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Catholic Mission, Colonial Government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon)

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Catholic Mission, Colonial Government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon)

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Preface

What follows is a slightly revised version of the thesis with which I completed my studies in history at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. I am grateful to the African Studies Centre for making the thesis accessible to a wider audience by publishing it in this form.

I am thankful to many people for their help in the realization of this study. During only four months in Cameroon, I managed to run up huge debts. At the Cameroon National Archives in Buea, Prince Henry Mbain provided me with invaluable assistance, graciously guiding me through the files with infallible patience. For his assistance I am most grateful. Primus Forgwe did much to make me feel at home both at the archives and outside. Dr Francis B. Nyamnjoh kindly took it upon himself to introduce me to Buea University, Guinness, *Mindsearching* and beyond. I am deeply indebted to Mr Bernard Muna and his family. Not only did Ben assume responsibility for my well-being by providing me with accommodation, companionship and encouragement, he also located and sponsored my research assistant, Chiabi Fidelis, without whom the most interesting material presented in this thesis would not have been collected. Chiabi's dedication and skill far exceeded any expectations one might have of a research assistant: I hope he will find my treatment of the material to do justice to the colourful reality behind the text. Most of all, I am indebted to those Cameroonians, in and out of Njinikom, who shared their histories and hospitality with me.

The debts I have incurred closer to home weigh no less heavily. My housemates in Delft shared with me various tools of the trade, from books and computers to rucksacks and nightcaps. Most importantly, they lent me their ears. Ad van den Oord played the role of mentor convincingly. In Oosterbeek, Father Hermanus Bots and Father Jan Haak shared their experiences in Cameroon with me, while Father Charles van Drunen welcomed me to the Mill Hill Archives. My father John de Vries performed the editorial surgery necessary to prevent me from grave linguistic embarrassment. Thanks to Sami Faltas for commenting on, and Michel Jansen for formatting the revised version.

The academic guidance provided me by Prof. Dr P.L. Geschiere, of the University of Leiden, and Dr M.R. Doortmont, of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, was both inspiring and heartwarming. Their confidence in this project far exceeded mine: for their patient persistence I am very grateful.

Delft, April 1997

Jacqueline de Vries

Introduction

In the late summer of 1958, thousands of women — almost the entire female population of the Cameroon village Njinikom — marched some 40 miles to the divisional headquarters of the colonial administration to protest against proposed agricultural reforms. For two weeks a large group of women camped outside the British administrative office in Bamenda, clothed in men's attire or covered with vines, dancing and singing obscene songs, mocking the colonial administration and the male leaders of Kom alike. The protest march was preceded by violent scenes in Njinikom: schools had been closed by the women, the traditional government and courts rendered virtually ineffective, and farming by anyone who opposed their cause sabotaged. Huge weekly rallies were held in the Njinikom marketplace, attracting up to six thousand women from all over the Kom kingdom. Though intensive colonial intervention succeeded in restoring some semblance of peace, political unrest in Njinikom persisted for many years.

Traditional authorities, missionary leaders and colonial rulers looked to each other, to no avail, for explanations and solutions, each perplexed by the seemingly inexplicable fury and high level of political organization that characterized the women's movement. Though the outburst was ostensibly triggered by the introduction of contour-farming regulations and the destruction of crops by wandering cattle, the *Anlu*, as the movement was called, can, in retrospect, be seen to have brought to the fore a number of social and political tensions which had been simmering for many years: the erosion of both traditional and colonial authority, power struggles between "modern" youths and conservative elders, shifting gender relations, culture conflicts accelerated or perhaps instigated by the missionary presence, and incumbent nationalism and party politics, to name the most obvious.

Although several studies have been devoted to this women's protest movement,¹ a fully satisfactory explanation of the outburst has yet to be formulated. Existing studies fail, without exception, to provide comprehensive *historical* explanations for the uprising.² In particular, previous studies demonstrate a most puzzling neglect of the fact

¹ For example S. Ardener 1975, Diduk 1989, Konde 1990, Nkwi 1985, O'Barr 1984, Ritzenthaler 1960, Rogers 1980, Westermann 1992.

² Equally remarkable is perhaps the neglect of the *continuation* of tensions stemming from (or illustrated by) the 1958 *Anlu*. The repercussions of the *Anlu* influenced Kom politics until well into the 1970s at least. (E.g. BNA-Ci 1966/1, Extract of Report by sous-prefect of Fundong, 2.2.1972, refers to the political situation in Kom as "very tense" due to the repercussions of the *Anlu*).

that Njinikom was heavily influenced by the presence of a popular Catholic mission there: in preceding decades, Njinikom had become a stronghold of Catholicism in the largely non-Christian kingdom of Kom, and had developed a tradition of dissension and political agitation well before the *Anlu* erupted.¹ It was this lacuna that prompted this research project.

Initially, then, this project set out to uncover the historical roots of the *Anlu* examining the changes that took place in Njinikom in the two or three decades preceding the *Anlu* outburst, guided by the tentative connection between missionary presence and politicization of the Njinikom population. It soon became obvious, however, that any such endeavour would far exceed the scope of a Master's thesis: archive material revealed that the influence of Christianity in Kom was so far-reaching and profound that virtually no aspect of Kom social and political relations was left unaffected. In addition, the changes wrought by early colonial and missionary penetration proved intriguing and substantial enough, in their own right, to justify placing them at the core of the investigation. Thus, the emphasis of this research shifted from a focus on the *Anlu* itself to a focus on the historical context. The missionary presence became the focus, for investigations in the Cameroonian archives confirmed that an analysis of the missionary enterprise, in the context of British colonial rule, would be crucial to any understanding of later developments in Kom.

The aim of this study, then, is to illuminate the way in which a complex configuration of factors — notably indigenous political, ideological and social structures, colonial aims and missionary policies — interacted to fundamentally transform Kom society, altering the previous balance of power, and creating new cleavages which persist even today. The *impact* of missionary and colonial penetration is the focus: not the missionary policies themselves, nor, for that matter, colonial or traditional policies in their own right, but the way in which various groups of Kom people were affected by, responded to, and in turn influenced these policies. A conscious attempt has been made to integrate the macro-level and the micro-level in the analysis.

Like other former colonies, Cameroon has not escaped scholarly attention, nor has Kom, the kingdom with which this study is concerned. Yet most of the existing studies about Kom are principally concerned with either the pre-colonial era or with the pre-independence years, focusing on the *Anlu*. This emphasis on the distant and the very recent past is understandable, but regrettable, for it is in the decades following the establishment of British rule that the basis was laid for profound social, political and economic changes that underlie the tensions which so strongly characterized the 1950s. This is not to suggest that Kom society was static in the pre-colonial years: developments in the 20th century were informed to a great extent by changes and struggles which had set in in the preceding periods. But colonial and missionary intrusion perhaps intensified or altered the direction of earlier developments, while

¹ Even Westermann 1992, the most detailed study of the movement, based on archive data and oral history research, staunchly ignores the implications of the missionary presence on the changing socio-political relations:.

adding both a new focus for discontent and new avenues for social and political struggle.¹

The British anthropologist Edwin Ardener once asserted that Cameroon as a nation would not exist today save for missionary endeavours.² It cannot be disputed that the impact of missionary penetration in Cameroon, ambivalent though it may be, can hardly be exaggerated. The missionary endeavour constituted far more than the merely religious enterprise to which it has often been reduced: as the case study of the Catholic mission in Kom illustrates, so-called cultural change cannot be seen as disjunct from other social, political and economic transformations.

As noted above, the focus of this study will be on the inter-war period, during which Kom was confronted with the change from German to British rule and British administration was consolidated. In this period, the Catholic mission became firmly established in Kom, despite (or perhaps in part due to) heavy resistance from various groups of Kom people and despite continuous clashes with the colonial government, the Njinikom mission emerging, apparently no worse for the wear, as one of the strongholds of Catholicism in the present-day North West Province of Cameroon. As a focus for a broad range of conflict, ignited by both exogenous and endogenous factors, the Catholic mission in Kom serves, in this study, as a kind of prism, through which the fabric of Kom "traditional" society can be seen to begin to unravel.

The study has been divided into three parts. By way of an historical introduction, Part One provides general background information on the colonization of Cameroon, the relevant aspects of British Indirect Rule, and the indigenous political structures of Kom kingdom, as well as a description of early colonial policies regarding missions in Cameroon.

In the second part the case study will be presented: the coming of the Christian church to Kom, the various obstacles encountered by local and foreign Christians in their efforts, the responses of both the traditional authorities and of the colonial authorities to the "new religion", and so on. For the sake of analysis, the case study has been divided into four chronological phases, each characterized by different forms of leadership, different arena's of struggle, different modes of colonial administration, and so forth, but the four phases must be seen interconnected parts of the whole.

While in Part Two the emphasis will be on a coherent presentation of the Njinikom case, Part Three constitutes an attempt to integrate the findings of the case study into the existing body of literature on the impact of missionary penetration on African societies.

This study is based on an analysis of both primary and secondary sources. The main body of primary sources consulted consists of reports and correspondence of the British colonial government and missions, deposited at the Cameroon National Archives in Buea (hereafter BNA).

¹ According to Sanneh, the relevant question is not how missions changed Africa, but how changes in Africa, long preceding the onset of missions, took a more radical and longer lasting turn from the encounter with Christianity (Sanneh 1991: 3).

² Cited in v.d. Geest & Kirby 1992: 90.

In total, some 150 dossiers were studied at the archives in Buea.¹ Roughly speaking, these covered the years 1916-1960. The period 1918-1934, however, carried by far the most weight, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. An attempt was made to collect information from as many perspectives as possible. Thus, not only reports specifically pertaining to Kom were consulted, but also reports concerning other kingdoms, nor was the research limited to those files explicitly or exclusively concerned with the missions. In addition, more or less comparable documents over a long period of time were examined and compared: an analysis of annual reports, for example, from 1916 to 1960, revealed changes in both the objective socio-political situation in Kom (and elsewhere) as well as in attitudes of colonial administrators towards their subjects and towards general colonial policies.

In addition to colonial sources, missionary sources have been consulted insofar as this was possible. At the Roosendaal archives of the Mill Hill Fathers (the Catholic missionaries who were in Kom), missionary periodicals and miscellaneous files were made available so that to some extent a reconstruction of the missionary interpretation of the situation in Kom was possible. Though the co-operation of the Cameroonian bishops was readily obtained, the archive material at their disposal was of limited interest to this study. Unfortunately, access to the Njinikom parish archives was denied by the local parish priest, so that this source could not be tapped for details on the local situation.²

It goes without saying that the views of colonial and missionary administrators, as preserved in their respective archives, are coloured. Despite their evident bias and subjectivity, however, the archive sources can provide a wealth of useful information, if the bias of the writers and the context within which the documents were compiled are taken into account.³

Indispensable though they may be, efforts to read between the lines, to take into account bias and context, and to obtain information from both colonial and missionary sources cannot wholly negate the danger of inaccurate interpretation due to the sheer predominance of colonial or other institutional sources. The voices of subordinate groups are rarely heard, and in those rare instances when they can be traced, these voices are inevitably distorted, speaking, literally and figuratively, the language of the colonial power. In an attempt to shift the balance towards those groups not fully represented in written documentation, extensive use has been made of oral testimonies.

During a field trip to Njinikom in the summer of 1994, interviews were conducted with a variety of people from various social groups. Thus, the present chief of the village was asked to relate his interpretation of the Christianity conflict, as well as a Catholic school teacher, a "run of the mill" Christian, two daughters of early female converts, close relatives of the first catechists and former palace guards, among others. Among the informants were men as well as women, royalty as well as commoners,

¹ A list of files consulted can be found at the end of this study.

² This must be considered regrettable, as there is no doubt that the local parish archives contain valuable and otherwise unavailable information. (Personal communication, Dr A.M. Ndi, Bamenda).

³ Cf. Whiteman 1983 *passim*.

Christians as well as non-Christians, Baptists as well as Catholics, representatives of the "new" order as well as people loyal to the "old". In addition, former missionaries to Kom were interviewed.

Most interviews were conducted with the aid of a well-trained research-assistant, himself from Kom, who made many of the necessary contacts and translated those interviews (the majority) which were conducted in the vernacular. The interviews were not strictly structured in advance. Rather, the interviewer suggested broad themes and asked informants to expand on these, as well as to introduce issues which they themselves considered to be relevant: the framework emerging from colonial documents is obviously not the sole possible framework for analysis. This approach proved to be fruitful: witchcraft, for example, was not once mentioned in the colonial sources in the context of mission-related conflict in Kom, while almost all informants introduced witchcraft, without prompting from the interviewer, as an important factor in the establishment of Christianity.

In interpreting the collected narratives, as in the interpretation of written sources, care has been exercised to take into account *who* is speaking, as well as probable distortions resulting from the interview situation and from the tricks memories play.¹ Admittedly, the picture is still far from complete, but the testimonies collected are so rich, detailed and coherent that they constitute a considerable contribution to the research data, both elaborating and refining the pictures presented by colonial writings. The secondary sources consulted can be divided, roughly speaking, into three categories: ethnographic or historical studies pertaining to Cameroon or Kom specifically, studies pertaining to missionary activities in other parts of Africa, and more theoretically oriented studies concerning the long-term impact of colonial and missionary penetration in Africa. Mission-oriented studies were more often than not hampered by an approach which centred on the organization and institutional "successes", though several smaller studies and recent articles provided insights which enriched our own study of Kom. These, together with the current discussions and debates about the missionary impact, will be dealt with fully in Part Three of the study.

¹ Cf. Vansina 1986: *passim*.

Part I

THE CONTEXT

In this part of the study, the historical context will be provided for the case study of Njinikom which constitutes the central part of this study. The first section describes the most distinctive geographical and socio-political characteristics of the Kom kingdom, in which Njinikom is situated. The brief sketch of the pre-colonial and early colonial history of the region will provide a backdrop for the case study. The second section of this part of the study contains a cursory analysis of German rule in Cameroon, and more specifically of the impact of the German presence in Kom. The transition from German to British rule, as well as the dominant characteristics of British colonial administration, will be investigated briefly, to outline the conditions which shaped developments in Kom in the colonial era.

The kingdom Kom in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon

The village Njinikom, with which the case study is concerned, is one of some 26 settlements in the Kom kingdom, in the Bamenda Grassfields of the present-day North West Province in Cameroon. In the Bamenda Grassfields, the Kom kingdom occupies an area of about 280 square miles at an average altitude of about 5000 feet above sea level. The capital of Kom, Laikom, is located on a peak higher than 6000 feet above sea level.

A high, grassy plateau, the Bamenda Grassfields region is characterized by a relatively high population density.¹ The country is rugged and diverse, the highlands intersected by fertile valleys in which most of the settlements are found. The Grassfields are inhabited by five main population groups — the Tikar, Widekum, Mbembe, Bali and Aghem — as well as a small minority of Hausa and Fulani. Oral tradition links the Kom to the Tikar, who migrated from the Upper Mbam river and its tributaries prior to the eighteenth century. Linguistic and archaeological research indicate a long, continuous occupation of the Bamenda highlands. Data pertaining to the early history of the Bamenda area suggest that the early Grassfields societies were not highly stratified. The typical political organization of the Grassfields was a chiefdom, federating descent groups under the leadership of a council or clan and lineage elders presided over by the Fon, a "primus inter pares." (Warnier 1993: 304).

As a result of economic and political changes in the pre-colonial era, a number of strong, highly stratified and centralized kingdoms, including Kom, emerged along the most important trade routes (Warnier 1993: 304). After the decrease of the legitimate Atlantic slave trade, the Grassfields supplied slave labour for the prospering palm oil

¹ According to Kaberry (1952: 3) the population density in Kom was 62 inhabitants per square mile in 1948.

plantations in Calabar. Kom kingdom was a major provider of slaves, obtained through raids and warfare. Increased trading activity in the 19th century laid the basis for the territorial expansion of Kom and the consolidation of its hegemony over smaller Grassfields chiefdoms. Kola, slaves, iron goods, guns and livestock were the main goods traded by 19th century Kom traders. The expansion of trade resulted in an increase in social stratification, with a new social group emerging: merchants with large compounds and large numbers of wives.

In general, the Grassfields economies were (and still are) characterized by a sharp gender division of labour according to a common sub-Saharan pattern: women perform subsistence farming and prepare food, men perform income-generating activities, trade, clear bush and assist in the harvest. The organization of the Kom economy follows these general lines, though Njinikom in particular has a relatively large contingent of traders among its inhabitants.¹ Agricultural production in Kom is largely the responsibility of women, who produce enough food to satisfy local needs. Men assist in the clearing of plots and in the harvest of crops — mainly maize, guinea-corn, cocoyam, yams, sweet potatoes and cassava. Kola used to be an important cash crop but was largely replaced by coffee in the second half of this century. Cattle are reared by semi-nomadic Fulani, and constitute a considerable source of income for the local economy, as pastoralists pay a special tax called *jangali*, but herding also gives rise to considerable friction between graziers and farmers on account of damage brought to crops by stray cattle.

1.1 Kom political institutions²

In its political institutions, Kom resembles many neighbouring kingdoms and village chiefdoms, the main difference being that Kom is matrilineal, while most Grassfields kingdoms are patrilineal. The kingdom was traditionally ruled by a so-called Fon, a powerful religious and secular leader, who was guided by councils of advisors, and aided by numerous regulatory societies. A divine ruler, the Fon was ascribed sacred qualities, and he exercised control over the life and death of his subjects. In the words of the colonial administration, the Fon was the "be-all and end-all of everything."³ As an intermediary between his subjects and the Kom people and spirits of the past, the present and the future, the Fon was vested with unquestioned authority in both spiritual and worldly matters. In the execution of his tasks he was closely assisted by a secret society, the Kwifon, and various personal advisors. Conflict resolution was usually obtained through arbitration by quarterheads and councillors, and the consultation of diviners.

A distinctive institution was the Kwifon, the executive arm of the Fon's government, endowed with advisory, judicial and ritual functions. Orders and messages

¹ BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927.

² Limits of time and space allow only a superficial discussion of this complex subject here. For in-depth analyses of Kom political institutions refer to Nkwi & Warnier 1982, Nkwi 1976, Chilver & Kaberry 1967 or Kaberry 1952.

³ BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927.

from the Fon were communicated to the Kom people through Kwifon retainers. The Kwifon was a highly secretive body, organized in a hierarchy of lodges. Membership of its inner lodges was sharply restricted. In the execution of state duties, Kwifon officials appeared clothed in net gowns which masked the face and body: its authority was of an impersonal kind, and its agents could not be held to account by the populace (Chilver & Kaberry 1967: 127). The Kwifon not only executed orders of the Fon, but also regulated economic affairs, for example by inaugurating the harvest at a certain time and controlling the market. Duties of the Kwifon also included the recruitment of palace retainers from among free-born commoners.

The Fon stood very much apart from the rest of the populace, living in a large palace compound on the hilltop Laikom. He was regarded with infinite respect and surrounded with carefully guarded secrecy. His household consisted of numerous wives, pages, guards and advisors. Around the turn of the century, the Fon of Kom had hundreds of wives, and he had more than a hundred when the British took control of Cameroon. The numerous wives and children at the palace served to enhance the Fon's prestige and demonstrate his wealth, in addition to consolidating alliances with other kingdoms by intermarriage. Royal wives functioned primarily as the Fon's farmers and cooks, and were recruited from among the free-born population at large. The Fon's extensive rights to claim women in marriage or to dispose of them to others was one of his most important prerogatives and became a source of considerable political struggle in the colonial era, as Part II of this study demonstrates.

An important role at the palace was fulfilled by a variety of pages, retainers and messengers. There were various positions within these ranks, but for the sake of simplicity the whole of the Fon's male servants and assistants will be referred to here as *chindas*. Most *chindas* entered the Fon's service between the ages of 7 and 14 years. Service to the Fon generally lasted between six and eighteen years. At the palace, *chindas* were trained to carry out a variety of duties, ranging from manual labour to advising the Fon (in the role of Kwifon retainers), the more gifted ones being granted more responsible tasks and privileges. *Chindas* were trained in strict discipline, obedience, docility and loyalty, and sworn to secrecy. Service to the Fon was compulsory and unpopular. Many resented being called to the Fon's aid, and attempts to escape were frequent, though considerable prestige was usually conferred on the *chindas* after retirement.¹ When the time came for a retainer to leave the palace, his father, assisted by kin, brought a considerable investment in goats, food and wine to the palace. Because of the heavy financial burden this implied, a family generally could not have more than one son in the service of the Fon.

Another important role in the Fon's household was reserved for the "queen-mother", the so-called Nafoyin, usually the most senior woman of the Fon's matrilineage. The Nafoyin was without a doubt the most influential woman in the kingdom. Though she did not have institutionalized political or judicial powers, she was in a position to advise the Fon personally on a wide range of matters. She was usually not married, but

¹ P.N. Nkwi recorded several life-histories of boys recruited into the Fon's service. Without exception, the boys were dismayed at being recruited into the service of the Fon. Cf. Nkwi 1976: 67-73.

was free to take lovers. She could sit in the Fon's court, and usually her opinion was sought. She was highly respected throughout the kingdom.

It is significant that, despite the highly structured hierarchy of the palace and the centralization of authority, political power in Kom was not strictly hereditary: wealth, wisdom, loyalty and birth could win an individual prestige and political influence, particularly at the village level (Nkwi 1976: 40). Age remained an important determining factor, however. Elders were held to be the incarnation of wisdom and justice, and youths were excluded from important judicial and political positions.

1.2 Elements of Kom's early colonial history

In 1884, Cameroon became a German protectorate, but since the Germans were primarily interested in the exploitation of the coastal areas, where climatic and soil conditions were favourable to plantation agriculture, the Grassfields escaped direct European penetration until the late 19th century. In 1889, Zintgraff, a German explorer, canvassed the area for economic resources potentially useful to Germany. In 1890, he visited Kom, where he met with outright hostility, but Kom had no further contact with Germans until 1901, when patrols, engaged in a punitive expedition against Kom's neighbour and rival, Bafut, crossed the Kom border (Chilver & Kaberry 1976: 123, 128-29). The Kom response to the Germans was informed by the tense relations between Kom and Bafut: the Kom leader, Fon Yu, congratulated the Germans on their victory over Bafut, and presented them with gifts and promises to supply labour for the new German military station at Bamenda.

The apparent allegiance of Kom to the colonial rulers was short-lived, however. In 1904, Fon Yu rejected the German demands for labour, provoking a German military invasion of Kom. The German offensive was determined and bitter: all villages on their path were burned down completely, the palace at Laikom was occupied and later burnt, and crops were destroyed (Nkwi 1976: 140). Fon Yu went into hiding and after seven months of battle was persuaded in 1905 to sign a peace pact with the German aggressor, thereby placing Kom under German administration (*Ibid.*: 23). A shortage of old men in Kom in the 1920s is testimony to the severity of the confrontation between the Germans and the Kom people: the men fled during the German offensive and died of cold and hunger.¹

After the subjugation of Kom in 1905, the relationship between Fon Yu and the German authorities seems to have been cordial. The head-tax which was introduced in 1909 was paid regularly, and Kom supplied the porters and station labour demanded of it. (Chilver & Kaberry 1967: 124-25). Kom young men were recruited into the German *Schutztruppe* as soldiers, messengers and carriers, providing the Germans with the information necessary for administration, and in 1908 a German military post was established at Njinikom (Nkwi 1976: 140).

¹ BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.23.

Direct German interference with Fon Yu's authority seems to have been minimal, but unintended effects of the German colonial presence can be noted. After the penetration of the Kom area by German troops and the official establishment of German rule in 1905, some sub-chiefdoms which had been subjected to Kom hegemony in the 19th century began to strive for secession from Kom, seeing the Germans, rather than the Fon of Kom, as their new superiors (*Ibid.*: 141). Through German recognition of the Fon of Kom's authority, Kom control was re-established: Fon Yu became the official tax-collector for the German government for Kom proper and for the sub-chiefdoms concerned.

Fon Yu died in 1912. During his reign, Kom had prospered economically, power had been centralized, consolidated and enhanced by colonial support, and the territorial boundaries of the kingdom had been expanded. Laikom had increased in population and in ritual importance, numbering more than 250 houses and over 1000 inhabitants in 1912. As a result of increasing population pressure at Laikom and controversies among some royal lineages, several new settlements had been founded a short distance away from the capital, including Njinikom and Fanantui (*Ibid.*: 21).

After his death in 1912, Fon Yu was succeeded by Fon Ngam, at the close of German rule in Cameroon. Ngam's dealings with the German administration reveal some of the incipient conflicts troubling the Kom kingdom around the turn of the century.

Prior to his succession to the throne, Ngam, then heir apparent, had presumably made himself unpopular: his inauguration was a troubled one, as he was embroiled in a conflict with three other princes of the blood, and several of Yu's sons (Chilver & Kaberry 1967: 149 fn. 5). Though there are conflicting accounts as to nature of the quarrel, it appears these royals refused to recognize Ngam as Fon, perhaps because He abolished the practice which permitted senior princes of the blood to marry the widows of the deceased Fon. Fearing opposition to his rule, Ngam accused these princes of treason. The German authorities had the new Fon's opponents executed, upon which some of Yu's widows committed suicide. Fon Ngam was cursed, such that future chiefs were allegedly robbed of their power of protective clairvoyance (Chilver 1988: 7) The Nafuyn at that time, Naya'a, went into voluntary exile, taking a contingent of followers with her, to demonstrate her disapproval of Ngam's methods, refusing to live at Laikom after she returned to Kom many years later. Ngam's royal rivals, including the Nafuyn, became Christians and moved away from the palace (Nkwi 1976: 23-24). Naya'a was the first highly-placed royal to convert to Christianity.

Though the intricacies and implications of this episode are not clear, it is evident that Fon Ngam's position as omnipotent ruler was disputed, at least by some royals, from the early days of his reign. It is also clear that marriage politics were a volatile source of conflict, and that Fon Ngam was not averse to collaborating with the German rulers to enhance his own power. The dissension among the royals is not stressed in studies of Kom, but it is noteworthy that as early as 1912, internal political affairs in Kom had become inextricably intertwined with colonial relations of power: the conflicts which were to plague Kom in the 1920s were rooted in an earlier period.

German and British colonial administration

2.1 German colonial rule

From 1884 until the defeat of Germany in the First World War, Cameroon was officially a German protectorate, *Kamerun*. German rule met with fierce resistance: when the First World War broke out in 1914, German authority had yet to be established in large parts of the territory. All forms of passive and armed resistance imaginable plagued the German administration throughout its presence in Cameroon. The Bamenda Grassfields provided the German colonizers with heavy, armed resistance. From 1888 until 1912, German rule in the Grassfields was characterized by brutal military expeditions. Large parts of the Grassfields were "pacified" as late as 1907. We have already noted the resistance of the Kom people against the German occupation of their kingdom in 1904-05.

Germany's aim in colonizing Cameroon was above all an economic one. Unlike her successors, Britain and France, who were at least nominally subject to conditions stipulated by the League of Nations, Germany had no philanthropic motives whatsoever in the colonizing enterprise, nor did she so much as attempt to disguise her economic interests in terms of a "civilizing mission". This purely economic aim inevitably had repercussions on the form of government and the relationship with indigens. The two most characteristic features of German rule relevant to this study are the economic exploitation of the coastal regions and the resulting need for labour, combined with the German style of Indirect Rule.

Economic policy

The prime objective of the German colonial government was to facilitate economic development to the benefit of Germany. Before colonization, rubber, palm oil, palm kernels, cocoa and coffee had been cultivated for trade with German commercial firms

(Ngoh 1983: 48-49). Under German rule, large-scale plantations were established in the present-day South West Province. In 1906, there were 23 plantations, encompassing 7292 hectares; in 1913 the number of plantations had been increased to 58 (28 225 hectares), established for the production of cocoa, rubber, palm oil, bananas, tobacco, tea and so on (Stoecker 1986: 162).

Unlike the coastal areas, which proved highly suited to plantation agriculture, the Bamenda Grassfields presented no major economic attraction to the European traders and planters, save as a source of manpower. The establishment of the German military station at Bamenda was intended to ensure a steady supply of labour for plantation and government service. Due to the expansion of the plantation system, the growing needs of the colonial bureaucracy, and the construction of a railway, for commercial and military purposes, the demand for labour far exceeded the readily available supply.

Forced labour soon became the bottom line of German colonial policy. According to one conservative estimate, 150,000 Cameroonians were conscripted to work for the German government in 1914 (H. Winkler, cited in Stoecker 1986: 167). Most of the plantation workers were "imported" from the Grassfields, as people in the vicinity of the plantations showed little inclination to work for the Germans. Grassfields rulers were rewarded for the regular recruitment of plantation workers (Ngoh 1983: 54, Gwan 1991: 11). Labourers were often recruited by force by their chiefs, as the chiefs who did not meet government demands for labour were beaten and chained themselves. (Ndi 1983: 24 fn. 63).

The system of forced labour, with compulsory service ranging from 6 to 18 months, gave rise to much resentment, particularly as methods of recruitment were often inhumane, wages low, working conditions abominable and the death rate among plantation and railway workers very high. According to one recruiter, only one-half to one-third of the workers recruited from the Grassfields returned home alive at the end of their service.¹ Much of the resistance towards German rule focused on the German labour policies. The resistance to the German labour policies took the form of passive resistance (hiding in the bush at the sight of a recruiting party), as well as armed protest.

German Indirect Rule

In order to exercise a maximum of control at minimum cost, Germany adopted a policy of Indirect Rule in Cameroon. German Indirect Rule closely resembled the more famous British system of Indirect Rule which was developed in Northern Nigeria and applied in many British colonies after the First World War. Both systems relied heavily on what was surmised to be legitimate traditional authority to carry out colonial administration. In addition to their crucial role in recruiting labour for the Germans, recognized chiefs fulfilled important roles in maintaining law and order, collecting taxes and executing justice. While some pre-colonial authorities lost legitimate power, others saw their authority considerably buttressed by German support.

An important pillar on which the system of Indirect Rule was founded was a judicial system which allowed for the continuation of "native law and custom" alongside

¹ See Rudin (1938: 324-28) and Stoecker (1986: 168-70) for methods of recruitment and labour conditions.

European legal systems. In principle, native judicial systems were permitted to function as long as native law was not repugnant to European norms. Thus, certain forms of customary justice, such as trial by ordeal, were forbidden. Cases which could not be dealt with in the traditional courts, due to limitations imposed by the Germans, were brought before the German colonial district courts.

In the coastal regions of Kamerun "native tribunals" were established, but the Grassfields lay largely beyond effective German intervention. Native judicial systems in the Grassfields were left more or less undisturbed, though poison-ordeals, enslavement and brutal punishments were officially forbidden (Nkwi 1976: 152). Even these stipulations were almost impossible to enforce, however, and in Kom the Fon remained the sole judicial authority throughout the German colonial era. It has already been noted that in Kom, Fon Ngam relied on support from the Germans to further his own judicial powers: when the three royals with whom he was engaged in a conflict refused to appear before his court, he had them arrested and prosecuted by the Germans.

German educational policy in Cameroon was minimal in all respects, and education was primarily a missionary concern, especially until 1910, when an education law was promulgated which enabled the government to exercise some control over the rapidly increasing number of mission schools. The law prescribed a programme for mission schools and stipulated that no language other than German was to be used as a medium for instruction (Ngoh 1987: 63). Schools which satisfied government requirements were granted moderate financial support. The nominal increase in government concern for education seems to have been motivated by the increasing need for Africans who could serve the German government as clerks, interpreters, and so forth.

2.2 World War One in Cameroon

The German presence in Cameroon came to an end due to the outbreak of the First World War, which prompted Britain and France to invade the territory. The greatly outnumbered German forces were forced to retreat from Cameroon in December 1915, when Colonel Zimmerman fled to Spanish Guinea with most of the German troops (Ngoh 1987: 80, Stoecker 1986: 275). The ensuing internment of the German troops and their supporters on the island Fernando Po constitutes an important, yet hitherto largely neglected, episode in Cameroonian colonial history: by German estimates almost 15,000 people made the exodus from Cameroon, slightly less than 1000 of them Europeans (Quinn 1985: 171). Only in 1919 were the Cameroonian soldiers repatriated. In northern Cameroon German troops maintained control until Garoua was captured by Allied forces in June 1915. As early as September 1914, however, when the Germans had been ousted from Douala, colonial rule in the Bamenda Grassfields had essentially become a British affair (Ngoh 1987: 80). Eventually, the Treaty of Versailles stipulated that Germany should relinquish all her colonies to the Allied and Associated powers, and German Kamerun was divided between Britain and France. This arrangement was ratified in 1922 by the League of Nations.

In the years preceding the First World War, the German government had deemed it unwise to recruit Cameroonians into German military service on a large scale, considering the widespread resistance to German rule. When the War erupted, the German colonies had been provided with only minimal military support, and hence they came to depend heavily on African soldiers. The situation became all the more dramatic when the British maritime blockade, imposed immediately after the outbreak of the war, prevented Germany from recruiting military support from the homeland. The forced labour policies of the pre-war period were easily adapted to military conscription of Cameroonian men, and again the Bamenda Grassfields proved a trustworthy supply of manpower. Some Cameroonians volunteered for service in the German armed forces, attracted by the relatively high wages, prestige, and health care, but more often than not conscription was involuntary, and Cameroonian support for the German effort was, on the whole, minimal.¹ The Cameroonian population at large was either hostile or indifferent, assisting the Allies in many ways.² Numerous incidents of disobedience in the armed forces, including a mutiny in June 1915, hampered the German war effort.

The Bamenda Grassfields seem to have constituted an anomaly in this respect. The powerful chiefs in the Grassfields were generally loyal — at least superficially — to the Germans, who had considerably enhanced their authority. Some adapted their allegiance to changing conditions: Fon Ngam was judged by the British to have played a "dubious" role during the war, supporting the winning party.³ With only a few exceptions, the Fons provided the Germans with the labour and provisions demanded, perhaps because of the threat of severe sanctions should they refuse to comply (Stoecker 1991: 244).

The British also made use of native soldiers, though an explicit policy of conscription was not adopted. Britain relied primarily on Nigerian soldiers in the Cameroon campaign, but when Yoruba wartime resistance against British rule increased, the British recruited about 100 soldiers from the Bamenda area, a fraction of the number recruited into German service (Matthews 1985: 109-110). Many Cameroonians were conscripted by whichever power happened to be operating in their locality, so that some served first German and later British masters (Page 1987: 10).

2.3 British colonial rule

Although British rule was not yet officially ratified, the British government concerned itself with the establishment of British authority in Cameroon well before the war came to an end. From the fall of Douala in September 1914 to March 1916, Cameroon was ruled as a so-called "condominium" by France and Britain jointly, after which time

¹ The German recruits were much despised and feared. A Protestant missionary described them as "die ärgste Landplage, die grössten Räuber, die frechste, unverschämteste schändlichste Sorte von Menschen, die mir in meinem Leben begegnet sind" (Hausen 1970: 136 fn. 237).

² Stoecker 1986: 275. See also Hausen (1970: 95-135) for details on the recruitment of Cameroonian soldiers for service in the German *Schutztruppe*.

³ BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.33.

Cameroon was divided into two mandated areas, under British and French authority. The condominium administration provided for the provisional administration of Cameroon until the Germans were completely expelled. The co-operation between France and Britain in the condominium government was short-lived, however: separate French and British administrative structures were set up in 1916.

British rule between 1916 and 1922

The period from 1916 to 1922 was one of confusion and contradictory colonial policies. British administrators in the Bamenda Division were left more or less on their own, receiving only occasional instructions from Lagos, until 1922, when, after the Southern Cameroons had been entrusted to the British government as a Mandate Territory by the League of Nations, Indirect Rule was adopted as the official policy for Cameroon.

Early British policy was largely determined by the fact that Cameroon fell to Britain as a spoil of war and not as a colonial territory for its own sake. By consequence, the status of the territory was ill-defined in the years after the conclusion of the war, and British policy *ad hoc* and often contradictory. The importance of German economic aims had largely informed the pattern of colonial hegemony, and large parts of Kamerun had not been pacified when the First World War erupted, so that the economic and political structure which the British inherited from the Germans was by all measures a shaky one.

