

Nuptial Customs and Royal Celebrations in Mbum Land, North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: Majority of ethnic groups in Bamenda Grasslands like the Mbum established and sustained diplomatic relations with each other since their settlement in the region based on the canon of common ancestry. Despite this, only few fondoms still maintain this doctrine as the rate of mutual connections among them diminished drastically over the past centuries due to competition for governing space and conflicts of autonomy. This study sustains the argument that marriages and royal celebrations were factors that strengthened relations among Mbum fondoms. Oral traditions and written sources were data used in carrying out this research. This study reveals that nuptial practices and royal celebrations underwent mutations without necessarily respecting the dogma of Mbum traditions. *Fons* gave their daughters in marriage to their counterparts to create new/strengthen relations among them. Women played significant role in conflict resolutions and the acquisition of farm/settlement land for their relatives. The introduction of Christianity and huge bride wealth hindered the fulfilment of many marriage rites in Mbum land. Marriages and royal celebrations remain vital facets of coexistence and diplomatic relations among Mbum fondoms.

Keywords: Canon, Royalty, Marriage, Custom, Relation, Mbum

I. INTRODUCTION

The North West Region of Cameroon is host to fondoms (kingdoms, chiefdoms, villages) of different ethnic groups, which include the Tikar, Chamba, Widikum, Tiv and Mambila.¹ The Tikar that is the largest group is composed of fondoms like Kom, Nso, Bafut, Bum, Oku, Babungo, Kedjom Keku, Kedjom Ketinguh and Mbum. Tikar traditions held that their ancestors migrated from around Tibati, Banyo, Ndobu, Kimi, Rifum and Bankim areas in the Adamawa region of Cameroon. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Tikars moved in different groups southwards and westwards to their present location establishing independent fondoms. Before settling permanently in the region, they disintegrated into different units. This is the case with the Mbum, which separated at Ntem and moved in three groups to their present site in the Nkambe plateau of Donga Mantung division. Similarly, the Kedjom fondoms, Kedjom Keku and Kedjom Ketinguh also underwent the same experience.

These fondoms evolved similar socio-political institutions with most of them maintaining the inherent culture they

brought from their points of departure in the Adamawa region. The uniqueness in their organisation made them to remain connected and attached to each other because of shared religious beliefs and cultural practices. The division of these groups into separate political entities formed the bases of ritual connections between them. The groups shared common origin and ancestry, which made it difficult for them to dissuade from each other. Therefore, there was a necessity for them to maintain their relations with each other in the Bamenda Grasslands. These ritual connections manifested in different forms. It varied from the enthronement and funeral celebrations of traditional rulers, the organisation of annual festivals, inter marriages, the exchange of visits and gifts among the fondoms and their citizens. Over the past centuries, there have been changing facets in the practices and maintaining of established marriages and royal celebrations between the Mbum as well as other Tikar fondoms. Mbum fondoms communed with each other although most of them shared varied political views; they remained connected through the festivals, which brought them together.

The Mbum communed with each other and relations among the thirty-four fondoms dated to the time of their initial settlement on Nkambe plateau in the eighteenth century. The fondoms had incessantly involved in relations with one another. These relations were established on the traditional politics at the time; the creed of common ancestry, cultural practices (matrimonial exchange of gifts, religious beliefs and language), the quest for dominance, and trade benefits. The fondoms either sought to improve their status in the Nkambe plateau or attempted to maintain their superiority and influence in the region. The *Fon* (traditional ruler) was the supreme authority who took decisions concerning the type of relation to create with other fondoms in consultation with the *Nwerong* and *Ngiri* regulatory societies. At each period, the leadership style or the individual *Fon*'s decision to determine relations with one another depended on the factors he deemed were of value to his views and fondom. *Fons* created relations with each other in anticipation of the expected benefits. The establishment of relations between two fondoms was determined by traditional practices, blood pacts or fictive ideologies.²

¹ E. M. Chilver and P. M. Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda The Pre-Colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*, Buea, Government Printers, 1967, p.6.

² P. N. Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy A Study of Inter- Chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields North West Province of Cameroon*, Publication of the Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde, 1986, p.41.

From time immemorial, Mbum *Fons* made genuine efforts to promote friendly contacts and maintain marriage relationships among fondoms beyond clannish tendencies. Most Mbum fondoms sustained relationships among them that were initiated by their ancestors. In this regard, relations were based on maintaining long-established traditions. It focused not only on political ideas but also on economic motivations and social activities. However, it was not compulsory for these fondoms to respect the existing traditions. Blood pacts relations were established by fondoms that had a common ancestry. One vital aspect of relations was the organisation of royal marriages marked by the exchange of princesses. Marriage relations among the fondoms evolved with time and circumstances resulting in diverse mutations.

