decisions for Moh. The people respected his order and dispersed while the chief of Nkambe and his people left. Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor admired him based on the respect Moh had for him. When he successfully enthroned Wacho Shey Mathew without any friction from Moh, he turned to Nformi Genesis Mbatu as Tarlah Nkfunko knowing well that he had no right to the sub chiefdom. Moh was embarrassed that he accepted to be enthroned as sub chief in Nkambe. Moh treated him as an ordinary indigene knowing that the vacant position was reserved to Fai Vincent from whom the uncle obtained the position and ruled because he was still too young. He increased the level of problems between Moh and Nkambe. 13/07/2020.

⁵⁰ Eric Ada, Blacksmith, 47years, 30/04/2022, Limbe.

⁵¹ Erick Ada, Blacksmith, 47years, 30/04/2022, Limbe.

⁵² Disappeared: refers to the death of a royalty in Mbum tradition. In this context death can be described as: missing, left, journey, disappeared.

⁵³ Titus Nko, Security Agent, 45years, 02/01/2017, Nkambe.

further reiterated that Nkambe that was in the urban centre did not implant signposts as pointers to her palace or sub palaces.⁵⁴

Nformi Genesis Mbatu reported the matter of the board removal at the Nkambe Gendarmerie Brigade and it was forwarded to the legal department while Chief Edwin Chifu was charged to ensure that the board was removed. He was supported in the charge by chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor of Nkambe who stood as witness. Though residing in Nkambe, chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor stood as witness in a matter that happened in Moh. This case was judged and ruled in favour of the chief of Moh because he enthroned the plaintiff as sub chief. The charge exonerated chief Edwin Chifu on grounds that the complainant and family were never injured and were safe in Moh.⁵⁵ When the chief of Nkambe realised that the judgment favoured Moh, he lodged a court case of usurpation of title against him. The chief, council members, Kingmakers and some youths were charged to court.⁵⁶ The chief was judged and jailed on grounds that he arrogated royal authority to himself as head of Moh while council members, kingmakers and youths were imprisoned for paying allegiance to him as leader. Some elders: Fai Tarlah Boh (sub-chief), Ngwayi Godfrey Dogo (notable), Ntoh Kekem, Angoh Cornelius (prince) suffered and died as a result of the deplorable prison conditions.⁵⁷ They were buried and their funerals celebrated but Moh resolved to be resilient notwithstanding. Nkambe insisted to be in charge of the royal feast of Fai Tarlah Boh who died as a result of the poor prison conditions but Moh refused and celebrated his funeral like the previous ones.⁵⁸

It should be noted that this was not the first-time authority was demonstrated over deaths, celebrated between Moh and Nkambe. Chu Kembang (*Nkfunke*)⁵⁹ and Ndimu died in prison as a result of refusal to hand over a Tiger skin to Nkambe who requested for it as a sign of supremacy. During their funeral celebration the chief and the *Mfuh* society honoured them with the display of *Nyafuma* which was a terrifying and uncommon masquerade in the line of masquerades in Moh. The masquerade was rare and displayed only during very dignified events involving heroes and heroines.⁶⁰ The most fortunate person saw the masquerade once or twice in his or her life time. This was because of the mystery and rituals that surrounded *Nyafuma*. During its outing in 1987 to celebrate *Nkfunke* and Ndimu, Nkambe prohibited her indigenes from participating but some obstinately took part. One of the indigenes of Nkambe who lived the event was Paul Ngabir Bantar. It was his first time to see the masquerade. He noted that as a young man he enjoyed the masquerade and the gallantry of the Moh who excelled in *Tara* and displayed *Ngoro* (shield display). He reiterated that his admiration for the shield display was because those involved acted as if they had no bones (i.e. their flexibility and dexterity).⁶¹ *Nyafuma* was linked to *Mfuh* but its membership involved mostly elderly male folks who were able and capable of performing many rituals and preserving principles. Membership was by succession after the death of one's father or grandfather who was a member. Restriction of membership was to avert many deaths and other casualties that ensued after the outing of the masquerade. Members spent about three months in the bush prior to its outing but over time, the death of elderly members resulted to a blend of membership between the old and young.⁶² *Nyafuma* was synonymous to Moh under the *Mfuh* since their migration and settlement. The masquerade was not found in the neighbouring communities including Nkambe. Efforts by Nkambe to exercise authority over *Nyafuma* was only to prohibit her indigenes from being part of its display.⁶³ The attraction of the masquerade

⁵⁴ Edwin Chifu, Traditional ruler, Driver, 35years, 02/01/2017, Moh.

⁵⁵ Edwin Chifu, Traditional ruler/Driver, 35years, 02/01/2017, Moh.