The new British government in Cameroon focused on establishing British authority with a minimum of force, making use of traditional rulers to implement its policy. This early British strategy, at least in the Bamenda Grassfields, implied more or less a continuation of the German system of government, which likewise made extensive use of so-called Native Authorities to implant colonial rule. Initially, few changes were effectuated: the British recognized those traditional authorities recognized by the Germans, the Native Courts established by the Germans were accepted as the foundation for the administration of British judicial policies, and education was left largely to the Christian missions. In terms of taxation there was no real departure from the German system: tax quotas were fixed at a percentage of the estimated gross income of villages. Detailed assessment reports were drawn up for this purpose. Like the Germans, the British adopted a policy of compulsory labour, though the British policy was far less severe than the German policy had been: every adult male was liable to conscription for one or two weeks a year, as near to home as possible, to work as a porter, in road construction, and so on.¹ The area of Cameroon under British control was divided into four administrative divisions — Bamenda, Mamfe, Kumba, Victoria — each under the direct control of a District Officer (D.O.), who was responsible to the Resident in Buea. These divisions were more or less continuations of administrative divisions established by the Germans.

¹ For example, Mamfe and Bamenda Divisions supplied 9 147, 13 293 and 9 398 carriers in 1923, 1924 and 1925 respectively (Gwan 1991: 11).

British civil administration in the Grassfields was established in 1916 by G.S. Podevin, the first British D.O.¹ of Bamenda Division. From the former German military station in Bamenda, he set out to rally chiefs and to reconfirm the status quo of the German administration. As early as 1916, taxes were increased and customary courts, which would be instrumental in the tax-collection envisioned, revived.

In the period 1916-22, on the whole, there was something of a power vacuum in the Bamenda Division. The lack of a defined colonial policy was exacerbated by the geographical isolation from Lagos and the coastal towns and by staffing problems. As a somewhat impoverished appendage of Nigeria, Cameroon probably never attracted a particularly outstanding group of administrators, and was constantly understaffed.² The main problem, however, seems to have been a persistent lack of coherent policy, and may be attributed to the political uncertainties following from the First World War.

Aspects of British Indirect Rule

Broadly speaking, British colonial rule in Cameroon was informed by previous African colonial experiences, particularly in Northern Nigeria, and by the inheritance of the foundations laid by the Germans. In essence, Cameroon was administered as a part of Nigeria, and governed, after 1922, according to the principles of Indirect Rule laid out in several Political Memoranda by the British Lord Lugard and based on experiences with Indirect Rule in British Northern Nigeria.

Indirect Rule concentrated on the adaptation of traditional political institutions for local government and the integration of traditional authorities into the colonial hierarchy. The goal was the establishment of a well-oiled machinery, under British supervision, called the Native Administration, and consisting of so-called Native Authorities, Native Courts and Native Treasuries. Indigenous systems of government would be maintained for local affairs. The task of the colonial administration was envisioned as a predominantly supervisory one, and Britain's colonial subjects were to be guided towards future self-government by increased participation in the political decision-making process (of course along Western lines). It should be noted, however, that, ultimately, the Native Administration remained subordinate to the British administration.

In practice, the Native Authorities were chiefs or chiefs-in-council whose authority was formally recognized by the British. These Native Authorities were granted executive, judicial, fiscal and partial legislative powers, and were responsible for the orderly collection of government taxes, the maintaining of law and order, and the provision of services such as schools and dispensaries. The Native Courts and Native Authorities were installed pending the approval of the D.O., and were responsible for the administration of law, maintaining the peace, recruitment of labour, public health

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the use of the term DO in this study refers to the District Officer of *Bamenda* Division, as this region is the focus of our study.

² Inexperienced officers were sent to Cameroon and Togo, as the best colonial administrators were sent to India and Sudan. Chiabi labels Cameroon a "dumping ground" for colonial officers deemed unfit for duty elsewhere in the British empire. Cf. Chiabi 1989: 175-77. See also Austen 1971: 527 and Chiabi 1982: 69-71.

and hygiene. The funds collected in the Native Treasury served largely to sustain the Indirect Rule bureaucracy.

The British colonial judicial system was rooted firmly in the concepts and goals of Indirect Rule. African customs and justice were to be respected insofar as they did not interfere with European concepts of a just society. Native tribunals were granted the right to arrest and try those upsetting public order, but this authority was not unlimited. Every serious crime had to be tried in court (Nkwi 1976: 144). The professed acceptance of so-called "Native Law and Custom" gave rise to much manipulation and speculation, on the part of African subjects, traditional rulers, and colonial officials alike, all of whom sought to (re)define "custom" in their own interests.

Though a number of policy changes were effectuated in the 1930s, Indirect Rule formed the backbone of British colonial policy in Cameroon until after the Second World War, when a shift in policy was initiated to grant more autonomy to local native authorities and to incorporate the new elites into local government institutions. Increasingly, literacy became a requirement for participation in the increasingly centralized legislative councils established after World War II. Eventually, the Native Authority system proved unable to accommodate both the traditional and the modern elements, and the chiefs so persistently supported by the British were more or less ousted from power upon independence.

Indirect Rule in the Grassfields

Indigenous leaders in the Bamenda Grassfields took advantage of the change from German to British rule to renegotiate their positions *vis-à-vis* the European authorities. British authorities sent investigators out to collect data on the region they were to govern. Elaborate intelligence reports were drawn up, traditional leaders consulted, and possible policies debated on the basis of the findings. Needless to say, the picture obtained through these initial investigations was a gross oversimplification of the diversities and complexities which, in time, would confront the British rulers. Nonetheless, they informed British policy to a large degree, for lack of an effective correcting force.

The policy of Indirect Rule was considered particularly suited for the Bamenda Grassfields, as the region was characterized by large, centralized chiefdoms, which would facilitate implementation of the British policy. Until an administrative reorganization of British Cameroon in 1948, the Bamenda Grassfields numbered 23 Native Authority areas. In five of these, including Kom, the Native Authority was a single chief. In the other areas, the Native Authorities were chiefs-in-council.

The N.A. area in Kom may have been one of the few which could claim a basis in traditional ethnic boundaries: this may be attributed to the fact that a strong, consolidated kingdom had been created there prior to the arrival of the Europeans. In Kom, the traditional political set-up was largely maintained, initially. The Fon was assisted by Village Heads, Kwifon officials and sub-chiefs in running local affairs, collecting taxes, organizing communal labour, and trying minor civil and criminal cases (Nkwi 1976: 144). Contrary to British wishes, however, the Fon rarely met with his

authorized council: it usually held meetings only when the D.O. came on tour.¹ The Fon's word remained law, British attempts to induce consultation with recognized councils notwithstanding: "The Chief's word is law. What he says, we agree with", commented an elder in 1929.²

In 1918, the Native Court in Bamenda was established. Officially, its president was the Chief of Bafut, but in practice the court was presided over by small chiefs, as big chiefs, according to D.O. Hunt, considered it an insult to their dignity to attend. The result was that a quorum of smaller chiefs settled the cases which the bigger chiefs were unable to settle on their own. The accuracy of Hunt's comment that "yet the bigger chiefs do not disapprove of the system" is questionable: when the Native Court was sent on tour in the Bamenda Division, Fon Ngam of Kom flatly refused the court permission to sit in his territory. The result was almost complete inaction of the court for almost four months, after which the practice of sending the court "on circuit" was discontinued.³

Until 1927, British attempts to reorganize native courts were resisted by the Fon of Kom, who was wary of losing authority. The Fon's resistance may have been motivated by his fear he would lose control over the revenues which the court fees provided (Nkwi 1976: 154). At the close of his reign, Ngam reluctantly agreed to the establishment of a Native Court in Kom, but only after he had been convinced that he would maintain ultimate authority, as its president. The new Customary Court in theory replaced the Fon's supreme court, but in practice the old court continued to judge minor cases (*Ibid.*). Although in pre-colonial Kom the judicial role of the Fon had probably been greater than in other, less centralized Grassfields kingdoms, the creation of Kom customary court served to increase the Fon's direct involvement in the administration of justice: traditional methods of conflict resolution were no longer recognized, and the Fon was forced, as president of the court, to assume the role of judge.

The case of Kom aside, Native Courts in the Bamenda Grassfields functioned relatively well because chiefs there were powerful and had been accustomed to dealing with cases (Chiabi 1989: 184). The village courts and councils continued to exist during British rule and tried the same minor cases over which they had jurisdiction prior to the colonial era. The Native Court became the court of second instance, handling complaints from village councils. The D.O. reviewed appeals from the Native Courts, and presented to the Resident of the Commissioner those cases which he could not solve satisfactorily.

Initially, the Kwifon was not tampered with by the British administration, which described the institution as particularly useful in "strengthening the authority of the chiefs and elders, primarily perhaps over their womenfolk, but secondly also over all members of the tribe."⁴ The initial enthusiasm gave way in the 1930s, however, to scepticism. Professed intentions to uphold indigenous systems of government notwithstanding, proposals were launched to diminish the influence of the Kwifon,

¹ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1930, p.32; Nkwi 1976: 144.

² BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1929, p.13.

³ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, p.24.

⁴ BNA-Ia 1926/1, Resident to all DO's, 6.2.1926.

which was considered too secretive: the British administration demanded transparency, but the Fon and the Kwifon refused to comply. From 1930 onwards, the Kwifon was no longer recognized as a legitimate part of the Native Authority (Chiabi 1989: 188).

The change may be seen as an institutionalization of the increasing British preference for the new progressive, literate elite as partners in Indirect Rule. Whereas previously the strong, centralized chiefdoms of the Grassfields had been regarded as the most suited to Native Administration, in the 1930s the authority of the Fons was seen to frustrate British attempts to broaden the base of political power and participation. Referring to the Fon of Kom, D.O. Swabey in 1938 claimed that "the people through the chief's prestige and power are less vocal and willing to voice their complaints and though there is certainly no oppression the exact state of affairs in more difficult to gauge", compared to those areas where competition among councillors rendered them more vocal.¹ The D.O.'s description of the Native Administration on the whole as a "cumbersome body, ill-fitted for executive action"² was typical of government opinion in the 1930s. After the Second World War significant changes were effectuated to incorporate the modern elements in the colonial hierarchy and to diminish the influence of hereditary rulers. The Kom Clan Council, for example, established in 1949, comprised 16 elected representatives and 29 hereditary rulers. The Fon lost his position as president, but remained an ex-officio member.

British educational policy in Cameroon

The British concern for education in Cameroon was, in practice, minimal. Britain's primary goal in terms of education was to train a literate elite for the local civil service, and to enculturate Cameroonians to the dominant British social norms. Initially, education was left to the missions, which more or less carried on where they had left off before the First World War disrupted the schools. But because the colonial government's policy with regard to the missions was very strict immediately following the war, there were few resident missionaries present to continue educational efforts.³ In a half-hearted effort to fill the vacuum, the early colonial government did establish a few government schools as well as some Native Authority schools, but these fell far short of meeting the educational demand, so that education in the early 1920s was largely dependent on indigenous (Christian) initiative.

In the 1920s, a British colonial educational policy was worked out by the Phelps-Stokes Commission. The reports of this Commission, which provided the blueprint for British educational enterprise in Cameroon, viewed education as a necessary bridge between the cultures of the colonial ruler and the colonized people. Practical, rural-based education, geared to encourage small-holder market-oriented agriculture, was granted preference above urban-oriented courses stressing liberal arts. The Phelps-Stokes reports stressed a partnership between colonial government and missions, and

¹ BNA-Cb 1938/3, League of Nations Report, 1938, Bamenda Division, p.3.

² BNA-Cb 1938/3, League of Nations Report, 1938, Bamenda Division, p.18.

³ All German citizens, including missionaries, had been expelled from the territory during the First World War.

initiated a policy of government grants to those mission schools which adhered to the official curriculum and worked with qualified teachers.

In the context of Lugard's Indirect Rule, the British educational policy also endeavoured to establish so-called Native Authority schools, secular schools which were out of the range of control of the missions but within the range of control of the colonial government. The early N.A. schools were staffed by Nigerian teachers, as there was no teachers' training in Cameroon. In 1923, there were 6 government, 12 Native Authority and 5 mission elementary schools in the trust territory.¹

The depression of the 1930s again decreased the government's involvement in education. After a short period in which inspected mission schools were provided grants-in-aid, the economic crisis put a stop to the government's financial assistance. Kake teachers' training college, which had been established in the late 1920s, was unable to attract students in the 1930s, as missions and N.A.'s had no hopes of paying teachers' salaries. There was political uncertainty as well, as the restoration of German rule was not unthinkable. The result was a stagnation in governmental involvement in education until after World War II, although during the war grants to mission schools were substantially increased.

2.4 Early colonial policies regarding Christian missions

German missionary policy

The policy adopted by German colonial authorities with regard to missions may be termed pragmatic. Though there was some scepticism regarding monogamy and the potential decrease in fertility (and thus in labour supply: Rudin 1938: 301 fn. 1), missionaries were welcome to the protectorate as long as they contributed to the colonial effort, for example, by providing education in the German language. The lack of government initiative resulted in a near-monopoly on education by missionary organizations. Missionary education was popular where it was available: between 1906 and 1913 the number of pupils registered at mission schools tripled, from 15,472 to 43,419 (Stoecker 1986: 169).

The first missionary organization to concern itself with Cameroon was the English Baptist Mission, which was taken over in 1886 by the Protestant Basel Mission, as the Baptists had encountered difficulties with the German colonial authorities (Ngoh 1987: 59). Initially, the Basel Mission was considered by the German colonial administration to be more or less a state church, and hence Catholic missions found it difficult to obtain entry to Cameroon (Ndi 1983: 17).

In 1889, the Catholic Pallotine fathers obtained permission to operate in areas not yet covered by the Basel Mission, and established a mission station at Bonjongo, near the coast. It appears that the establishment of a Catholic Mission was welcomed by the German administrators at that time because the Basel Mission had failed to provide

¹ BNA-Sb/a, 1939/12, Commentary on the 'Memorandum of Evidence' presented by Chief Manga Williams, the Cameroons Welfare Union and the Cameroons Youth League to the Elliott Commission, March 1944.

German-speaking native clerks and agents. The Basel Mission had also encountered problems with the German government because the mission resisted the colonial government's oppressive measures with regard to forced labour and land expropriation (Manthobang 1985: 90, Ndi 1986: 214). The Pallotine Fathers identified themselves closely with German colonial policy, using German as the teaching medium and supporting policies of enforced labour (Obdeijn 1983: 62).

Until the turn of the century, missionary activity was concentrated along the coast, in the area where plantations had been established. In 1903 the Basel Mission opened a mission station in the Bamenda Grassfields, at Bali, but it was not until 1913 that the Kom area was approached by missionaries. At that point, the Catholic Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus founded a mission station at Fujua, a short distance away from Laikom, the capital of Kom and habitus of the Fon.¹ The same missionaries had established a mission station in 1912 at Nso (Kumbo), to the east of Kom, having been sent there by the German government to "mollify the natives" (Ndi 1986: 21).

The German missions relied heavily on the support of local catechists. Most of the early Christians in the Bamenda Grassfields were plantation labourers who had been baptized by the Pallotine Fathers after receiving rigorous religious instruction for two to three years. These catechists taught in schools, prepared catechumens for baptism, explained the catechism and bible stories in so-called doctrine classes, and led the congregation in prayers. In practice, they ran the whole mission during the absence of ordained priests. (Ndi 1986: 27).

The outbreak of World War I did not put an end to the German missionary influence in Kom, for the German *Schutztruppe* in the Bamenda area included three Catholic priests and five brothers (Nkwi 1976: 159). In the long run, the influence of these "soldier-priests" was to be far greater than the influence exerted by the pioneer missionaries who had settled at Fujua.

Early British attitudes towards the missions in the Bamenda Grassfields

Although British rule was not yet official, the English concerned themselves with missionary activities in Kom as early as 1916, when the D.O. in Bamenda attempted to convince the Roman Catholic Mission to set up a school where former teachers would be taught English.² This move may be considered an anomaly, however, for as the war drew to a close the British policy regarding the re-establishment of the missions in the Bamenda Grassfields was far more hesitant. During the unsettled first years of Britain's presence in Cameroon, her attitude towards the missions was marked by suspicion and impatience.

The initial investigations of the British colonial authorities had revealed that the Fons and other traditional leaders in the Bamenda Grassfields were, on the whole, none too enthusiastic about the representatives of the new religion, be they European or Cameroonian. What had begun as an enticing flirt with "whiteman's" education, had evolved into a potential threat to the omnipotence of the previously unchallenged Fons.

¹ BNA-Sd 1916/3, undated memo (1916) regarding Bekom.

² BNA-Sd 1916/6, DO to Resident, 18.5.1916.

Many of them felt threatened by the new religion, and seized the opportunity presented by the change to British rule to pressure the new authorities to limit missionary activities in their territories. The traditional rulers made astute use of the uncertainty accompanying the switch from German to British rule to try prevent a new wave of missionary activity from undermining their authority. Furthermore, the fact that the Catholic missionaries had been *German* gave rise to considerable suspicion on the part of the British administration. In post-World War I colonial logic, Catholicism was easily equated with allegiance to Germany.

In a lengthy report to the Resident in Buea in 1917, D.O. Podevin summarized his fears that co-operation with the mission would lead to political unrest, as British control over the territory had not yet been fully established:

With due regard to the very uncertain hold we exercise upon the conduct of native affairs in the Cameroons (...) the present juncture would be a most inappropriate moment to introduce any influence which would in any way be calculated to minimize or depreciate our efforts (...) The consensus of opinion of the chiefs is not altogether in favour of the re-establishment of Missions. Chiefs I have interviewed affirm and assure me emphatically that the German missionaries undermined their authority and created many difficulties. These chiefs also informed me that since the German Missions were closed these difficulties have to a great extent disappeared and they are able to exercise a very much more efficient control over their 'boys'.¹

Podevin's reference to Britain's uncertain hold on Cameroon reflected the British fear that African loyalties to Germany were stronger than loyalties to the new colonial rulers. He interpreted the fact that such a large contingent of Christians from Kom had enlisted in the German army as an indication of the potentially subversive nature of Catholicism, and was quick to associate mission activities with pro-German propaganda. Earlier, a native ex-German soldier from Nso had been accused of spreading "pro-German propaganda under the pretence of religion" and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment with hard labour for aspiring against the King and English authority.² This recruit was soon joined by other Christian ex-soldiers, arrested at the request of the Fon of Nso, who suspected them of using the church to usurp power from him.³ Clearly, the early Christians were perceived to be hazardous not only to the authority of the new colonial government, but also to the authority of the local chiefs. The implied threat to their own authority was not lost on the early British officials. Thus the fears of the early British administrators went hand in hand with the interests of traditional rulers, on whose support the British depended heavily.