II. FONDOM INTER-MARRIAGES

Fondom inter-marriages were common phenomena practiced in Mbum land. They used marriage alliances to bolster relations with one another. The marriage alliances between fondoms took two dimensions, royal marriages that involved *Fons*, princesses and princes of the different fondoms and marriages between the citizens. In these two forms of marriage, there was no great variation in practise and contraction. The marriage rituals according to Mbum customs and traditions were respected but for the fact that in royal marriages, the *Fon* did not take part in the engagement process and manual labour exercises carried out in the compounds of the in-laws.³

These aspects were not respected because *Fons* and *pkibai* willingly gave their daughters in marriage to other *Fons*. The *Fons* could also send their palace heralds to select maidens in the fondom as their wives. The heralds moved with special powder produced from cam wood into a red paste and used them in selecting the maidens. When they saw a beautiful maiden suitable for the *Fon*, they rubbed camwood powder on the doorpost of the maiden's house and this indicated that she was chosen as the *Fon's* wife.⁴ That was not the only method, as the heralds could also apply camwood powder on the hand of any beautiful maiden they met at the market centre to signify that she was the chosen *Fon's* wife.⁵ It was prestige and honour for a family from which a maiden was selected as the *Fon's* wife. This created links between the family and the palace, more importantly as the maiden was ascribed the status of a queen and royalty. Marriages were not limited within the fondom as there was the practice of royal marriages.

Royal marriages were popular phenomena among Mbum fondoms, as well as those of the Bamenda Grasslands. *Fons* got married to princesses from other fondoms and they equally gave their daughters to other *Fons* in marriage. In

many Mbum palaces, friendly *Fons* married off their daughters to new *Fons* during their enthronement ceremonies.⁶ In most palaces, there were proliferation of betrothed queens by *Fons* to each other. The *Fon* of Nkambe gave his daughter into marriage to the *Fon* of Taku and that of Ntumbaw equally gave his daughter to the *Fon* of Nkambe. In addition, the *Fons* of Njap and Wat gave their daughters to that of Nkambe for marriage, while that of Talla gave a bride to the *Fon* of Tabenken during his enthronement ceremonies, and those of Nsop, Wowo, Njirong equally did same to the *Fon* of Nseh-Makop.⁷

The main motive for this practice was to maintain their prestige/position in order to strengthen existing relations among them, while others sought to create friendship ties with the fondoms.⁸ Nkwi argues that such marriages among the fondoms of the Bamenda Grasslands were based on the principle of equality of power as only fondoms who judged their positions to be equal exchanged their royal females.⁹ This was not strictly the case among the Mbum fondoms as royal marriages were acts of diplomacy and sanctioned by the customs and traditions. The practice among the Mbum and other Cameroonian chiefdoms was not different from what took place in Europe and Africa between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. A glaring example was the fortifying of alliances between France and Austria through the marriage of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the seventeenth century.¹⁰ In Africa, it was a similar phenomenon among kingdoms. By the end of the seventeenth century, the kings of Denkyira and Ashanti exchanged wives with each other who acted as diplomatic representatives in their kingdoms.¹¹

Though royal marriages were common practice, only the biological daughters of *Fons* were given into marriage to their counterparts.

The *Fon* was not supposed to give out any palace maiden for marriage who was not his biological daughter though he was the family head. The exchange of women among fondoms was an established practice among fondoms in Bamenda Grasslands. In the policy of traditional diplomacy among fondoms, Nkwi argues that daughters of *Fons* acted as resident ambassadors and representatives of their fondoms of origin, in the same manner, as it is the case in modern diplomacy.¹² *Fons* willingly gave their daughters to their counterparts for marriage not just for friendship, but because of the role, they played in the fondoms. The women acted as accredited ambassadors in these fondoms representing the interests of their people. They provided reliable information to

⁶ *Fon* Polycarp Ngwayi, personal communication, 23 July 2011.

⁷ *Fon* Jabfu Nfor Ibrahim, personal communication, 21 July 2011.

⁸ *Fon* Polycarp Ngwayi, personal communication, 23 July 2011.

⁹ Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy*, p.49.

¹⁰ D. Richard, *An Illustrated History of Modern Europe 1789-1974*, London, Longman Group Ltd., 1977, p.89.