⁵⁶ Court judgment No.NM/19.C/08.07/01/2009.

⁵⁷ Derick Nkenenya, 40years, Carpenter, interview by Kingsley Angoh, Moh, 05/02/2021, Nso. He was among those dragged to court by the chief of Nkambe.

⁵⁹ Chu Kembang was the sub chief of *Tarlah Nkfunke* sub chiefdom who died in prison in Bamenda. Moh caught a Tiger and Nkambe wanted to be honoured with the skin as a sign of submission. Moh resisted and Chu Kembang and Ndimu represented her in the matter against Nkambe.

⁶⁰ Gilbert Tanyu, Farmer, 53years, 25/08/2020, Kumba.

⁶¹ Paul Ngabir Bantar, Former Mayor of Nkambe Council, 70years, 14/07/2020, Nkambe. He is an indigene of Nkambe. He was one of the brains behind the formation of Nkambe Cultural and Development Association (NKACUDA) formed in 1998. He was the pioneer president of the association. He is the former president of the Bamenda Police Cooperative Credit Union Limited (BAPCCUL) and the Cameroon Cooperative Credit Union Limited (CAMCCUL) He is former section president of the Cameroon People Democratic Movement and the former Mayor of the Nkambe council.

⁶² Fai Ndi Tenku, traditional ruler, 85years, interview by Richard Giyo, 20/06/2020, Moh. He is a member of *Nyafuma* cult that is still alive.

⁶³ Roland Ntuntu, Shoe Maker and mender, 50years, 07/02/2021, Douala.

was not only the mystery and rituals that surrounded it but its size that appeared like an elephant. This is because it was not found in any of the neighbouring villages and those that were even similar did not match the grandeur and mystery that encircled it. It was on the basis of its size, mystery and rare outing that much attention was attached to it.

The family of Moh that established the settlement of Njema was Ntembe. The family grew into a quarter known as *Mbuhsi*. Others who later joined her were Du-Kop and Bo-Beh. They were recognised as quarters under the chiefdom of Moh. The expansion of Moh chiefdom again attracted the animosity of Nkambe and she carefully carved out Njema and linked the polity to Nkambe area. She inflexibly awarded titles to some adult males and enthroned sub chiefs in Njema that hitherto was the prerogative of Moh. Nkambe faced unbending resistance from Tata Issa who was a patriarch of Njema and notable of the sub chiefdom of *Ndi Kemnjo*. Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor placed the three sub chiefs of Njema (*Ndi Kemnjo*, *Ngah Du* and *Ndi Mbortu*) whom she enthroned on equal strength thereby creating hatred among them. The basis of placing them on same category was a digression meant to destroy their history of settlement and the Class distinction that existed between the three sub chiefdoms under Moh was destroyed. The destruction of the class peculiarity ignited competition amongst the sub chiefs who sought promotion from Nkambe. Greater confusion was manifested when chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor conferred the titles of *Saah Mba*⁶⁴ to *Ngah Du* and *Ndi Mbortu*. The conferring of the Sheath of Cowries to *Ngah Du* and *Ndi Mbortu* instituted hostility amongst them and side-lined *Ndi Kemnjo*, the founder of Njema.⁶⁵

X. Manifestation of conflict between Moh and Nkambe

The relationship between Moh and Nkambe fondoms were often tensed. Even in situation where amicable discussion or activities involved the communities, there was lack of honesty. This was because no one was opened to another. There were several manifestations of discordant voices in the Moh and Nkambe conflicts.

The primary instance of conflict between the two communities was over the Tiger that was caught in Moh. The Tiger was considered in Mbum as a significant animal for the palace because of its worth. Tiger became a source of hostility between Moh and Nkambe because mysterious people used to transform into the animal and destroyed crops and animals in the neighbouring communities. The Tiger skin was used by the chief in the palace as a symbol of strength. Nkambe sought to have it on the basis of a conceived affinity that placed Moh as the youngest in the union of three brothers called *Juninkambe*. Moh resisted the union and argued that if she was not qualified to possess the Tiger skin it should be handed to Mbot, the Clan Head. Mbot was silent over the squabble and the Tiger skin was retained by Moh under chief Mohngong. The withholding of the item by Moh infuriated Nkambe and Chu Nkembang (*Nkfunko*) and Ndimu were arrested and sent to prison in Bamenda for the retaining role played in the tiger skin dispute. Nkambe did not pay attention to the second Tiger that was caught by the Moh because the matter over the first one was still under judicial procedure.⁶⁶