Though they may have overestimated the direct subversive potential of the young Christian church, the British fears were not entirely unfounded. Although the censorship of communications described below leaves, in retrospect, a somewhat paranoid im-

¹ BNA-Sd 1917/5, DO Podevin to Resident, 8.9.1917.

² BNA-Sd 1921/1, Confidential Memorandum: Catholic Mission at Banzo (Kumbo) and Bikom, DO to Resident, 20.12.1921.

³ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Confidential Memorandum: Catholic Mission at Banzo (Kumbo) and Bikom, DO to Resident, 20.12.1921.

pression, Podevin's investigations strongly suggest that a connection between Christian affiliation and pro-German sentiments cannot be altogether denied:

The German Missionaries and the Agents at Fernando Po are in constant communication with natives in this Division. One letter I censored recently — and did not deliver — was addressed to the Head Chief of Bekom. This letter was written by one of his people — a German soldier. This man requested the Chief to look after his women and to repair the Government buildings. I should imagine without exaggeration that I have received at least 200 letters and post-cards from Fernando Po addressed to natives in this Division since I have been in charge of Bamenda and the majority of them have been written by ex-mission boys. It is reasonable to suppose most of them were written at the instigation of German missionaries and I am more inclined to believe — judging by the handwriting — that many were written by the missionaries themselves. If the missions are re-opened before a definite conclusion in the war is arrived at and before we know whether this portion of the Cameroons is to be British Territory or not I cannot help thinking that an altogether erroneous impression will be formed by the native mind.¹

Podevin's fears were echoed by his successor, D.O. Crawford, who declined to have mission stations in the Bamenda area reopened "on account of the unsettled state of certain parts of the division (...) On no account should the *German* missionaries be allowed to return to the division."² After the official adoption of the policy of Indirect Rule, D.O. Hunt reiterated that

(...) the introduction of a foreign faith seems to be an obstacle to the natural and gradual evolution of a stable Native Administration. (...) A foreign religion is disintegrating in its influence, and (...) tends to diminish the power of the chiefs.³

Clearly, the new colonial administration found itself in a precarious dilemma. The situation which the British inherited from the Germans included a Christianized population — small in number but large in determination — and the beginnings of a Westernized elite. By keeping the missions out of Cameroon the British would be certain to alienate that part of the African population, while at the same time signing the death warrant for the many schools which had been started by the various missions. Allowing the missions to continue their activities uncontrolled, however, would most certainly alienate a significant other part of the population, including the so-called natural rulers on whose loyalty the British so much relied. Not only foreign missionaries posed a threat to English rule, so did independent Africans. Besides, the influence of missions had in the past proved singularly difficult to assess. The chiefs in the Bamenda area believed that the autonomy of the Christian "boys" undermined their traditional authority, while the Basel Mission, for example, was accused by colonial officials of

¹ BNA-Sd 1917/5, DO Podevin to Resident, 8.9.1917.

² BNA-Sd 1916/3, DO Crawford to Resident, 17.11.1919. (Emphasis in original).

³ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.21.

having destroyed "any sense of tribal unity" in Mamfe: "all tribal spirit, even personality, seems to have been crushed out."¹

After much debate, and contrary to the wishes of the Bamenda officials, missionaries were allowed to re-establish activities in Grassfields in 1921, on the condition that they pledged to confine themselves to their "proper functions and abstain from any activities calculated to interfere with harmonious relations between the native races and constituted authority".² In the case study of Kom (presented in Part II) the dilemmas confronting the British colonial government with regard to the missionary presence will be illustrated in detail. Suffice it to say here that in the first years of British rule, colonial mission policy was critical and cautious. From the very beginning, the colonial administration found itself entangled in a power struggle between Christian converts and traditional authorities, a conflict which was rooted in pre-British times and which was to continue throughout the ensuing decades, time and again posing an indirect but keenly felt threat to British hegemony.

2.5 Summary and concluding remarks for Part One: Backdrop for the case study

It has been shown above that Kom, like many of its neighbours in the Bamenda Grassfields, was characterized by a highly centralized political structure, headed by a Fon with far-reaching authority. The authority of the Fon of Kom had been disputed as early as 1912, when the powerful Fon Yu was succeeded by the controversial Fon Ngam. The latter made astute use of the German colonial power to enhance his power and even relied on German support to execute all rivals to the throne.

In practice, British Indirect Rule was not fundamentally different from German colonial rule, which lasted, in the Grassfields, from the turn of the century to 1915, when all German inhabitants were exiled. Both colonial governments strove to strengthen so-called Native Authorities in order to consolidate colonial hegemony and facilitate tax-collection. Indirect Rule was based on three main institutions: the Native Authorities, the Native Courts, and the Native Treasuries. Despite a professed respect for indigenous political and judicial institutions, the system of Indirect Rule involved considerable and complex shifts in social and political relations. The transition from German to British rule after World War I was accompanied by chaos and colonial confusion: British rule was ratified only in 1922, although British colonial officials were stationed in Bamenda as early as 1916. The case study will illustrate that this state of political uncertainty had considerable repercussions on the developments in the Kom kingdom at that time.

British Indirect Rule strove to create strong chiefs and subjugate them to British rule while increasing their power *vis-à-vis* other social forces. The case study will show that this led to contradictory colonial actions, sometimes in support of behaviour

¹ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1921, p.11.

² BNA-Sd 1921/1, Extract from *The Morning Post* of Wed. July 27 1921, cited in Ndi 1986:83.

challenging chiefs, and at other times reinforcing traditional authority. In the Grassfields, Indirect Rule vested in the Fons not only *more*, but also *different* powers, namely judiciary and legislative powers previously shared with various regulatory societies.¹

Regarding Christian missions, both Germany and Britain were guided by pragmatic motives, and both co-operated with the missions to a certain degree in order to further their own aims: economic exploitation, the supply of labour, and the "socialization" of the natives along colonial lines. The result was, initially, *ad hoc* and sometimes contradictory policy, informed by the colonial government's dilemma: wanting on the one hand to preserve and strengthen traditional authority, and on the other hand striving to allow for "modernizing" influences in the form of Christianity and education.

¹ As is noted by v.d. Berg 1992: 29.

PART II

THE CASE STUDY: CHRISTIANITY AND COLONIAL RULE IN KOM, 1913-1940

This part of the study consists of a micro-study of the development of the Catholic mission in Kom, in the continually changing colonial context. For the sake of analysis, the period of Catholic missionization in Kom has been divided into several phases.

The first phase, from roughly 1913 to the end of the First World War, might be labelled the "pioneer era", as it was during these years that the Catholic mission first attempted to establish itself in Kom. Little is known of this phase, and since it is essentially beyond the main focus of this study, the pioneer phase will be discussed only briefly.

The second phase, from the end of the First World War to about 1927, was characterized by indigenous leadership of the Catholic church, and by outright conflict and provocation. In addition, developments in this phase were informed by the uncertain hold which the new colonial government had on the trust territory. In this period, the seeds were sown for fundamental shifts in social relations, which were to have important repercussions for the future development of Kom. Increasing penetration — both by Christianity and by colonial forces — was accompanied by scores of conflicts, intricately interwoven, regarding the question of authority, conflicts regarding the relative autonomy of women, and administrative/judicial issues. Conflict notwithstanding, in this turbulent phase the Catholic mission did succeed in establishing the basis for its future success in Njinikom, by providing an attractive alternative to "traditional" social structures, perceived by many as oppressive or unjust, and by establishing schools.

In 1927, formal European leadership over the Catholic mission in Njinikom was established, upon the arrival of the first Mill Hill Fathers. The change from indigenous to European leadership marks the beginning of the third phase, in which older conflicts continued to play an important role, now compounded by complications arising from the European missionaries' relationship to the colonizing power: though they were white, and thus perceived by the local population to be a part of the colonial sphere, most of the missionaries were not British, giving rise to suspicion on the part of British colonial authorities. Despite the numerous, continuing conflicts, this phase may be described as one of consolidation, as the intermediary role played by the European missionaries enabled the Catholic mission to expand in and outside Kom, and decisive measures by the colonial government eventually led to compromise and accommodative missionary policy.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, missions and government focused their dealings with each other on constructive co-operation. To a large degree, the Christian missions relieved the government of the obligation to involve itself in education and welfare, so that even after the Second World War, education and health care were virtually monopolized by the missions. Though this period lies essentially beyond the scope of this study, it will prove interesting to note the main themes which characterized the post-war era in the mission history of Kom. Old conflicts and themes continued but several new themes emerged as well, in the context of changing political culture and early nationalism.

To sum up, then, the consecutive phases of the missionary endeavour in Kom may be characterized as phases of *contact* (1), of *penetration and conflict* (2), of *compromise and consolidation* (3), and of *continuity in change* (4).

The First Phase: Pioneers – scratching the surface, 1913-1919

As was noted earlier, missionary activity in Cameroon was concentrated along the coast until the turn of the century. In 1903, the Basel Mission opened a mission station in the Bamenda Grassfields, at Bali, and in 1913 the Catholic Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus founded a mission station at Fujua, a short distance away from Laikom.¹ At that point, a Catholic priest and two brothers were granted land at Fujua to build a station and establish a school, with a three-year educational programme entirely in German (Timneng n.d.). In 1913, the school boasted an enrolment of 120 boys, of whom 7 were sons of Fon Ngam (Nkwi 1976: 164).

The German mission station was far from completed when the missionaries were forced to leave the area late in 1915. The mission compound measured about 100 by 100 yards, with "12 outhouses, all of them badly damaged and in various stages of disrepair" and pigsties and stalls for oxen.² The mission house itself was a large brick building with a grass roof and a mud floor. Adjoining the mission was a "bush church" measuring about 40 by 20 feet.

It is difficult to determine how these early missionaries were received in Kom. Most informants maintain that, originally, Fon Ngam had been apprehensive, but not hostile, towards the missionaries, having given them one of his own pipes to indicate his goodwill.³ According to Nkwi, "Fon Ngam warmly received them and gave them a rich fertile area at Fujua" (Nkwi 1976: 158). He further maintains that "the Fon was very keen on their work especially the school." The Fon indeed granted the land on which the

¹ According to Michael Timneng (Kom catechist), in his autobiography, the German mission at Fujua was established in 1911. Nkwi (1976: 158) dates the establishment of the mission in 1913

² BNA-Sd 1916/3, Report on Bekom mission, 23.3.1917.

³ Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

mission station was built freehold, and supported the missionary effort by providing the mission with building materials and clothing for the school pupils.¹ The apparently harmonious relationship between the Fon and the missionaries is further indicated by the fact that, when the German missionaries were banned from Kom, they brought all their valuables and books to the Fon for safe-keeping during their absence, clearly intending to continue after the war where they had been forced to leave off.²

Yet Nkwi's claim that "the Fon was certainly preoccupied with the furthering of the missionary efforts" (Nkwi 1976: 164) may overestimate the Fon's goodwill. All whites were regarded with a certain degree of suspicion because of the Fon's previous encounters with German soldiers. It seems plausible that the mission was allocated land very close to the Fon's palace in order that the Fon might be in a position to keep a close eye on the activities of the missionaries.³ Oral testimonies suggest that Ngam's interest in the mission stemmed primarily from the advantage he imagined Kom people would gain by taking part in "whiteman's" education. Whether the Fon's allegiance to the German Catholics was, as Nkwi maintains, motivated by a genuine acceptance of the new religion, or, rather, by curiosity or by a feeling that he and his fondom might gain more by co-operating with the priests than by resisting them overtly, remains open to debate.

The ostensibly friendly reception granted the missionaries by the Fon did not imply that the people of Kom were prepared to demonstrate the same tolerance towards the new religion. Some Cameroonians were pleasantly surprised that the German missionaries "were not like the German soldiers whom they had met so often,"⁴ but early British reports refer to a history of tense relations between the Kom converts and the non-Christian population. Non-Christians appeared to be particularly annoyed by the alleged seduction of their women by Christian men.⁵ Archive references to this early period of Kom Christianity are scarce, however, so that it remains for further research to determine the nature of the early response to Christianity.

The significance of the early German missions lies primarily in the foundations they laid for further Christianization in Kom. The outbreak of World War I did not mean the end of the German missionary influence in Kom, for the German army in the Bamenda area included a number of Catholic leaders, whose influence was far greater than that exerted by the pioneer missionaries who had settled at Fujua. More than 500 men from Kom, mostly catechumens, were recruited into the German colonial army to take part in the German defence against the invasion of the protectorate by British and French troops.⁶ Service in the German colonial army was a punishment imposed on them by the Fon for their acceptance of the "whiteman's religion".

¹ BNA-Sd 1916/3, Report on Bekom mission, 23.3.1917.

² *Ibid.*; BNA-Sd 1916/3, Acting Vice Consul of Fernando Po to Resident Commissioner, 29.9.1919.

³ A suggestion made by Ndi (1986:30).

⁴ First Cameroonian catechist, Peter Wake, cited in Ndi 1986: 22.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1920.

⁶ According to Nkwi (1976:159) the recruits numbered 300, but colonial files recorded a higher number, e.g. BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1919.

The details pertaining to the recruitment remain vague, as oral and written sources contradict each other on this point, but there is no doubt that the First World War was a crucial episode in the history of Kom because of the participation of Christian soldiers in the German war effort. After the defeat of the Germans, most Kom recruits fled with the German troops to Fernando Po. There, they worked as servants for the Germans with whom they were interned, and many Kom soldiers were further educated in Christianity, reading, writing and German. Compared to their compatriots back in Kom, these men experienced an intensive confrontation with "Western" Christian culture. Many of the recruits were baptized during their internment, so that they would be qualified to lead the Christian communities in their villages upon their return. The return of the Christian recruits to Kom signals the beginning of the second phase of mission activity in Kom, under indigenous leadership.

The Second Phase: Indigenous leadership, traditional resistance and colonial confusion, 1919-1926

The second phase of missionary activity in Kom, from 1919 to 1926, was the most crucial in shaping the mission influence in the Kom kingdom. In these years, the blueprint was drawn up for the decades that followed.

When the British assumed control over Cameroon, the Fons in the Bamenda Grassfields were sceptical about the activities of the representatives of the new religion. The Christians' potential to undermine the previously undoubted omnipotence of the Fons was keenly felt. The cautious acquaintance with whiteman's education had acquired a momentum of its own, beyond the direct control of the Fons, and many traditional rulers welcomed the opportunity provided by the change in European leadership to attempt to diminish the Christian influence.

Fon Ngam, who had been apprehensive but certainly not hostile towards the missionaries at Fujua before the outbreak of the First World War, emerged as a fervent anti-Christian during this period, when the mission effort was led by the self-confident and determined Kom catechist Michael Timneng. The relationship between the Fon and Timneng will be examined here in some detail, as the conflict between the two men served to exacerbate tensions between the Christian and the non-Christian people of Kom, making colonial intervention virtually inevitable. A major source of conflict was the control over women: the Fon's resentment increased sharply when his wives started to leave him, and were offered refuge at the mission compound. There, they were accompanied by converted ex-German soldiers, which aroused the suspicion of the colonial authorities. A complex web of conflict developed, with the colonial

government trying to maintain peace, supporting traditional authorities to a certain degree, but also trying not to alienate the Catholic community which had emerged at Njinikom and nearby Fanantui. By the end of this phase, communications between the Fon and Njinikom had come to a full stop, and Kom society showed ever deepening cleavages, with denominational rivalry between Catholics at Njinikom and Baptists at nearby Belo threatening the unity of the kingdom even further.

4.1 The change from German to British rule and the return of the Kom recruits

When the First World War reached Cameroon, very few Cameroonians were in a position to appreciate the meaning of their involvement in what was essentially a European war. It was virtually impossible for Cameroonians to judge what English or French rule might mean to them in comparison with German rule: in the minds of many, all whitemen came from the same country. The causes and consequences of a war so foreign to the Kom people could not possibly be grasped by them. Early in the war, the Fon had been given to believe that the British intended to enslave the entire Kom kingdom, including the Fon himself.¹ Many were perplexed by the sudden appearance of whites speaking another language and bearing a different flag. For the villagers and the traditional rulers, the change from German to British rule was a source of considerable confusion and speculation, particularly as concerned the future of the Fon.² Fon Ngam's prestige and power had been enhanced by German colonial support, but it remained to be seen which role the British would allot him.

During the First World War, the German army relied heavily on Cameroonian soldiers. In total, some 10,000 Cameroonians were enlisted in the German *Schutztruppe*. As noted previously, many young men from Kom served as soldiers in the German army. Some were recruited directly into the army by the Fon, but some joined the army voluntarily after having served their six months of compulsory plantation labour for the German government.³ Their actual military performance was short-lived, as the German forces were driven to Spanish Guinea and Fernando Po early in the war, in 1915. Nonetheless, their service in the German army left strong impressions on the recruits. Living and working in continuous, direct contact with Germans gave these men an intensive introduction to (a particular brand of) Western culture. As in the case of migrants who had been away from Kom to work on plantations on the coast, the adventures of these men conferred on them a great deal of status and prestige. In contrast to the plantation workers, however, the soldiers had lived in a community dominated by the presence of Europeans, for a continuous stretch of about five years. Their "immersion" in that peculiar wartime society of interned Germans, mostly soldiers, presumably all Christians, had great repercussions on the development of

¹ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

³ Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.9.1994; interview Thaddeus Nkuo (diplomat), Njinikom 18.8.1994.

Christianity in Kom, for it was the returning soldiers who re-established the Catholic church in Njinikom.