¹¹ Adegbulu, F., Pre-Colonial West African Diplomacy: It's Nature and Impact, *The Journal of International Social Research*, Volume: 4 Issue: 18, 2011, p.174.

¹² Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy*, p.47.

³ D. K. Nfor, *Development in the Wimum Customary Marriage*, Bamenda, Neba Publishers, nd., pp.9-10.

⁴ M.D.W. Jeffreys, *The Wiya Tribe*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1963, p.17.

⁵ Sarah Ntalah, personal communication, 20 July 2018.

the *Fons* on what was happening in their respective fondoms during visits to their fondom of origin.¹³

The women even influenced the *Fons* in taking decisions in the interest of their fondoms of origin and equally persuaded them not to carry out acts of aggression against their people during periods of skirmishes.¹⁴ They also acted as a medium of communication and helped in obtaining farm and settlement land for their relatives as they easily convinced their husbands and in-laws to do so.¹⁵ That notwithstanding, most of the royal marriages were to create and maintain a kinship system among the fondoms. The diplomatic marriages also made certain fondoms to be prominent in Bamenda Grasslands. In the 1940s, *Fon* Ndi Kouh of Kom and *Fon* Angwafor II of Mankon became very popular in the region since they got married to many wives and used them to consolidate and stabilise their control over subjugated smaller groups.¹⁶ Royal marriages were of importance among the Mbum because the number of foreign wives in the different palaces determined the number of fondoms, which had established relations with them. Nkambe, Tabenken, Mbot, Talla and Ndu fondoms were prominent due to the number of foreign wives in their palaces.

Though royal marriages were limited to members of the royal family, there were also some exceptions. Some princesses and princes got married to ordinary citizens. They were not restricted to marry within the royal families of other palaces. The citizens of different fondoms also got married amongst themselves. Such inter-fondom marriages were common between fondoms of the same clan. Marriages were common between the people of Nkambe, Njap, Binshua, Mbot fondoms of Warr clan as well as those of Tang and Ya clans.¹⁷ The people did not easily contract marriages because they belonged to the same clan, but because of the geographical proximity to the fondoms. People who were involved in long distance trade with further fondoms were few and the number who got married from those distant fondoms was limited. With the passage of time, the situation changed as distance was no longer a barrier in marriage. When the Ya clan had finally been integrated into the Mbum society after the periods of the Chamba/Fulani raids, there were intermarriages between the three clans.¹⁸

Nevertheless, certain biases based on myth acted as hindrances to inter-fondom marriages. People of other Mbum fondoms labelled those of Tabenken, Nkambe, Binka, Kungi and Binshua with witchcraft practices and unfaithfulness especially of their women, as they hardly stayed long in marriages.¹⁹ This was a propagated bias concept that scared

most people from getting married to men and women from those fondoms as witchcraft practices and infidelity were common phenomena associated to citizens of Mbum land. However, it was the responsibilities of parents to carry out investigations about the families their children intended to marry there before approving of their marriages. Distance was just a factor that acted as a hindrance to inter-fondom marriages. At the dawn of the twentieth century, these beliefs had been overcome especially with the proliferations of Pentecostal Christian churches that demonstrated powers to outsmart witchcraft concepts in marital relationships. Roads were constructed linking most fondoms and distance was no longer a barrier in marriages. Conversely, marriages between people of distant fondoms were of importance as they brought the people of the fondoms closer. It increased the strength of friendship ties between the people. The Mbum people conducted marriages following established customs.

Marriage customs among the Mbum were unique. Thus, there was the payment of bride wealth. During the pre-colonial period, its payment was done in the local currency (cowries) or pawning.²⁰ Families, which did not meet up with the payment of the dowry gave their daughters in exchange to the bride's fathers. In this case, only a statement served as an agreement for the payment of the dowry. The groom's family provided other bride wealth item (palm oil, salt, goats, fowls, clothes). With the introduction of the Pound as legal tender during the British rule, the bride wealth ranged between £7 and £15 depending on the family, but the situation changed after the reunification of Cameroon in 1961, amounting to about 14,000 Francs CFA (about 28 US Dollars) and above.²¹ As from the last quarter of the twentieth century, the concept of marriages shifted in the context of its practice. The bride wealth and quantity of items requested for the traditional marriage ceremony increased tremendously. The educational level of the bride and the economic status of the groom were factors, which pushed most families to demand a higher amount as bride wealth. Some families whose female children were educated beyond high school demanded as much as 500,000 Francs CFA (about 1000 US Dollars) for bride wealth. However, the average amount ranged from 100,000 to 300,000 Francs CFA (about 200 - 600 US Dollars). This huge sum hindered most citizens from lawfully getting married and most of them lived as concubines. The situation became more complex in case the woman died. According to Mbum tradition, her corpse was to be buried in her father's compound and the children returned to her father if the man did not fulfil the marriage requirements no matter the length of time they lived together. On the contrary, in the case of royal marriages involving *Fons*, there was little or no payment of bride wealth.