The foundation of the *Nwarong society* in Moh was another contending issue between the Nkambe and Moh people. Nkambe maintained that the *Nwarong* regulatory society should be an institution located only in main palace and not in sub palaces. It was on the basis of this that chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor of Nkambe solicited the help of the administration of Donga and Mantung Division under Kanjo Musa, and the *Nwarong* was apprehended in 1983. The seizure was effected but the *Nwarong* week days continued to be observed and other lodges like *Mabu*, *Wan-Mabu*, *Chumbuh*, *Likang* displayed during funerals and related events. Moh recovered her *Nwarong* because it was abandoned with the administration and not Nkambe palace. Tension erupted between the communities when Nkambe realised that the *Nwarong* society was secretly taken back to Moh. The matter was reported to the administration and warning was sent to Moh.⁶⁷ The SDO realised that tension could result to bloodshed because members of the *Nwarong* mobilised and involved Peter Ngi Nsakwa who was the member of Parliament for Nkambe central constituency. Honorable Peter Ngi Nsakwa reminded Moh and Nkambe that they were all of the *Warr* clan and had to settle their crisis amicably. He reiterated that as son-in-law he could not allow Moh and Nkambe go to war over the right of Moh to own a *Nwarong* institution. He emphasised that the presence of law enforcement officials was to execute administrative instructions based on

⁶⁴ It was a royal Sheath of cowries whose immediate beneficiaries were the chief or his next in command. It was awarded to sub chiefs who did exceptional things in the community.

⁶⁵ Joseph Nganji, 53years, carpenter, interview by Elvis Dogo, Nkambe, 04 December, 2020.

⁶⁶ Nformi Njeba, Tradi-practitioner, 70years, 27/10/2021, Moh. He is the son of Mabu who caught the second Tiger.

⁶⁷ Tantoh Sule, Farmer, 56years, 27/10/2020, Moh. He is the head of *Nwarong* Regulatory Society.

report from chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor. He highlighted that the appropriation of the royal masquerade was temporal to enable the administration examine the matter. He assured Moh that after the examination of matter that brought animosity and hostility between the two communities it would be handed back to her.⁶⁸ Honorable Peter Ngi Nsakwa was member of parliament who knew the two communities and their behavioural patterns.⁶⁹

The appropriation of *Nwarong* in Mbum was always a formidable task because of the rituals that encircled it. When Peter Ngi Nsakwa assured Moh that the *Nwarong* was leaving the palace only for a period of time, chief Nko Pedro and members of the *Nwarong* especially Tantoh Mathias Jiti, gave access for its repossession. The chief of Nkambe who knew that the *Nwarong* was sacred and could not be common placed or brought into his inner chamber without adequate rituals. The Gendarmes who had access to the case did not act in line with traditional norms and as a result the Moh continued with her *Nwarong* activities. The week days were uninterruptedly observed and *Nwarong* lodges displayed unruffled. Despite serious warnings from the administration after it was discovered that the *Nwarong* related activities were rife in Moh, Moh did not heed to the warnings and so continued unchallenged.⁷⁰ Some indigenes of Nkambe who were not directly concerned with the palace enrolled as members of the *Nwarong* of Moh.⁷¹ The wrangling between Moh and Nkambe was however aggravated by the meddling of the administration in a matter they were not versed with.

The *Nwarong* represented the judicial arm of the traditional administration and handled vices in the society but the *Tantoh Nwarong* (leader) *Mamnjuh* (women leader) and traditional council members of Nkambe did not involve anyone from Moh in their *Nwarong* institution and vice versa.⁷² When chief Nko Pedro of Moh “disappeared” in 2007 and was replaced by Edwin Chifu, Nkambe raised a court case against him for usurpation of title. The matter ensued after Nkambe made an abortive attempt to reposition him as sub chief of Moh. He was invited as leader of Moh to Nkambe by chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor who had informed the administration that his newly enthroned Quarter Head was visiting. When chief Edwin Chifu approached the palace gate a sub chief was sent by chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor to receive and treated him as a sub chief. Chief Edwin Chifu, notables and indigenes who accompanied him returned to Moh in anger. Nkambe summoned him and some twenty-one persons at the Gendarmerie Brigade for insolence against authority. Moh only released her chief and indigenes after paying heavy amounts as bail bonds.⁷³ Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor later proceeded with the matter to court and Moh was charged for usurpation of title. Though money was spent to get them released, some were sentenced to two years imprisonment each with hard labour at the Nkambe prison.⁷⁴ Moh became disappointed with the administration and courts for not carefully handling the matter. While some administrative documents were only seen for the first time in court as exhibit, some magistrates requested Moh to plead with chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor and Paul Ngabir who was Section President of CPDM and National President of NKACUDA and resolve the matter amicably.⁷⁵

Nkambe again manifested her authority over Moh when the Mbum community of Bamenda organised a football competition to keep the youths busy during the summer holidays of 2008. The organiser of the tournament was Jackson Ngwani who worked with a brewery company known as *Les Brasserie du Cameroon*. Nkambe enrolled into the tournament under Nkambe Cultural and Development Association (NKACUDA). Members raised insufficient funds for registration but Victor Tambang added the money. The performance of Nkambe was poor in the first edition of the competition and this was attributed to lack of funds owing to the fact

⁶⁸ Ignatius Weyih, Farmer, 67years, 27/10/2020, Moh.