In 1919, most of the recruited soldiers from Kom were repatriated from Fernando Po. They numbered 400 ex-soldiers, about 170 women, 50 children and 95 servants.¹ The return of the Christian recruits to Kom was a cause for concern for the newly established colonial government, because of the religious enthusiasm of the ex-soldiers and because of their apparent loyalty to Germany. Local officials noted the tense anticipation and excitement that accompanied the soldiers' return to Kom, and advised the Resident in Buea to keep a close eye on the activities of the converts. Their potential threat to the authority of the traditional rulers was not a welcome prospect to the British.²

Among the Christian recruits returning to Kom in 1919 was Michael Timneng, a former palace guard turned Christian, and the leader of the early Christian movement in Kom. While at Fernando Po, Timneng had served as a houseboy to a German army-priest, who instructed Timneng to bring Christianity back to his people upon his return to Kom and gave him a German catechism to aid him in this task.³ When the Kom recruits from the German army were released from their internment in 1919, Timneng led the delegation back home. The welcome received by the recruits was not singularly hearty: the Fon in particular had hoped to have rid his fendom of Christianity by sending the Catholic converts to war. The return of Michael Timneng, as described below by his brother, illustrates the tension surrounding the return of the recruits:

News came to us that my brother and other soldiers were coming. My mother prepared food and sent me to meet them on the way and welcome them. The Fon had ordered that they come directly to the palace, bringing to him all the war booty. I gave them the food and after eating they were given the Fon's message. Some initially refused to go to the Fon, but my brother insisted that they go (...) He led the group to Laikom and tried to make me return home, but I only tarried a bit and followed on their heels.

At Laikom, the Fon came out to meet them. My brother did not remove his cap. While he was talking, the Fon kept watching Timneng's boots. My brother told him it was a good thing to have been sent to be killed by the whiteman, because instead of killing him the whiteman had taught him the ways of the true and only God and had asked him to come back and preach his message to the Kom people. He showed the true God's instructions (the German catechism, JdV.). The Fon said it was a good thing, but ordered that they bring him the war booty. He inquired to know why their shoes were so large, and was told that they were used to kick people and break their bones and skulls. The Fon requested the soldiers to remove their boots and uniforms, and leave them at the palace. My brother swore an oath

¹ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1919, p.9.

² See also Part 1, section 5 of this study for early British government responses. In Kenya, too, the British colonial government viewed with apprehension the intertribal contacts formed in the armed forces. Cf. Lonsdale 1968: 142.

³ Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng's son), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

and told the Fon that could not be done. It was the first time in Kom history that the Fon's orders were denied to his face.¹

This description contains references to several elements which warrant further discussion. Apparently, the conflict between the Fon and Michael Timneng was an old one, dating back to a period before the outbreak of the First World War. Timneng seems to have been recruited by the Fon to serve in the German army as some sort of punishment.² Evidently, the Fon had hoped that Timneng would not survive the war, having "been sent to be killed by the whiteman". (The antecedents of the conflict between the Fon and Timneng are discussed in the following section.)

A second point worth noting is the apparent confusion on the part of the Fon as concerns the war booty. Earlier, it was noted that the mechanisms of a war between two European powers, fought in part on African ground, were beyond the grasp of the Kom people. The Fon's insistence on war booty illustrates some of the confusion: evidently the European notion of winners and losers in a war situation was not compatible with the Fon's idea (i.e. that coming back alive indicated having won the war and thus having war booty to distribute).

Further, the description of Timneng's homecoming suggests a conscious manipulation, by him, of symbols connected to the European powers (the boots and uniform) and of his knowledge of the whiteman's world (particularly Christianity and the ability to read).³ The soldiers' alienation from their Fon was so strong that they ignored all customs of respect (keeping their caps on) and even defied his authority outright.

Even if one takes into account a certain degree of dramatization by the informant, it is not difficult to imagine the Fon's bewilderment and even fear, upon seeing the Christian recruits returning to Kom bearing an infinitely mysterious and apparently threatening message, wearing whiteman's clothes, and claiming to carry a book of secrets about a God that would no doubt engage in a power struggle with the Fon (as a direct representative of supernatural powers) himself. It is not difficult to understand that the Fon regarded the activities of the returning Christians with a great deal of apprehension.

4.2 The roots of Timneng's conflict with the Fon: a flashback

Timneng's conflict with the Fon dated back to before the First World War, and was apparently connected to his behaviour during his service as a palace guard in training. According to his younger brother, Timneng had been recruited into the service of the

¹ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² It was not uncommon for traditional authorities to recruit labour or soldiers for the German government in order to rid themselves of political opponents. See Rudin 1938: 22.

³ Fon Ngam and Timneng were not alone in attributing power to the attire of the white rulers. According to Rudin, "superstitious natives believed that clothing had something to do with the great power of the whiteman and (...) they hoped to get some of that power by wearing clothing themselves" (1938: 380).

Fon because of his size and strength. At the palace, the young chinda Timneng was quick to acquire a reputation for stubbornness:

He was called Chakara ("scatterer"). He must have been very stubborn, because each time a report on him came from the palace his father or uncle had to send something — a goat, a sheep, or some chickens — to appease the Fon and cleanse the offence Timneng had committed.¹

A retired chinda related:

I knew Timneng before he left the palace. He was a very stubborn boy and everybody but Johannes Ngom abandoned him. That meant nothing to him. Every soothsayer at the palace had predicted that Timneng would bring disorder to the country. I was with him the day that he escaped from the palace, taking with him Johannes and other stubborn Njinikom boys. He had stoned a chinda and broken his skull. Blood was still flowing from the man's head and he (Timneng) just went away, never even stopping to apologize. He was never seen again at the palace. When he came back with religion it was no surprise to me. I knew everything about Timneng was bad.²

The incident referred to — the stoning of a chinda — was the direct cause of Timneng's conscription into the German army:

The Fon was still considering what to do with Timneng (after he stoned the chinda), when the Germans sent a message, telling the Fon of the approach of the British and their evil intentions. The Fon was informed that the British were coming all the way from their country to destroy all kingdoms and fondoms and make slaves out of everybody, the Fon inclusive. The Germans asked the Fon to send capable men to assist in sending away the British. Immediately the Fon sent out a recruiting squad with orders that Timneng and Ngom must be among those enlisted for German service. Timneng escaped for two weeks and nobody knew where he was. When Ngom was captured, Timneng came out of hiding and went to his mother's hut. Before dawn a group of palace guards came to his mother's hut and compelled Timneng to submit. He was taken away with other recruits for a short training in Bamenda, before they started the march for Fernando Po. Before he left, Timneng said that would be the last time the palace would ever command him. He told his mother not to fear, for he would rather be killed by the whiteman than by the Fon.³

It is interesting to note that Timneng was feared by some at the palace because he was expected to bring *disorder*. Although at that point in time no-one could imagine which form that disorder would take, Timneng's evident refusal to adhere to strict, age-old norms was readily perceived as a threat to the existing *status quo*. To understand this, it is important to recognize the importance of the strict codes that surrounded the job of a chinda: it was essential that the loyalty of those who stood so close to the Fon be

¹ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² Interview Yindo James Nsah (retired chinda), Njinikom 17.8.1994.

³ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

unquestioned. Absolute deference and respect were demanded of those who had been initiated in the secrets of the palace. Timneng's refusal to comply implied a major threat to the others at the palace, to the social hierarchy as a whole, and, worst of all, to the omnipotence of the Fon, and thus could not be tolerated.

In retrospect, then, it is not surprising that Timneng was considered by many to have had supernatural powers. Because of his background as a member of the palace household, Timneng's fervent adherence to the whiteman's religion represented a very specific threat, in the words of a former chinda:

It was like some treachery. We felt we had been betrayed. When I say we, I mean palace notables and traditional authorities. This was Timneng, who had been amongst palace guards at the palace. This same Timneng had got recruited into the army by the Fon for the Germans. Timneng goes to Fernando Po and on his return he brings with him a contrasting religion, whose sole aim was to destroy the old order. Do you think we, in the secret house, could have been comfortable? No. Certainly not. There is one thing that you book-people have never wanted to accept. Timneng was not an ordinary man. It was one of the reasons that they had enlisted him in the German army. Soothsayers in the palace had always said that Timneng had a very bad scheme in the pipeline for the Kom kingdom. Timneng is not a stranger to me. He was strong, yes, really strong. Even before he entered the German army he was considered a wizard. Very strong. People always advised us to leave him alone, so when he came back and took a stand against us we were not taken unawares. We had always thought that he could not bring anything but bad luck to the kingdom.¹

Another chinda recalled:

We decided to fight him. Timneng knew too much about the palace, and we could not let him live, worst of all with this new religion. He had been a palace guard! He had been initiated! And he had stronger mystical powers than most of us. Even the Fon feared him secretly, before Timneng went to Fernando Po. That was actually the reason he was sent to Fernando Po. Timneng was a wizard. I would never have wanted anything to do with him. Ngonkoukule and I had asked that Timneng be killed instantly (...) Today, I am a Christian, but I still do not trust Timneng, because his strength was not only the church. He was a wizard, stronger than the Fon, stronger than all of us put together.²

The young Michael Timneng had clearly made himself very unpopular, and even feared, among the traditional elites of Kom. Many had hoped and expected that Timneng's recruitment into the German army would put an end to his activities in Kom, so his return was greeted with all the more suspicion. For some, the fact that he had survived the whiteman's war was proof of Timneng's supernatural powers, powers not to be taken lightly, as they were underscored by the power of the colonial government.

¹ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² Interview Yindo James Nsah (retired chinda), Njinikom 17.8.1994.

4.3 The establishment of a chapel at Njinikom

On their return to Njinikom, Timneng and his Christian followers set about practising their new religion. In the beginning, their activities were limited to doctrine classes, led by Timneng, and weekly prayer meetings on Sundays. These activities took place in the homes of the converts, or in Timneng's own compound. The non-Christian community took note of the Christian rituals with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. In Timneng's words:

It was a marvellous thing to the natives. When they saw us every Sunday gathered in Chiamba's premises for prayer, they asked among themselves: 'what do these people mean by uniting themselves on Sundays?'. This was already in 1920. (...) The Koms at that time did not know anything about prayers, except on juju medicines" (Timneng n.d.).

For lack of an ordained missionary in Njinikom, the Kom Christians operated virtually independently of "official" church guidance. In the resulting vacuum, Michael Timneng developed a strong leadership position: he was the only Kom Christian who could read and write, and had little left to lose in terms of his relationship with traditional authorities. The Njinikom Christians requested the appointment of a European priest to guide them, but this request was not granted until 1927. Occasionally, Njinikom was visited by priests from nearby Nso, where the Kom converts went for confession and where, for example, the entire Christian community from Njinikom celebrated Christmas in 1920 (Timneng n.d.).

Early in 1921, Father William Bintner, a priest from Luxemburg who had previously played a role in the establishment of the German Catholic mission at Fujua, journeyed to Kom in order to persuade the Fon to allow the Christians in Njinikom to build a church there. After some debate, during which the Fon tried to convince Father Bintner to build the mission at Fujua, the Fon was indeed persuaded to allow the building of a church at Njinikom, but his enthusiasm for the plan was minimal: "He finally accepted, telling the Father that his building of the church at Njinikom was of no use, for these people (the Njinikom Christians) were travellers and would never settle" (Timneng n.d.).¹

Nonetheless, the Fon's permission to build was acquired, and a suitable location was determined. The Fon agreed that a number of villages would assist in the building of the Njinikom church, and would provide labour and building materials. Njinikom village was to build the church itself, while Fanantui and Babang were to build the catechist's house and the guest houses. Thus, the building enterprise involved a group of people far larger than the Christian community alone. Father Bintner was present to supervise the building and to provide spiritual guidance for the Christians, who attended mass and doctrine classes every morning before going out to work on the building project (Timneng n.d.).

¹ See also BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.80.

After the church was completed, the Catholic community grew rapidly: in the eyes of the Kom people, a church building conferred considerable prestige on the prayer-meetings. It was not long before the church proved too small to harbour all the Christians in Njinikom, so that catechist Michael Timneng preached outdoors in front of the church, rather than inside the new building. By 1922, some 500 Christians were attending Njinikom chapel (Timneng n.d.).

4.4 Njinikom as a refuge for witches and wizards: a flashback

In Kom oral tradition, the fact that Njinikom became a stronghold of Catholicism is attributed to the predominance of witchcraft in the village. Many informants, from Kom as well as from outside the area, referred to Njinikom as being an age-old refuge for witches, wizards and other people chased out of their home communities during the annual witchcraft ordeals.¹ According to oral tradition, Njinikom had been uninhabited when the Kom kingdom was founded:

When Kom was captured, nobody settled in Njinikom. People settled in all the other ridges, but nobody wanted Njinikom. After many years of settlement, witch hunting began. Everybody who was suspected of witchcraft was sent to Njinikom, which was then a penal settlement. It was expected that our fathers would come here and die. But the Kom man, even from old, never wanted to kill an innocent freeborn on the basis of suspicion (...) I do not know whether or not everybody sent here was a witch or a wizard, but I am sure that the population of Njinikom has always included many who had supernatural powers.²

According to a former palace guard:

Njinikom was the land of witches long before Christianity came. Njinikom was just an empty land at first. Then a pact had been entered into in the occupied area that destructive witchcraft be abandoned. Anybody who was suspected of having witchcraft was chased away from the settlement zone and the only place that they could go to was Njinikom. It was thus common knowledge that everybody who came to Njinikom was a witch. They were resented by people in the settlement zone. It was also common knowledge that Njinikom could only bring trouble to the Kom kingdom. So the rivalry was already existing before Christianity came (...) Some people were exiled to Njinikom innocently. They could not go back to their own ridges nor could they go elsewhere. They had to stay here at Njinikom alongside the real witches and wizards. When Timneng brought Christianity and promised people that it could protect them from witches, they had no alternatives. People here at Njinikom who did not accept to be converted were automatically

¹ See Nkwi & Warnier (1982: 68-69) for a description of the ordeals.

² Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994. Also Yongabi Polycarp (Catholic schoolteacher), Njinikom 17.8.1994; and Valentine Nke (nephew of Timneng), Bamenda 22.8.1994.

identified as witches. To try to prevent themselves from being branded, they eventually accepted to be converted.¹

Some claim that the Fon deliberately had the church established at Njinikom because he hoped that the whiteman would do away with the witches or vice versa:

The Fon knew that the people of Njinikom did not respect him and that they had been undermining his authority. He and his councillors, not wanting to arouse the wrath of the whiteman, decided to send the church Njinikom. In so doing, the Fon expected that the whites would either be destroyed by the Njinikom witches and wizards, or that it would be the other way around.²

Little did the Fon know that the two groups of outsiders — whitemen and Njinikom people — would become allies rather than opponents.

No references to Njinikom's witchcraft history have been found in written sources. This is not surprising, given the secretive nature of the subject matter. Colonial authorities who created the earliest documents had no access to this "darker" side of Kom society. It is not unthinkable that Njinikom's witchcraft reputation stems from the fact that Njinikom became a stronghold of Catholicism, rather than the other way around. This interpretation is defended by one informant, who claimed that

Those who were accused of witchcraft came to Njinikom to seek asylum in the church (...) They ran to Njinikom because they knew they would be protected by the priests there. (...) The witches came *after* the church came, after the whiteman came and wanted to guard the lives of even witches.³

But it is also plausible that Njinikom did indeed have a tradition of relative open-mindedness and had been a meeting place for people with alternative ideas or deviant behaviour, so that Christianity gained a foothold there more easily than at other places.⁴

Whether the witchcraft tales are based on fact or (in part) on mythology cannot be determined. It may be considered significant, however, that the witchcraft scenario was a prominent and stable element in virtually all the narratives collected. The witchcraft story strongly suggests that the rivalry between Christians and non-Christians, geographically defined as the rivalry between Njinikom village and the other Kom settlements, was older than the Christian mission in Kom. The recurrence of the witchcraft story also indicates that the converts inspired fear, in the perception of both

¹ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994. The idea that it was in the interest of society at large to allot the Christian church a site in a neighbourhood considered to be inhabited by evil spirits, was not limited to Njinikom. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe describes the land allotted to the Christian mission as the "evil forest": Achebe 1958.

³ Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

⁴ In this context, it may be relevant to note that the establishment of Fanantui, a settlement bordering on Njinikom, which shared with Njinikom an early and continuing sympathy for Christianity, has been attributed by oral tradition to the secession of one of the founding clans of Kom (Nkwi 1976: 21).

non-Christians and converts: their unusual behaviour could only be explained by evil supernatural powers.

4.5 Timneng's first arrest: Biwa'a

The re-establishment of the Catholic mission, signified by the church building, institutionalized an elaborate web of conflict in Kom: conflicts between the converts and the non-Christian population, between the leaders of the young Catholic church and the traditional rulers of Kom, between the colonial government and traditional authorities, and between the colonial government and church authorities. In the words of D.O. Duncan in Bamenda, the re-opening of Njinikom mission was accompanied by "native disturbances of a very serious nature", which, in the opinion of the D.O., might well lead to civil war.¹ Duncan's request that the mission at Njinikom be returned to its former site at Fujua, and religious instruction for women be discontinued until European sisters could be called in to supervise the education of women in a separate school, fell on deaf ears.²

Not long after the church building was erected, tension between the Fon and the Christian community came to a head when one of the Fon's wives left the palace to stay at Njinikom with fellow converts. The story of the woman, named Biwa'a, occupies a prominent place in virtually all accounts of the history of the Catholic church in Njinikom. She was the first in a long and increasing flow of royal wives who left the palace and converted to Christianity. Their refusal to submit to the Fon's authority incensed him and troubled both colonial and church officials throughout the period of missionary activity in Kom.

Before she left the palace, Bertha Biwa'a had been secretly attending doctrine classes in Njinikom during visits to her family there. When she decided to stay in Njinikom, the Fon could not accept such an open affront to his authority, and demanded that the woman return to the palace:

Having been informed that Christianity would take away *all* his wives, the Fon decided to set an example with Bertha to deter other wives from attempting to flee to Christianity. The chindas came and dragged Bertha away and tortured her all the way to Laikom. Bertha refused to stay at the palace and escaped again to Njinikom. On her return another delegation of chindas, more fierce, came to get her, and my father (Timneng, JdV) intervened. He told them to allow the woman to finish her doctrine and be baptized before returning to Laikom. He asked that the women be left to chose which way to go.³

In the catechist's words:

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Mgr. Plissoneau, 18.11.1921.