¹³ Jeffreys, *The Wiya Tribe*, p.18.

¹⁴ Ndomi Mukeng, personal communication, 21 August 2018.

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy*, p.47.

¹⁷ Agatha Nye, personal communication, 26 September 2020.

¹⁸ National Archives Buea, File AC 13, Assessment Report on Nsungli Clans, pp.5-6.

¹⁹ Mary Munshi, personal communication, 26 September 2020.

²⁰ National Archives Buea, File AC 13, Assessment Report on Nsungli Clans, p.54.

²¹ Nfor, *Development in Wimbun Customary Marriage*, p.11; Jeffreys, *The Wiya Tribe*, p.23.

During the death celebrations of an in-law, the *Fon* was obliged to proof his worth through grandiose presentation of gifts like a cow, goats and calabashes of raffia palm wine.²² With the passage of time, crates of beer, bottles of wine, whisky and rum replaced palm wine. This was to maintain the status quo of the fondoms especially those that were prominent. It was disgrace for a *Fon* who did not celebrate the passing on of a colleague who equally doubled as an in-law in a grandiose manner. The impact of marriages was widely felt among the citizens of the different fondoms.

The performance of marriage customs and formalities encouraged cooperation between people of the fondoms. The marriages opened chances for relatives of those concerned to visit each other. It entailed the movement from one fondom to another, thereby enhancing cooperation and coexistence. It was common for relatives and in-laws to exchange visits from Mbaah to Mbot, Binka to Mbipgo and Nkambe, Tabenken to Wat and Mbot, Talla to Ndu and Ntumbaw, Taku to Ntundip and Luh, Njilah and Ngvulu and vice-versa.²³ Diplomatically, marriage alliances brought the fondoms together. In the case of royal marriages, the *Fons*, *Fais* and other dignitaries were often involved. This aided in promoting approachable relations between the fondoms. Moreover, when such people got married, it implied that the fondoms themselves were married. It also indicated that there was a sealed blood pact between the fondoms because of the marriages, as they considered themselves as members of one family.²⁴

Marriages among citizens of different Mbum fondoms helped to reduce the degree of tension between those that were involved in land and boundary disputes. Citizens of most fondoms that had land conflicts were inter-married. Consequently the people found it difficult to fight for long since they had in-laws from both sides. Continuous fighting meant that they were fighting against themselves. Subsequently, most of the land disputes that resulted into skirmishes lasted only for few days, though with frequent re-occurrences. The killing of people in most disputes was not rampant because the people were conscious of their marriage relationships and shading blood meant they were killing their own blood descents.²⁵ Although, marriages brought fondoms together and strengthened their relations, there were customary barriers that hindered marriages.

The common practise of meeting the bride's entire family was an obstacle in some marriages. Indeed, bridegrooms needed to prepare financially and materially in order to fulfil the marriage rites. This involved the distribution of gifts like palm oil, bags of salt and money to the uncles, aunties, fathers, and mothers, before taking their wives. Most people preferred to marry in their own fondoms to avoid the long distances to other fondoms. Though the practise was the same, they could negotiate with their in-laws amicably without travelling long

distances to farther fondoms for same purpose. In most cases, it acted as barrier to marriages between people of different fondoms. Not only marriage alliances played a role in the diplomatic and socio-cultural relations among fondoms, the enthronement and funeral ceremonies of *Fons* were important occasions for the creation of relations.