⁶⁹ Ngie Peter Nsakwa was the member of parliament for the Nkambe central constituency. Though his permanent resident was Nkambe, his village of origin was Kungi. Following the Clan system of Mbum land, he was from the Warr clan. It was for that reason that when both the chief of Nkambe and the SDO for Donga and Mantung realized that the Moh people were ready to fight for the preservation of their *Nwarong*, they had to invite him as a peace crusader to lead the administration and the gendarmes to Moh. His second wife was from Moh. He however succeeded in the mission as he avoided confrontation between the forces of law and the chief of Nkambe on one side and the people of Moh on the other side.

⁷⁰ Ignatius Weyih, Farmer, 67years, 27/10/2020, Moh.

⁷¹ Oliver Mabu, Mechanic, 55years, 13/07/2020, Nkambe. He is also member of the *Nwarong* of Nkambe.

⁷² Augustine Weyih, Farmer, 56years, 13/07/2020, Nkambe.

⁷³ Godwin Mbori, Farmer, 54years, 30/12/2021, Moh. He accompanied chief Edwin Chifu to Nkambe.

⁷⁴ See Suit No. NM/19C/08, The people VS Ibrahim Edwin and 21 OTHERS.

⁷⁵ Andrew Tete, Carpenter, 47years, 30/12/2021, Nkambe. He is former branch president Moh Development Association and former prisoner.

that members were unwilling to raise money to support the team.⁷⁶ Moh enrolled her team during the second edition of the tournament. When all formalities were completed, Nkambe lodged a complaint against Moh. Her complaint hinged on the fact that Moh was not a village and so should not be admitted into the competition. Her complaint was received because the second edition of the competition was supervised by Mbum Cultural and Development Association.⁷⁷ When Nkambe was asked to register before her case against Moh could be attended to, she left and contacted Johnson Nkforkwi a journalist who instead announced on Radio Bamenda that, the registration fee of Moh was sent by Nkambe. The chairperson of the competition for 2008, Emmanuel Ngah was ordered to replace Moh Football Club with NKACUDA FC. The name of the Football team, documents and other gadgets were replaced with NKACUDA. After a careful investigation it was discovered that Richard Kengong who represented NKACUDA as president lied against Moh. The name of the team and related documents were again changed from NKACUDA to Moh FC.⁷⁸ The matter was laid to rest and Nkambe grudgingly admitted the verdict and Moh participated in the competition. NKACUDA players played in Moh FC and the team reached the semi-finals and even played the third position. The team emerged third and received fifty thousand francs CFA. Moh raised some money and added to what was received and equitably shared to all the players.⁷⁹

Moh was never permitted to participate in official public meetings especially in Nkambe by chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor. Chief Nko Pedro for instance was forced out of the Nkambe Grandstand in the early 1972 on grounds that he was not a ruler. Though the administration condemned the act no action was taken against Nkambe. Moh ceased to attend any event at the Nkambe Grandstand.⁸⁰ Moh and Nkambe were again members of Warr Cultural and Development Association (WACUDA). In 2011 when Moh was invited to participate in the WACUDA assembly at Mbot, it resulted to an attack. Chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor and his subjects attacked, injured and destroyed *Ngoro* (shield) of Moh. Though Moh retaliated the numerical strength of Nkambe overwhelmed her. The Fon of Mbot, National President of WACUDA and the administration warned and blamed chief Ibrahim Jabo Nfor stirring disorder. The attack went viral on social media and heightened tensions between the two communities. The SDO of Donga Mantung warned against the propagation of the video and convened an emergency dialogue meeting to address the crisis.⁸¹

XI. Conclusion

Moh and Nkambe *Fondoms* are of Mbum extraction under the *Warr* clan but many existentialist differences divided them. The core of the differences rested on greed, identity and authority. Nkambe consistently contended and maintained that Moh was not a *fondom* nor a village but a quarter under the Nkambe *Fondom*. The concerted and vigorous attempt by Moh to assert her independence and separate existence had been the fundamental cause of their animosities and hostilities. Unfortunately, for political reasons, the different administrations continue to act in support of the Nkambe *Fondom* to the utter dissatisfaction of Moh. The absence of justice and the incessant determination of the Nkambe *Fondom* to propagate her power and authority was at the centre of the hatreds and resentments between the two *warr* villages.

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