² *Ibid.*

³ Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng's son), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

I told this girl that she was wanted back at Laikom by the Fon. She refused to go back to Laikom and I told the messenger to go and inform the Fon that the girl refused to go (...) Not long after this messenger's departure to Laikom, I ordered two Christians to go to Banso and inform the Rev. Father that the Fon was trying to withdraw some of the catechumens from the church (...) The Fon in hot anger sent the messenger again back to me. (...) He asked me whether I did not understand that this girl was the wife of a Fon? That if I really wished to detain her for church services or to make her become a Christian I should pay dowry on her and claim her as my wife. I replied to this man of the Fon politely that we do not pay dowry on girls before they become Christians (...) and that I should wait until the Rev. Father should come before I could pay the dowry (Timneng n.d.).¹

Timneng's refusal to comply with the Fon's orders led to his summons to court in Bamenda, charged with having taken the Fon's wife. Together with his assistant, who had also been summoned, Timneng marched to Bamenda, followed by all the catechumens and Christians of Njinikom. Much to the distress of the Christian community, Timneng was convicted by the Acting District Officer and sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour in the Bamenda jail. His assistant was released. When Timneng had served less than three weeks of his sentence, the Senior District Officer returned to Bamenda, and released Timneng, overruling the previous conviction.

4.6 The sacred staff defied

Timneng returned to Njinikom, and was immediately summoned by the Fon to appear before him at the palace. The ensuing confrontation between the Fon and Timneng, culminating in Timneng's fearless defiance of the Fon's sacred staff, has become a well-known part of Kom oral tradition. The confrontation has acquired the status of a legend, and is interesting to this case study because it illustrates the way in which Timneng's presumed powers were perceived. Oral tradition regarding Timneng's defiance of the sacred staff reveals the framework within which popular discourse explains not only Timneng's behaviour, but the events of the twenties as a whole: the crumbling authority of the Fon is clearly associated with the rise of the Christian church and British colonial power, but also with supernatural forces. Timneng's alleged wizardry is seen by most informants to have frightened even the Fon himself, an idea that presumably would have been unthinkable in Kom in the pre-colonial era.²

Before Timneng appeared on the scene, anyone who aroused the fury of the Fon had been pointed at by the Fon with his sacred staff, upon which the subject would be taken away and be killed or otherwise punished by the Fon's *chindas*. The Fon pointing his staff was synonymous to the Fon giving orders for execution. Legend describes the staff itself as lethal. According to oral tradition, Timneng was the first person in Kom

¹ See also BNA-Sd 1921/1, Mgr. Plissoneau to Resident, 26.11.1921.

² Prince Mbain Henry denies that the Fon feared Timneng (noting that since he himself is from the royal family he is not likely to share the popular view): "The Fon did not fear Timneng. He was *annoyed*. He saw Timneng talking back and concluded that Tim had something behind him, and that thing must be the whiteman" (Interview Buea 31.8.1994).

history to be pointed at by the staff and survive. His apparent immunity to the supernatural power of the staff granted Timneng mystical prestige.

In the following fragment, Timneng describes his famous visit to the Fon, after his release from prison in Bamenda. As one could not visit the Fon empty-handed, Timneng went to Laikom bringing a fowl:

He (the Fon) said I had come to poison him. I told him this was not my intention. I added that in Native Laws and Custom when a father of a child sends his son to a bad medicine house (juju), his father washes him with water and rubs him with camwood to signify clear conscience. He (the Fon) continued in the same vein and asked: "If I sent you to prison because you took my wife, why do you bring me a fowl again? This really shows that you want to do away with me." I told him that I did not come to poison him. He said that the fowl should be taken back to Njinikom (Timneng n.d.).

The ease with which Timneng adopts the colonial phrase "Native Laws and Customs" is noteworthy. The definition of what precisely those laws and customs entailed, was a continuous and volatile source of conflict among Christians, missionaries, traditional authorities, and colonial administrators. Intended to allow a continuation of "traditional" justice alongside colonial justice, the concept proved so vague that it was easily subject to manipulation, and frequently redefined. Here, Timneng shields himself by claiming that he himself adheres to Native Laws and Customs (by bringing the chicken to the Fon), while the Fon himself does not. By implication, Timneng is a defender of traditional society, while the Fon is falling down on the job. Using the terminology of the colonial rulers, Timneng tries to demonstrate his own allegiance to Kom tradition, and to cast doubts on that of the Fon.

It is interesting, too, that Timneng uses a traditional metaphor to accuse the Fon of abandoning his child (Timneng) and delivering him into the hands of the bad juju (the whiteman in Bamenda). Apparently, Timneng's loyalties are not entirely with the whiteman, even though it is the whiteman's religion which he is defending. This, too, is noteworthy: Timneng's behaviour cannot be seen to indicate absolute adherence to the new European order or an unambivalent move to increase his own freedom and power by aligning himself with the colonial rulers.

Timneng's description continues thus:

He (the Fon) told me that he had left the tax of Fanantui and Njinikom for me to collect. That if the D.O. sent for the tax, he would tell him to come over and visit Njinikom and take it from me. (...) He said I was already ruling Njinikom like a chief. He said that war used to arise in a country because of the Fon's wives, and that I (...) was taking his wives and harbouring them at Njinikom. So he would leave Kom for me to rule. I told him that I was not in the family of the Fon, so how could I rule Kom? He repeated that he would leave Kom all for me. He said, that there were five of them (brothers) but now only he and Ndi remained and I was putting pepper in their eyes. He must leave with Ndi for somewhere else. (...) He told me that the house I have built at Njinikom is for war, not Christianity, and that these soldiers (the Christians standing beside me) were preparing to wage war in Kom. (...) The Fon turned to me and said, that we Christians say there is only one God, but he the Fon has eight Gods. That he would never be afraid of a Rev.

Father, for who is he? A man like the Father, being a bororo man, with no home, how could he, the Fon, obey him? That he could only be afraid of one with a red cap (a soldier). (...) He shifted towards me with his stick (...) with all assurance of my immediate death. He added that he had no doubt that there was medicine in this church, since I dared to speak to him with no fear. He shifted behind and said: "If I were not afraid of the English or Europeans who burnt Kom into ashes, and the Koms ran into the forest (...) you would not leave this place alive (Timneng n.d.).

Timneng's account of his confrontation with the Fon presents us with a vivid picture of a traditional leader with his back against the wall: though he was required by the British to maintain control over his people, he was also required to refrain from the traditional sanctions, which, ostensibly, would have enabled him to rid Kom of Christianity, and enabled him to put an end to the threat to his authority. Clearly, the Fon perceived the growth of Christianity under Timneng's leadership as an open attack on his position, and even feared violent conflict, referring to the Christians as soldiers preparing for war. Clearly, too, he saw Timneng as collaborating with the enemy, the Europeans against whom Kom had fought so fiercely in 1906-07.

The Fon did not leave Kom, nor did Timneng collect the Njinikom and Fanantui taxes, or otherwise become a chief in the sense suggested by Fon Ngam. But the Fon's authority had been dealt a severe blow due to Timneng's fearless performance. Previously, the Fon's secular power had been so closely connected to supernatural power that it had been virtually impossible to distinguish between the two. Now, with the Fon's *religious* authority challenged, the legitimacy of his previously unlimited power could be called into question. Even if Timneng, as he claimed, had no intentions of usurping worldly power from the Fon, his insistence on religious freedom implied a threat to the Fon's authority in a far wider range of affairs, for the very basis of the Fon's claim to power was being attacked.

The Fon's conversation with Timneng suggests that the Fon harboured genuine fears about the future of the Kom kingdom, particularly because, in his view, Timneng's supernatural powers had been enhanced by the support of the whiteman, as was evidenced by his release from prison. The various interpretations of Timneng's power reflect the confusion in Kom with regard to the source of that power and the potential consequences for the fondom, and illustrate the beginnings of a synthesis of Christian and traditional belief systems, a synthesis which offered more or less logical interpretations of the changes in power relations.

According to a former palace guard, Timneng's defiance of the sacred staff was proof that he was a wizard, though it was essentially the support of the colonial administration that enabled him to act the way he did: "To our greatest dismay Timneng did not die (after being pointed at with the staff). So the belief at the palace at that time was that his witchcraft was superior. But his greater protection was the whiteman."¹ Some interpretations attempt to reconcile the supernatural powers ascribed to Timneng with a belief in the powers of a Christian God:

¹ Interview Chindo Ngonkouele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

It was not witchcraft. I do not know what to call it. You see, the Fon's powers came from the people and God. So it was always God's wish that the staff, when pointed at somebody, should have the desired effect. It (the staff) was some divine tool for executing justice not based on hatred or the settling of individual scores. You see, it never had the desired effect on Timneng. Probably because it was used wrongly, or because Timneng's spirit was stronger. You cannot call that witchcraft.¹

This last citation, particularly, illustrates the complexity of adapting age-old cultural beliefs to changed political and social-economic conditions. The speaker attempts to legitimate the Fon's powers in terms that will satisfy both the traditional belief in divine power and the Christian/Western idea of people's sovereignty ("powers came from the people and from God.") Timneng's superior strength is not something to be attributed to him personally, nor is the Fon's apparent misjudgement to be considered a fault of his own doing: God's wish is not easily discerned. The Fon is reduced to a mere human being, who needs the support of supernatural powers. In some sort of battle in the supernatural world, the Fon's and the whiteman's gods have duelled with each other, and for the first time in Kom history, the Kom gods seem to have encountered some real competition.

Thus, the incident at the palace signifies the beginning of shifts in power relations which were later to evolve into full-fledged cleavages. It is not clear to which degree the sacred staff story is mythical. Regardless, the tale indicates how Timneng attained heroic proportions, whether through witchcraft or through other sources of power, in the minds of Kom people. His defiance of the Fon was greeted with a mixture of admiration and fear. It could be said that in the collective interpretation of events in the early British colonial years, Timneng personifies and integrates the three main forces at work: the church, tradition, and colonial power. In attributing the larger, almost incomprehensible shifts in social structure to the "stubbornness" of one man, popular discourse perhaps facilitated an interpretation of the fundamental changes in Kom society, which were too diffuse and complex to grasp otherwise.

4.7 Timneng's second arrest: the market affair

With the establishment of a church building in Njinikom, the Njinikom market was also re-established, in 1921. The trading and selling of produce and other goods had come to an end in Njinikom when people became fed up with the harassment they received from the Fon's chindas: "Chindas and princes used to take things without offering a farthing, and the sellers were offended and stopped selling things" (Timneng n.d.). The regular, busy church meetings every Sunday provided an ideal opportunity for organized trade. At first only a few sellers hawked their goods after mass in front of the church building, but soon the church site became the scene of a regular, bustling market after weekly mass.

¹ *Ibid.*

Market activities gave rise to the next open outburst of conflict between the Fon and the Catholic communities, when two of the Fon's chindas allegedly refused to pay for the guinea corn they had "bought" from two boys at the market: "These warriors took the corn and ate all and told the boys to go and call God to come and tell them to pay" (Timneng n.d.). The chindas were brought to the mission to account to Timneng for their behaviour.

News of the detention of the chindas by Timneng spread quickly and it did not take long for the Fon to retaliate. Much as the Fon resented and feared the whiteman's presence in Bamenda, he turned to the colonial power for support in his struggle against Timneng a second time, reporting to the officers in Bamenda that Timneng and other Christian ex-German soldiers were organizing pro-German resistance against both the Fon and the British authorities, thus making clever use of the British fear of pro-German sentiments among the natives, and adding astutely that he had difficulties collecting taxes from the Christians for the Crown.¹

The Fon's claims did not fall on deaf ears: the British fear of a revival of pro-German sentiments was very real, as noted earlier. Timneng was again summoned to the Bamenda Native Court. His trial was a major public event: "The news had gone far and wide and every big man of the clan had been informed to go to Bamenda. The road to Bamenda was crowded with people following to give evidence."² The D.O. called upon the people present to lodge their complaints. According to Timneng,

The first report or evidence given against me was that I had spoilt the country and caused food not to grow because I had banned the medicines which were being prepared in the houses to make food grow. The D.O. asked me whether I had done so. I told him that it was the law of God that had made the Christians to do away with the primitive fashion (...) The D.O. shook his head in admiration (Timneng n.d.).

Further complaints pertained to the use of an allegedly stolen drum in church, the flogging of opponents, and the detention of the chindas. Timneng denied the accusations, and explained that his only intention was to ensure that those who wanted to attend church should be free to do so. Timneng's explanations apparently satisfied D.O. Hunt, for he released the catechist and sent the crowd back home, again publicly contradicting the wishes of the Fon.

4.8 Timneng's third arrest and imprisonment at Laikom

Timneng's release greatly distressed the Fon, as he had clearly expected his anti-Christian policy to be backed by government support. Having twice attempted, to no avail, to recruit the support of the British in his struggle against Timneng, the Fon resorted to his own measures, deciding that the Njinikom church should be burnt down

¹ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² Unfortunately, court proceedings of Timneng's trial were not available for this study. Timneng's autobiography does offer some indication of the proceedings, however.

or otherwise destroyed.¹ Johnny Ngong, the Fon's close advisor, went to Njinikom to order that the church be burnt, but found none of the Christians present willing to carry out the order. All the Christians in the neighbourhood were rounded up and imprisoned at the Fon's palace. Timneng, who had been away on a visit to Nso, heard of the mass arrest, and reported to Laikom:

I went straight to where the policemen were in the Fon's compound (...) The officer asked me who I was and I told him: "I am Tim, the person you were looking for at Njinikom a day ago. I have heard that you have arrested my people because of me. I therefore come so that you release them and take me where you want to (Timneng n.d.).

Timneng and the other 17 Christians at Laikom prison were chained, handcuffed and subjected to hard labour, corporal punishment being meted out intermittently.

This was a terror (...) At about 12 noon the Kwifon raised its usual alarm for about an hour and at one o'clock about forty chindas with skinned whips came to beat us while at work (...) The beating was severe. One can imagine forty people beating eighteen in anger (...) The third day, Johnny Ngong and others came and I was severely beaten by Johnny Ngong. As he started I leaned on the spade handle which I kept standing and showed my back to him so that he whipped until one of the strings of the whip broke. When he was tired of whipping he started abuses, He talked and I talked. He claimed that I said that the Fon was going to hell, and that if the Fon was to go, he would follow him. I answered: yes, if you shall not follow my way you shall surely go to fire. He said: yes, as I am with the Fon, I must go too where the Fon shall go (Timneng n.d.).

The beatings and pestering could not prevent the imprisoned converts from loudly professing their faith. Of course their hymns of praise were taken as a provocation:

Prayers led us through our torments (...) We prayed and sang loudly and even disturbed the whole of the palace (...) On the fourth night Yong Fugeh was sent again to come while we were praying, opened the prison door and whipped us all and said "if your voice is heard again, Tim, the Kwifon is going to eat you." On his going out there was an applause of loud prayer and singing. He never came again (Timneng n.d.).

The imprisonment of the converts at Laikom lasted two months, after which the Christians were transferred to the Bamenda prison. The prisoners, the Fon and his advisors were summoned by the D.O. to Bamenda for a hearing. According to Timneng, he was not given a fair trial, having no opportunity to defend himself against the charges put against him, namely "spoiling the country" (instructing people not to "make medicine"), beating the Fon's advisor (Johnny Ngong), detaining chindas, and stealing the Fon's wives. Timneng and fellow Christian William Fulmai were found guilty on all four counts and sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour for each

¹ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994 and Timneng n.d.

offense. After the total sentence of two years, the two men would be exiled from Kom. The remaining Christian prisoners from Laikom received sentences of four months.

The Fon at last seemed to have succeeded, with the D.O.'s support, in banning Christianity from Kom, thereby putting an end to the threat to his authority. Triumphant, he returned to Kom and

... invited all Kom people to come with wine. He said they should wash the country because Timneng had spoilt it and that the Kwifon had eaten God at Bamenda. There was great rejoicing all over the pagan race in Kom at that time. They had confidence that God had been eaten and they were very satisfied (Timneng n.d.).

4.9 The Resident intervenes: public humiliation of the Fon

The Fon's victory was short-lived, however, for early in 1922, less than half a year after the conviction of the Christians by D.O. Duncan, Resident Ruxton paid a visit to the Bamenda Grassfields, in connection with the continuing and increasing troubles between Christians and traditional authorities in Nso and Kom. D.O. Duncan had informed the Resident that the mission at Njinikom was "entirely in hands of the natives, who give religious instruction to married and marriageable women who now live in the mission compound". He warned that the Christians had "formed themselves into a political organization disregarding all Native Law and Custom".¹ Earlier, the Resident had disregarded the D.O.'s warnings, commenting that "friction (...) is everywhere a necessary concomitant to 'progress'. It is a distemper to be greatly nursed and seldom requires drastic action."² But when the distemper failed to subside, and Mgr. Plissoneau appealed to Resident Ruxton to review the court cases in the Christianity conflicts, Ruxton went on tour in the Bamenda to attempt to reconcile traditional authorities with their Christian subjects.³

The Resident found things "not at all" as Duncan had described them, and quashed the sentences of all the Christians convicted by the Native Courts, suggesting, with diplomatic understatement, that the D.O. had been "misled" by the Fons. The Resident found that, contrary to Duncan's claims, "the people are not with their Fons." He judged

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Resident, 31.1.1922.

² BNA-Sd 1921/1, Resident to DO, 10.1.1922.

³ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, pp.2-18; BNA-Sd 1921/1, Mgr. Plissoneau to Resident, 10.2.1922.

that the Fon of Kom was himself amenable, but listened too closely to a few "evil advisers."¹

Timneng and his followers were released and sent back to Njinikom, where they were joined by the D.O., the Resident and Mgr. Plissoneau. The Resident attempted, to no avail, to persuade the Fon to adopt a more conciliatory attitude.² According to Timneng, the Resident threatened to depose the Fon if he continued to refuse to accept the church in Njinikom. To prove his acceptance of the Catholic community, the Fon was ordered to come to Njinikom to re-open the church, which had been shut down after the troubles had escalated a few months earlier.