III. ROYAL CELEBRATIONS

In Mbum land, enthronement and death ceremonies of traditional rulers were a long lasting customary practice by the fondoms. This was of importance, not only as a cultural practice, but also due to its function in strengthening diplomatic relations. The relationship between fondoms could be determined during death and enthronement ceremonies of titled citizens like *Fons*, *pkibai* (auxiliary rulers to the *Fon* in the fondom's neighbourhoods) and *Yaa* (Queen). The death (disappearance or passing away of the *Fon*, as it was popularly known), marked and determined the level of relations between fondoms. The death was kept secret while festive arrangements were made towards the funeral celebration by 'building the palace' (the period during which kingmakers sat in the palace to choose a new *Fon* and day of enthronement).²⁶

Fondoms of common ancestry and closely related ones were usually informed of the death of friendly *Fons*. In order to assess the level of relations between fondoms, a white fowl and the *nkeng* plant (*Dracaena spp*) was rubbed with palm oil and sent to *Fons* of the clans, especially fondoms that had a good relationship with the deceased *Fon*.²⁷ This was the official announcement of the disappearance of the *Fon* and an invitation to the funeral ceremony. The fondoms that were not served with the *nkeng* plant was an indication that relations between them were not good, even fondoms of the same clan. In certain fondoms like Njilah and Ngvulu, their *Fons* performed the burial and funeral rites of each other. This is because their founding ancestors were brothers who separated and established different fondoms.²⁸

The participation in funeral celebrations and enthronement rites of *Fons* by their colleagues consisted in the mobilisation of all the palace associations. The *nfuh*, *ngiri* and some wings of the *nwarong* regulatory society like the *nkoh*, *mabuh* and *wanmabuh* were part of the *Fon's* entourage to display in those celebrations. This established practice, which extended to the twenty-first century, was performed by the different fondoms. It was a common phenomenon that the fondoms usually hosted several *nwarong* masquerades during death celebrations of *Fons* in Mbum land. When the *Fon* of Tabenken died in 1980s, the fondoms of Binka and Ngarum in the funeral celebration with *nwarong* and *nfuh* societies; that

²² Fai Nkfu-Tango Victor Yembe, personal communication, 22 August 2018.

²³ Ndomi Mukeng, personal communication, 21 August 2018.

²⁴ Fai Nkfu-Tango Victor Yembe, personal communication, 22 August 2018.

²⁵ Agatha Nye, personal communication, 26 September 2020.

²⁶S.T. Ngege, "Kinship, Royal Burial and Tombs in Wimum Land of Cameroon" *Les Cahiers d'Histoire et Archeologie de l'Universite Omar Bongo*, Faculte des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, No.3, juin 2001-juin 2002, p.78.

²⁷Fon Polycarp Ngwayi, personal communication, 23 July 2011.

²⁸Fon Samuel Ndzi, personal communication, 26 April 2012.

of Ndu with the *manjong*, while Wat and Luh fondoms sent both *nwarong* and *nful* palace associations.²⁹ During the enthronement ceremonies of *Fon Nformi Nfor I* of Ndu and *Fon Tokob III* of Mbot as clan heads in 1982 and 1987, there was the display of different animating cults from the various fondoms in Mbum land. In Ndu, the fondoms of Njilah, Wowo, Njimnkang, Sehn and Mbipgo that were in constant disputes with *Fon Nformi William* over the ownership of *nwarong*, did not participate with their masquerades during the enthronement ceremony of *Fon Nformi Nfor I*.³⁰ The presence of all palace associations in those ceremonies was an indication of the degree and nature of relationship that existed among the fondoms.³¹

Fons of the same clans were obliged according to the doctrine of common ancestry to send palace dances, and secret societies to the enthronement ceremony of any *Fon* of the clan. Fondom relations were easily depicted during such occasions as *Fons* that were not in good terms neither took part nor sent palace associations to grace the occasion. The attending of such ceremonies by *Fons*, *pkibai* and *Yaas* with palace associations was reciprocal, and each fondom that had been visited was expected to replicate such acts in similar circumstances.³² The enthronement ceremonies were occasions whereby the fondoms through their *Fons* strengthened friendship ties and created new relations with one another. It was during such occasions that *Fons* seized the opportunity to begin negotiations towards the establishment of new relations with the newly enthroned *Fon*.³³ Such occasions provided unique opportunities for renewal of friendship ties among *Fons* that were located further from each other since they did not visit frequently.³⁴

In certain cases, some *Fons* sent palace cults but were not present themselves. However, this was mostly the case in the death celebrations of *Yaas* and *pkibai*. During the death celebration of the *yaa* of Binshua in 2002, *Fon Jabfu Ibrahim* of Nkambe took part. It was an occasion that the *Fons* settled and reconciled their political differences that manifested publicly over the years, which hindered their relationship.³⁵ *Fon Jabfu Ibrahim* and *Fon Tangiri Clement* of Binshua belonged to the CPDM and SDF political parties. Their political ideologies were an impediment to their relations after the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1990. When diplomatic relations were not cordial among the fondoms, the *Fon* sent the *nful* society and envoys to condole with the

bereaved fondom. It was equally the same in cases where the fondoms were not officially invited as tradition demanded.