Not surprisingly, Fon Ngam flatly refused to perform the opening ceremony. The D.O. sent soldiers to Laikom to enforce his decision, forcing the Fon was forced "at gunpoint" to come to Njinikom to perform the opening ceremony, much to the jubilation of the Catholic community:

The Fon got midway and delegated someone to do the opening ceremony on his behalf. The commander of the army insisted that he wanted only the Fon and nothing short of that. The Fon came and stood a short distance from the church and asked Johnny Ngongfedoh, who was his spokesman, to open the church. The commander refused again and insisted that the Fon perform the opening himself. The Fon had no choice but to succumb and do as he was commanded. Because of this humiliation the Fon went back to Laikom and swore that he would never pass through Njinikom again. Whenever he travelled to Bamenda or any part of the North West, he took care not to pass through Njinikom (...) The politics of animosity between the people of the other ridges, like Fundong, Abasakom and Belo started at that time.³

The administration's description of the event was more euphemistic:

The Resident proceeded to Bikom, where the relations between Christians and Pagans had also been strained to the breaking point (...) A meeting at which the Resident, Mgr. Plissoneau and the Chief were present, resulted in the re-opening

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Resident to DO, 10.4.1922. Unfortunately, details regarding the review of Timneng's case are lacking. The description in court proceedings of a similar hearing, regarding Nso catechist Tangwa, suggest that the proceedings caused a good deal of uproar. In the Tangwa case, fighting between Christians and non-Christians ensued when about 50 Christians, led by Plissoneau, accompanied Tangwa to his hearing. About 250 non-Christians were present. The Fon's authority was questioned openly at the hearing. (BNA-Sd 1921/1, Provincial Court Case, Kumbo 11.3.1922). The case of Tangwa bears many resemblances to the case of Timneng. In Tangwa's case, explicit mention is made of the fact that "in former days, Tangwa's father tried to dethrone the present Fon" (BNA-Sd 1921/1, first draft of a letter (not sent) from DO to Plissoneau, 16.2.1922). Tangwa was jailed in 1916 for allegedly combining religious teaching with military propaganda. He was continually defended by Plissoneau. After the trial in 1921, the British government provided the Fon of Nso with a bodyguard to ensure his safety. (BNA-Sd 1921/1, Telegram DO to Resident, 15.3.1922).

² BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, p.18.

³ Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng's son), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

of the church, the breach between the Chief and the bulk of the people of the Njinikom quarter remained unhealed.¹

On the contrary, the coercion of the Fon by the colonial authorities served to worsen relations. The Fon's public humiliation at the hands of the whiteman was grist to the mill of the rebellious young Christian community, and his defeat was celebrated loudly.² Likewise, the incident reinforced the Fon's hatred of the converts. The recognition Timneng received from the colonial administration was perceived as a tremendous blow to the Fon: "Government's orders at Njinikom were given through Timneng and the church. The Fon was now reduced to a mere tax collector with great difficulties in carrying out even that task in Njinikom."³

A former chinda summarized the episode as follows:

The Fon tried first of all to make him (Timneng) understand what harm he was doing to the Kom kingdom. Timneng in his usual heady tradition did not listen. The Fon asked us to lock him up at the palace prison and beat him till he gave up. We did this to no avail. The Fon finally reported him to the big whiteman in Bamenda and Timneng was transferred from the palace prison to the whiteman prison in Bamenda. Timneng was a very strong man. He convinced the whiteman and the whiteman did not only leave him but gave him authority to go ahead with his scheme. Timneng came back and proudly told the Fon that he was wasting his time. You see this showed the Fon that Timneng had the whiteman on his side. Besides, the Fon knew that Timneng knew a lot about the palace and could reveal a lot to the whiteman.⁴

The fact that Timneng was seen to have obtained the support of the whiteman for his "scheme" was of crucial importance. Both Timneng and the Fon were keenly aware of the need to appease the white rulers: their ostensibly religious struggle was not merely a contest of faith, but a competition for power with explicitly political implications. In the colonial context, the support of the strangely powerful whiteman would be crucial to the outcome of the battle.

The victory of the Catholic community did not mean a victory for Timneng personally. Shortly after the church at Njinikom was re-opened, Timneng was transferred out of Kom, as his behaviour was seen by church leader Plissoneau to aggravate the conflicts between Christians and traditionalists in Kom (Ndi 1986: 66).

4.10 Emerging themes of conflict

At some point during these first years of conflict, a troubled Fon Ngam turned to one of his soothsayers, Nengabi, for advice about the future awaiting Kom. Nengabi was called upon to use his powers to show the Kom people that the new religion would bring only

¹ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, p.18.

² Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

³ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

⁴ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

evil. Nengabi complied, but after consulting his own gods, the answer he found only served to fuel the Fon's anger even more:

He evoked a rainbow, asking for one with three colours to indicate which of the three ridges (Fundong on the left, Njinikom in the middle, and Belo on the right) would prosper. The rainbow appeared, and the middle colour, representing Njinikom, rose very high into the sky. One could not determine its limits. The colours for the other two ridges did not go higher than people's heads.¹

The Fon concluded that the soothsayer had been listening too closely to the preaching of Timneng and the whiteman, and ordered that Nengabi's ears be cut off.²

The soothsayer story, prominent in Kom oral tradition, describes in a nutshell the state of affairs in Kom around 1922. The Fon's desperate attempt to see his authority demonstrated and justified by the soothsayer, and the soothsayer's subsequent demonstration of the fact that Christianity in Njinikom was there to stay, are etched into the Kom collective memory as the point of no return.

And indeed, the situation in 1922 provided the Fon and his supporters with good reason to be apprehensive about the future. The Christian population continued to grow. One of the Fon's wives had run away from the palace to join the Catholic community at Njinikom, setting an example that would be followed by an increasing number of women in the years to come. Floggings of Christians by chindas, and vice versa, were the order of the day. No longer could the Fon claim an absolute authority over his people. Virtually all communication between Laikom and Njinikom had ceased, as the Fon refused to recognize the largely Christian village after the re-opening of the church. Hostilities between the Christians and the non-Christian population in the Bamenda Grassfields had escalated to the point that Fons in the area demanded that Timneng and the other mission teachers be sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.³ Within the span of roughly one year, Kom catechist Timneng had been arrested three times, at the instigation of the Fon. Each time, the British administration had overruled the Fon's attempts to stop the growing threat to his authority.

After three years of continuous growth and conflict, the Christian community in Kom was still without resident European leadership, the nearest priest being stationed at Nso. In 1923, the mission at Nso was taken over by the British Mill Hill Fathers, and a British priest appointed to Nso, but Njinikom remained without a priest. Fon Ngam petitioned the British government for English priests to be sent to Kom, and asked that the present mission be closed, as it was controlled by "ex-German soldiers whose sole aim is to disorganize our native system of government and gain power themselves."⁴

The British did not grant the Fon's request to close down the mission or even to supply Kom with a priest. The tolerance of the British towards the Christian movement

¹ Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994.

² "This we did without any remorse. The people of his area wanted to kill him and he escaped to Njinikom." Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

³ BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Mgr. Plissoneau, 8.12.1921.

⁴ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Telegram DO to Resident, 3.1.1922; BNA-Sd 1921/1, Petition from Fon Ngam of Bikom to Government, 27.1.1922.

was not unanimous, however, as is indicated by the initial conviction of Timneng by D.O. Duncan and the subsequent intervention of the Resident. D.O. Duncan in particular was a staunch opponent of the Christian community, considering the mission to be a "Bolshevistic Society" which intentionally undermined both British and traditional authority. In a heated letter to the European leader of the Catholic mission, Mgr. Plissoneau, D.O. Duncan indicated his sympathy for the Fon's point of view, complaining that the Kwifon had been flogged by the converts, that the wives of the Fon were "continually seduced", and that unmarried girls were retained at the mission compound, hidden away when the European priests (from Nso) came to inspect the station.¹ The D.O. touched on two themes that were to trouble colonial and traditional authorities until well after the Second World War, namely the closely interconnected themes of the conversion and resulting relative freedom of Kom women, and the resistance of the Christian community to both traditional and colonial authority.

Runaway wives and the control over women

The most volatile area of conflict, not only in the early years of the mission at Njinikom, but throughout its history, was surely the competition between church and traditional authorities for the control over women. The mission had a clear interest in converting as many women as possible, so that Christian families could be formed. It did not take Njinikom women long to discover that the church offered them hitherto unheard-of opportunities to escape unsatisfactory marriages or family relationships. At the mission compound, they were offered some amount of physical protection and a livelihood relatively independent from their families, while they took part in the catechumen training. The power struggle was most blatantly illustrated when the wives of the Fon ran away to the mission.

It is impossible to tell whether the flight of the women to the mission was motivated by a spiritual longing to convert to Christianity, or whether their conversion to Christianity was motivated by other perceived benefits. No doubt various factors were important. Whatever the case may be, the mission's policy towards the runaway women acutely undermined the power that men in Njinikom had traditionally had over their women, and the fact that wives and unmarried daughters were granted refuge by the church served to fuel hostilities between converts and non-Christians tremendously. D.O. Hunt summed up the situation in Kom in 1922 as follows:

The return of the Catholic Mission to Kumbo (Nso, JdV), with its emotional appeal has attracted many young women to the churches, and unfortunately for peace, wives of chiefs have been among them. In particular this has been the case with the chief of (...) Bikom, a man of between 50 and 60 with at least 100 wives of whom some are under 20. Some of these, mostly young, have left him to attend the mission church and refuse to return to him unless he gives them facilities for conversion, of which he will not hear. The result is a bitter estrangement between him and the Christian congregation, of whom some have harboured and more than harboured the runaways, so that he has practically cut off communication with the Njinikom quarter where the church is (...) Seduction of the wives of their people

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Mgr. Plissoneau, 18.11.1921.

has also helped to set the chiefs of Bansa and Bikom against the mission, although it is possible that more agitation is made at the seduction of a woman by a Christian than by a pagan.¹

It was recognized by colonial officials that a large number of wives was essential to the Fons' prestige. In defence of Ngam's polygamous lifestyle, D.O. Duncan informed the Resident in 1921 that the Fon's wives "are not kept for purpose of sexual pleasure and are in practice farm labourers."² Their role at the palace was not so much a reproductive one, as a productive one: the Fon's wives farmed his land and prepared food for his many guests. It was generally accepted that a Fon's prestige was to be upheld by his keeping a large number of wives. Apparently the fact that the Fon's own sexual pleasure was at most a secondary reason for his large household, dispelled any doubts the D.O. might have had about the acceptability of the Fon's marital customs.

To the people of Kom, however, the recruitment of the wives was a bone of contention, as the girls in question had no option to deny the Fon their hand in marriage. Though some saw marriage to the Fon as a secure and prestigious way of life, many resented being wed to the Fon, particularly because their chances of bearing children would be small in a household where one man is expected to share his bed with hundreds of women in turn. This aspect entirely escaped D.O. Duncan's attention, however, and he claimed that women who ran away from the Fon's household did so out of laziness and immoral tendencies:

(...) the young married woman runs away from her husband to mission teachers in order to avoid work, not as a rule because her husband is abhorrent to her. She usually drifts down to big towns on the coast where she becomes a prostitute.³

The case of Bertha Biwa'a, the first of the Fon's wives to escape Laikom for the church, and the focus of the increasing conflict between Timneng and Fon Ngam in 1921 has already been noted. Bertha Biwa'a was not the first woman from the palace to convert to Christianity, as the former Nafoin, Naya'a Funkuen, who had been exiled from Laikom due to a conflict with Fon Ngam, had become a Christian during her exile.⁴ As she was the most influential woman in Kom, Nafoin Naya'a's conversion proved to be a great inspiration to many women at the palace. As the Fon had feared, the example set by Bertha Biwa'a was followed in 1921 by at least eight other royal wives.⁵ The mission, by

¹ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, pp.20-21.

² BNA-Qa/b 1932/2, DO to Resident, 29.12.1921.

³ BNA-Qa/b 1932/2, DO to Resident, 29.12.1921. No other references were found regarding the alleged prostitution of the runaway wives, although in several interviews it was suggested that the desire for sexual freedom enticed women to leave their husbands. An unattached woman is easily equated with a prostitute in traditional Kom culture. Further references to the prostitution of Christian women are found in BNA-Ad 1948/22, P. Kaberry to Prof. Forde, 14.12.1945, and in Kaberry 1952: 136 fn.1, but unfortunately further documentation is not available.

⁴ Interview Monica Iyena (daughter of Bertha Biwa'a), Njinikom 18.8.1994., and Nkwi, 1976: 162. Naya'a was described as being "the most stubborn Nafoin Kom and the whole world has ever seen." (Interview Princess Immaculate Mulesin, Njinikom 19.8.1994).

⁵ BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Resident, Confidential Memorandum: Catholic Mission at Bansa (Kumbo) and Bikom, 20.12.1921.

word of Mgr. Plissoneau, maintained innocence in the issue, denying any attempt on the part of the church to "seduce" wives of the Fon, or any other women, for that matter, claiming that the church merely offered temporary refuge to those who had run away of their own free will.¹ The D.O. was not convinced, pointing out that doctrine lessons were held between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., "when all respectable married women should be at home cooking their husbands' food."²

Plissoneau perhaps saw what he was able to see, with his Western eyes, or what he wanted to see, with his missionary eyes. The Cameroonians concerned, Christians and non-Christians alike, saw the church as "taking" other people's wives. Christian informants confirm the colonial government's suspicions that the mission station provided women with a freedom of movement that was considered scandalous and threatening to the old social order. On the other hand, several informants stressed that the church did not actively recruit converts among the Fon's wives:

It is not as if the religion was there to take away the Fon's wives. They were influenced by the fashionable way their relatives followed Christianity. Nobody really went to try to convert them or make them leave the Fon. It was their personal decision.³

Be that as it may, by 1923, some 25 wives of the Fon had run away to the mission, four of whom had borne children by persons unknown, and several others of whom were pregnant.⁴

Hawkesworth, the A.D.O at that time, visited Fon Ngam to discuss the position of the runaway wives. Previously, adultery with a wife of the Fon had been punishable by death for both parties. Now, however, Hawkesworth found the Fon willing to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. They agreed that the runaway wives would be returned to their fathers' compounds and that the ex-soldiers, who were held to be responsible for "seducing" the women, would either return to their compounds or leave Njinikom altogether. The direct result of the agreement between Hawkesworth and the Fon was that the 25 refugee royal wives ran away from Kom altogether.⁵ The Fon's willingness to negotiate with the A.D.O on this point indicates the extent to which his natural authority had already been eroded. Clearly, the Fon had little choice in the matter, as "traditional" sanctions would not be tolerated by the colonial government. An outright refusal to co-operate with the British would have further worsened his relations with the colonial government, without increasing his control over his wives.

The risks and uncertainties involved in running away from the palace were considerable. One wonders if life at the palace was so unbearable that women were willing to risk severe beatings (if not actually their lives) by running away to something as new and unknown as the Christian church. Some of the women who ran away to

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Mgr. Plissoneau to Resident, 26.11.1921.

² BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Resident, Confidential Memorandum: Catholic Mission at Banson (Kumbo) and Bikom, 20.12.1921.

³ Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng's son), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

⁴ BNA-Sd 1921/1, ADO to DO, Memorandum: The Missionary Controversy at Bikom, 27.6.1923.

⁵ BNA-Sd 1923/7, Fr. Moran to DO, 10.11.1924.

Njinikom fled the palace in search of religious freedom. But not all women who ran away were Christian converts: many purposefully used the opportunity to escape from unsatisfactory polygamous marriages, in the case of royal wives hoping that Christianity would offer them physical protection against the Fon's chindas.¹

According to the daughter of Bertha Biwa'a, the first royal wife to flee to the mission at Njinikom, many young women fled the palace to escape the harsh treatment to which they were subjected by the older wives. According to her daughter, Bertha Biwa'a was not the Fon's *wife*, but a princess living at the palace. She had been made a Fon's wife by the older wives in the palace, as a form of punishment after she had run away to Njinikom and been dragged back the first time:

After a very serious beating she was made the Fon's wife by the older women and was beaten with some itchy ivy that could peel the skin. This made her absolutely headstrong and she escaped again to Njinikom even though all the chindas had been put on an alert. Her journey to Njinikom took three days. This was because she could not follow the main path (...) The last thing she ever wanted was to be a Fon's wife. She hated the way some of the young wives were treated by the older wives. The coming of the church was certainly a relief to her. The older wives were very upset and beat any junior wife who tried to justify Christianity (...) Life at the palace was not that easy. Not that the Fon did not feed his wives well. No, on the contrary, the Fon's wives were the best fed and most privileged in the whole world. But among the women there was a lot of jealousy. Some women are still alive in the palace today without ever having seen the Fon's bed. They have never had children, and men were not permitted to enter the women's side of the palace, so the women could not engage in sexual relations, even illegally. The older women appeared to be jealous of the younger ones and beat them up often. Some of the wives were not known by their husband, the Fon. There were really hard times, especially for young girls, at the palace.²

The description of the lifestyle of the palace wives by a former chinda presents us with a different perspective:

You know women, I am sure. They can always get what they want (...) At that time there were so many wives in the palace that it was difficult to miss them until someone complained. My child, women are just terrible. You know that where there are too many women there is bound to be gossiping, quarrelling and jealousy. Imagine a situation where a fence is overcrowded with goats, and you would know that they fight themselves not because their owners are treating them badly. Women you also know are very easy to convince. Look, these are women who had stayed in the palace for so many years without even thinking of going out of control or pointing an accusing finger at the Fon for having so many of them. All of a sudden Timneng, who had stayed at the same palace with them goes to Fernando Po and comes back with new ideas. These same women buy the idea and begin to behave as if they had been complaining for long. That is how they are.

¹ Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief) Njinikom 15.8.1994 and interview Monica Iytena (daughter of Bertha Biwa'a), Njinikom 18.8.1994.

² Interview Monica Iytena (daughter of Bertha Biwa'a), Njinikom 18.8.1994.