Although most Mbum *Fons* did not attend the funeral and enthronement ceremonies, it did not affect the choice of their citizens. The people had the sole right to visit those that they had established marital and friendly relations with, in the different fondoms. It became difficult for *Fons* to stop them from attending such occasions. Following the norms of Mbum tradition, not all the *Fons* could attend enthronement ceremonies of their colleagues, unless they were officially informed. The *Fons* that obligatorily had to attend the ceremonies were those of the same clan as they were of the same kinship. If a *Fon* was not inform, there were various reasons attributed to it.

The deceased *Fon* might have instructed before his death that the fondom in question should not attend his funeral. Tradition demanded that the sick *Fon* had to make peace with all the fondoms that he was not in good relations with while on his sick bed.³⁶ The clan *Fon's* council sometimes took decisions to boycott the funeral of other *Fons* in order to sanction those who failed to respect their authority as traditional rulers. This was the case when the Warr *Fon's* Union meted sanctions in 1994 on the *Fon* of Wat, to boycott his funeral celebration as he supported his citizen for beating the *Fon* of Mbaah over a piece of disputed land between Wat and Mbaah.³⁷

The respect of Mbum tradition during such ceremonies involved the observance of the mourning period set by the authorities concerned. Among fondoms of the same clan, the period varied between one and three weeks of celebration, depending on the traditional authority. During such periods, all the citizens cut their hair and the women walked half-naked with no headscarf.⁴⁰ People from fondoms of different clans could mourn for one week depending on the relationship that existed between them. The presence of *Fons* at funeral and enthronement ceremonies of traditional authorities together with their citizens, observing all the rituals, indicated the high degree of relations between the fondoms. Their attendance served as a booster to their relations with the bereaved fondoms.

IV. CONCLUSION

The dynamics of marriages and royal celebrations among Mbum fondoms revealed a continuous process of socio-cultural evolution. The canons of the practices were not consistent throughout the twentieth century as it witnessed transmutations. Royal and local marriages between fondoms were based on the benefits obtained and not necessarily the respect of Mbum marriage customs. This was the reason why bride wealth increased tremendously that made it difficult for average citizens to meet up with the requirements. Those who

²⁹ Regional Archives Bamenda, File No. NW/Ha.1984/1, Chieftaincy in North West Province, 1984.

³⁰ *Fon Adamou Sale*, personal communication, 25 April 2012.

³¹ P. N. NKwi, "Traditional Diplomacy, Trade and Warfare in the Nineteenth Century Western Grassfields," in B. Chem-Langhëë and V. G. Fanso, *Nso and its Neighbours: Readings in Social History*, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1996, p.27.

³² *Fon Kennedy Nganjo*, personal communication, 27 May 2019.

³³ Idem.

³⁴ *Fon Alfred Nfor*, personal communication, 26 April 2012.

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ *Fon Banabas Mbunwe II*, personal communication, 20 July 2011.

³⁷ *Fon Jabfu Nfor Ibrahim*, personal communication, 21 July 2011.

⁴⁰ Agatha Nye, personal communication, 26 September 2020.

could pay high even by-passed some of the steps involved in the marriage rituals as money had over shadowed traditional practices. Royal marriages were mostly conducted to strengthened friendship ties among *Fons* and their fondoms, while local marriages were important as the women interceded on behalf of their relatives for them to acquire settlement and farmland. They equally influenced their husbands not to fight against their marriage relatives during periods of skirmishes between fondoms. Marriages as well as royal celebrations brought people of various fondoms together. The participation of people from various fondoms in these occasions with different masquerades indicated the level of relations among them. Fondoms that wielded high-level diplomatic relations attended royal celebrations with all the secret societies of their polities. Royal celebrations equally created opportunities to sanction recalcitrant *Fons* who did not respect their colleagues by boycotting any celebration in their fondoms. This was an indicator of dwindling relations among them. Fondoms that were not in good relations used royal marriages and celebrations to foster existing or reopening diplomatic relations with each other. Marriages necessitated peaceful coexist among Mbum fondoms as they inhabited the same geographical region and shared common culture. No matter the challenges and transmutations these cultural institutions witnessed during the twentieth century from religious and Western societies in the process of acculturation, the innate traits of Mbum tradition stood the taste of time.

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