You see Timneng (...) knew most of the Fon's wives very well and knew how they could be convinced easily. Do not blame it on the Fon.¹

Whether or not the Fon himself was to blame was of little concern to the colonial officials, who viewed with increasing concern the ever growing flow of refugee wives to the mission. In 1924, D.O. Hunt commented on the intransigence of the Fon, describing him as a "somewhat solitary and stubborn figure":

His trouble is of long standing and likely to be perennial, until the new social order regarding the foretime sacrosanct wives of a chief is accepted, as it will have to be accepted. (...) The Chief is cutting himself off from some 2000 of his people because twenty five of his numerous wives have left him. (...) His public conduct is now coloured by his fear of the Njinikom quarter and all that it implies.²

The wives issue placed the colonial government in a difficult position. The threat to Native Authority was perceived to be a very strong one, and the D.O. suspected that it would only be a matter of time before the Fon of Bali and other "big chiefs" would be troubled by the same fate:

Here lies the stumbling block, to reconcile the freedom of the missions with the inviolability of the chief's wives, which they feel is a matter vital to their prestige and position (...) On the one hand one desires to rule indirectly through the Native Administration and therefore uphold the authority of the chiefs, and on the other hand one must allow full scope for Christian missionaries who it must be confessed have no love for the Native Administration. The two aims are hard to reconcile (...) It is impossible to let the chiefs use their own methods to prevent a woman from deserting her husband to become a Christian, yet dissuasion and discouragement and even short terms of imprisonment by a Native Court have little or no effect. It is not pretended that this ailment of the body politic is peculiar to this division, but its present effects are all the worse for being a new malady for which no specific remedy has been found. It is apparent that in the cause of progress the chiefs will have to surrender the principle that they can keep inviolate as many wives as they can purchase.³

The D.O.'s analysis was echoed by the European missionary Father Moran in 1924, who stressed that the "woman palaver" was in essence unsolvable:

The idea of the freedom of women is quite a new and unwholesome thing to most of the chiefs, and until it is at least tolerated by them, we can never hope to have absolute peace. Scarcely a week passes without some complaint coming in from one locality or another (...).⁴

It had been noted, by Elizabeth Chilver, that the majority of non-Christians regarded the flight of royal wives as a deliberate reversal of the social order (Chilver 1963:121). It

¹ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

² BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, pp.6-7.

³ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, p.21.

⁴ BNA-Sd 1923/7, Fr. Moran to DO, 22.8.1924.

might be pointed out that the Christian converts, as well, perceived their support of runaway wives to be a deliberate reversal of the social order: they were well aware of the profound impact their behaviour was to have on the socio-political relations in Kom, and their behaviour may be seen as a conscious strategy to initiate changes to their advantage by making use of opportunities granted them in the changing colonial context.

Problems of authority and administration

The young Christian community at Njinikom under the strong leadership of Timneng was soon granted the title "imperium in imperio"¹ by colonial officials, because of the difficulties encountered by both traditional and colonial authorities in imposing their power there. Throughout British colonial Africa, the concentration of Christians in new settlements around the churches, with the local catechists functioning as both spiritual and secular leaders, was a cause for colonial concern.² Relatively isolated from their home communities and traditional social control, the Christian settlements proved to be averse not only to traditional authority, but also to colonial administration.

While few officials were as critical as D.O. Duncan, who considered the Catholic community at Njinikom a subversive political organization, many colonial administrators were sceptical about the feasibility of maintaining control in a community which demonstrated an almost complete disregard for both traditional and colonial authority, refused to pay tribute to the Fon and declined to provide the customary community labour.³ The attitude of the Njinikom Christians was a source of concern to the British administration not only because of the increasing difficulties in tax collection, though this certainly was an issue of considerable importance, but perhaps more acutely so because of the implied threat to traditional authority on which the colonial government depended heavily.

The two concerns — taxation and a strong Native Authority — were closely intertwined, as the British relied on local Native Authorities to organize and execute the collection of the poll—tax. We have seen earlier that Fon Ngam of Kom tried to have Timneng collect the taxes in Njinikom, as the Fon himself was no longer capable of exercising the authority necessary to ensure a regular tax collection. The Christian community saw itself as subject to its own set of laws, and separate from the larger colonial or Kom society.

According to the D.O., the refusal to pay tax, combined with organized obstruction, proved "that the ex-German soldiers from Fernando Po have not been idle."⁴ Throughout the Bamenda area, the presence of ex-German soldiers at the mission stations continued to trouble British authorities. To some extent, the doubts of the colonial authorities regarding the loyalties of the former recruits were shared by the

¹ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.21.

² See for example Welbourn 1971: 325.

³ See for example BNA-Sd 1921/1, Memorandum ADO to DO, The missionary controversy at Bikom, 27.6.1923; Chilver 1963: 122.

⁴ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.10.

European priests.¹ The irritation of the colonial government was compounded by the fact that, in the first years after the war, the European leaders of the missions in the Bamenda Grassfields were not British. The Resident was led to comment that

Mgr. Plissoneau's Belgian Congo training does not help him in a country under British administration. None of the Fathers speaks English and one was actually captured by our troops in 1915 and interned though a subject of Luxembourg.²

It would not be the last time that the nationality of the missionaries would be considered an impediment to effective British control. Quite clearly the British feared not only *African* allegiance to Germany: they also expressed doubts concerning the loyalties of the missionaries.

To a degree these doubts were founded, in the sense that the British explicitly intended to use the missions to consolidate British colonial rule, not only by imbuing the natives with Western (i.e. British) cultural norms, but, in a more practical sense, by educating an English-speaking native elite that would both serve in the colonial civil apparatus and act as an intermediary between the two cultures. With the missionaries coming from other parts of Europe (and later from the United States), the British could not rely on the dissemination of British social norms, nor even on English language education.

On the other hand, the administration's doubts regarding the national allegiance of the foreign missionaries were somewhat superseded by fears that an *indigenous* Christian church would threaten the new hegemony even more than foreign missionaries might. In a plea for European leadership for the Christian community in Mamfe division, the Resident in 1921 claimed that the "rapid and indigenous growth of a form of Christianity directed by old teachers and pupils of the Basel Mission, uncontrolled by any present foreign influence" was cause for grave concern, as political agitation seemed imminent.³ These fears were reiterated in 1924, when the Resident reported to the government at Lagos that the Basel Mission was in a "derelict condition":

The political danger is that the present totally uncontrolled organization, now spontaneous and indigenous and continually growing, may become the prey of the political agitator and develop into seditious Ethiopianism even as the recent history of South Africa and Nyassaland shows.⁴

The fears of the British administrators that colonial authority might be undermined by indigenous Christianity went hand in hand with the fears of traditional authorities, who considered the young Christian communities to be a threat to their previously unquestioned power. In Kom, the steady growth of the Christian community had led to a

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Memorandum ADO to DO, The missionary controversy at Bikom, 27.6.1923.

² BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1921, p.9. The reference is to Father Bintner.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ BNA-Sd 1923/6, Memorandum Resident to Hon. Secr. Southern Province, Lagos, n.d. (early 1924). The term "Ethiopianism" referred to a nationalist expression of anti-British sentiment, due to the post-war confusion and the repression of Christian activities.

stark and public erosion of the Fon's authority. Not only was he unable to carry out the tasks allotted to him by the British government, in tax collection, for example, but Njinikom collectively refused to supply him with the customary communal labour. Whereas previously it had been unheard of that a subject of the Fon refused to serve him as a *chinda*, now he could no longer rely on the unquestioning service of his population even at the palace. Increasingly, religious reasons were put forward to justify a boy's refusal to become a *chinda* for the Fon.¹

Indigenous Christianity versus European Catholicism

Another source of tension was the discrepancy between the ideas of the Cameroonian Christian leaders and the ideas of their European mentors. Colonial records make frequent reference to disputes between catechists and their European teachers, particularly with regard to the extent to which the catechists used their religious authority for their personal benefit. In 1923, for example, Kom catechist Mukong was discovered by the priest Fr. Bintner to have exceeded his powers as a teacher, having used his position to obtain cheap labour. In addition, he was accused of instructing his followers in a mixture of pagan and Christian rites. Mukong was dismissed and excommunicated.² A few years later, a catechist was discovered to have flagrantly abused the illiteracy of traditional rulers by producing his mission certificate and claiming that it was a letter from the D.O. ordering chiefs to supply him with scholars and food.³

The — often indirect — references to such incidents are important because they suggest the discrepancy between the perception which the European missionaries had of the implications of Christianity for the Kom people, and the meaning attributed to the whiteman's religion by those same people. Many early missionaries seem to have been oblivious of the attraction that Christianity had as a vehicle for social mobility and increased personal power. The prestige accorded the new religious leaders meant that the catechists and teachers gained access to a source of power which escaped the attention of the missionaries: namely power over people, particularly the power to organize labour and the power to manipulate the marriage market.

In addition, the ex-German soldiers far surpassed the European missionaries in their zeal and determination. While for the European missionary Christianity represented a system of moral discipline and sobriety, for the Cameroonian catechists Christianity was a liberating force. The difference in perception necessarily led to friction between the two groups of religious leaders.

¹ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.21; BNA-Sd 1921/1, Extract from Bamenda Division Annual Report, 1924.

² BNA-Sd 1921/1, Memorandum ADO to DO, The missionary controversy at Bikom, 27.6.1923.

³ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.27.

4.11 Kom Native Authority School established and the mission school formalized

Until 1924, the Catholic church had the monopoly on education in Kom. Doctrine classes and literacy training were organized in so-called "hedge" schools, led by the catechist and his assistants. The mission monopoly of education was seen by the colonial government to hamper relations between the Christian and non-Christian population, by limiting the opportunities for social mobility to Christians and by leading traditional authorities to be suspicious of the Christian movement. Fon Ngam, too, opposed the missionary control of education, sensing that the power of the Christians was in some way connected to their "book-learning". In addition, the hedge-schools remained entirely outside of the range of government control, since a resident missionary was lacking in Kom.

In August 1924, a Native Authority school was opened near Laikom, the result of the combined interests of British and traditional authorities.¹ From the outset, the school was troubled by poor enrolment. Although there were officially 60 boys on roll in 1924, attendance at the school was very irregular, and enrolment dropped to 24 in 1925.² Children of the Fon were occasionally sent to school, but none managed to stay for an extended period of time, as the princes "preferred the wealth of the palace" and would not tolerate being whipped by the teachers.³ Formal education, in which children were ordered about and beaten, was considered fit only for slaves and commoners, so that the princes and princesses usually stayed at home (Ndi 1986: 269 fn. 81).⁴

Nonetheless the Fon's initial response was enthusiastic: he paid the school three visits during the first term of its operation, and gave each pupil a shirt and trousers, calling the N.A. school his own school.⁵ The teacher of the N.A. school was well taken care of, receiving food regularly from the nearby palace.⁶ It was no secret to the colonial officials that the Fon supported the school in an attempt to offset missionary culture: his patronage of the school was described as "political, rather than due to any desire for education."⁷

The response of the Catholic community was to upgrade the Catholic school at Njinikom. Following the opening of the N.A. school, the mission school was supplied with a Nigerian trained teacher and supervised by the missionaries at Nso, who visited

¹ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division 1924; BNA-Sd 1921/1, Extract from Bamenda Division Annual Report, 1924; BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1925, p.22; Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

² BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1925, p.40.

³ Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

⁴ See also the description by Fohtung of how he was "caught" by his Fon to be a schoolboy: Fohtung 1992: 221-22.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.40; interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

⁶ Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

⁷ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.7.

the school several times a year.¹ In close competition with the N.A. school, 58 boys were enrolled at Njinikom mission school in 1924, and 62 in 1925.²

4.12 Denominational rivalry

During this second phase of the missionary enterprise in Kom, the basis was laid for a fierce denominational rivalry between Baptists and Catholics that persists until today. In the early twenties, the Baptist mission had established a station at Belo. Colonial sources suggest that Fon Ngam actively encouraged the Baptist mission at Belo, hoping that the Beloites might increase his chances of containing the growth of the Catholic community.³ When in 1925 Catholics from Njinikom destroyed a half-built Protestant church at Belo, claiming that the Fon had not granted permission to build there, the Fon responded by generously granting land at the chosen site, apparently not appreciative of the rather contradictory Catholic "zeal to maintain his authority". The colonial government underscored the Fon's hopes for "sectarian struggle" in this respect.⁴

Rather than reducing tensions by providing the Catholics with Christian rivals, however, the denominational struggle served to intensify the hatred of Njinikom by people of other villages, and vice-versa, and strengthened the group consciousness of the Catholics. The denominational rivalry came to a head in 1925, when inhabitants of Belo drove the Catholic missionary Father Scully and his followers out of Belo village. Christians who had built a resthouse at Belo to accommodate Father Scully on a journey from Bamenda to Njinikom were suspected of trying to build a church there, and were chased out of Belo by armed protesters.⁵ The entire Belo quarter was judged by the D.O. to be collectively responsible for the act, and fined ten pounds. The Resident later cancelled the fine, considering the Belo people to have been provoked by the Njinikom Catholics.⁶

The rivalry between Njinikom and Belo gave rise to considerable confusion on the part of non-Christians, who could not understand the lack of solidarity between the two Christian groups:

In Kom, people look upon religion as a sect, as another kind of (juju) society. When you grow up, you are initiated into this juju society (...) so that at your death, these people of your juju will follow you. So we could not understand how the Baptists at that time were fighting the Catholics. (...) We grew up with these

¹ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Annual Returns: Non-Assisted Schools, 23.11.1927.

² BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.40; BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1925, p.40.

³ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Extract from Bamenda Quarterly Report, 1925.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ BNA-Pc/b 1926/1, Inquiry regarding allegations of Belo-inhabitants driving Fr. Scully and followers out of Belo town, 6.12.1925.

⁶ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1926, p.21.

differences, Baptists hating Catholics and Catholics hating Baptists. We could not understand it.¹

4.13 Fon Ngam in retrospect

In June 1926, Fon Ngam died after having ruled Kom for only 14 years.² The last eight years of Ngam's reign had been dominated by his increasingly bitter struggle against the Catholic church. Since 1923, he had not communicated with Njinikom, having abandoned the village to Timneng and the whiteman. Dozens of his wives had left him to join the church. Chindas at the palace were no longer virulent anti-Christians.

Under the determined leadership of the Fon and Michael Timneng, relations between non-Christians and Christians in Kom had deteriorated to such an extent that the situation in early 1926 was considered to be "highly dangerous":

There was always the possibility that the Laikom and the Njinikom quarters might resort to force of arms in order to settle their differences (...) There existed an armed neutrality which a trifling ill-considered act might have developed into open conflict.³

Fearing an eruption of violence upon the Fon's death, the government sent military police to Kom to keep the peace and stop all communication between Laikom and Njinikom.⁴ Thus Fon Ngam's troubled reign ended as roughly as it began: under colonial military supervision.

According to some informants, Ngam's resistance against the church was in the best interest of the Kom kingdom: he rightly perceived Christianity to be a threat to the old social order, and hence had no choice but to oppose the movement with all his might. This view is shared by Nkwi, who describes the Fon as "fighting to preserve the tradition and safeguard the monistic character of the Kom kingship and the constitution that guided it" (Nkwi 1976: 161-62). According to one of the Fon's former advisor's, Ngam's insistence on maintaining a large number of wives was not solely a matter of pride, but was based on his concern for the continuity of the nation:

There were many tribal wars in those days. Then, numerical strength was a major factor in winning wars. With the new religion came monogamy. How could the Fon be comfortable knowing that monogamy meant less men and therefore weakness? From that angle, the Fon was not selfish. The Fon has never been given a fair trial.⁵

¹ Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994.

² His reign is jokingly referred to as having lasted only one month, for his predecessor, Fon Yuh, had ruled Kom for more than 40 years. (Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994).

³ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1926, p.4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁵ Interview Bochung (Njinikom elder), Njinikom 18.8.1994.

Ngam's desire to preserve tradition need not be debated. His conservatism was wholly in line with his own interests and opportunities, and a product of the colonial context in which it developed. Clearly, Christianity threatened to deprive Ngam and his followers of many privileges.

4.14 Reasons for conversion to Christianity

Perpetual and violent conflict notwithstanding, the Christian community at Njinikom had grown steadily during Ngam's reign: the Catholic population of Kom numbered two thousand at the time of Fon Ngam's death (Boh 1987). The desire to practise the Christian faith was but one of many motives which contributed to the growth of the Christian community. Conversion was prompted by the wish to be modern and innovative, by the belief that Christians enjoyed supernatural protection, by the advantages attributed to education in the whiteman's ways, and not least by the prospect of social mobility and economic gain.

Christian converts from all over Kom settled at Njinikom, where they could lead lifestyles unacceptable in their home communities. Relatively free from traditional social control, they developed a community renowned for its liberal lifestyle, its monogamy, and, in time, its high level of education: "people realised that the whiteman's religion could liberate them from the royal yoke and they poured into Njinikom."¹ In Njinikom, it was said, "everybody was free. Religion had liberated everybody. Women were free to do as they wished as long as they respected their husbands."² It became stylish to become a Christian: "It (Christianity) was something new, and Kom people like innovation. The prayers were taught in German and it was fashionable to speak the whiteman's language."³ The art of writing was regarded as whiteman's magic, perhaps more powerful than sorcery (Ndi 1986: 26).

Rumour had it that only Christians were protected against the Fon's chindas, so that some settled in Njinikom to enjoy protection.⁴ Many believed that Christians had access to supernatural powers which in case of emergency might prove stronger than those connected to traditional beliefs. Timneng's performance encouraged such ideas:

At the time Timneng returned to Kom there was a plague here that was killing like nothing had ever done before. Timneng told people that God was angry with them and that only prayers could end the plague. There was also the witchcraft aspect. In those days there were many witches here in Njinikom and even the witch-

¹ Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994.

² Ibid.

³ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

⁴ Interview Monica Iytena (daughter of Bertha Biwa'a), Njinikom 18.8.1994.

doctors were afraid. Timneng showed no fear of them and nothing happened to him.¹

According to some informants, Christianity easily gained foothold in Kom because of the similarities between Christianity and traditional Kom beliefs:

Here in Kom there was always a religion similar to Christianity. There was a belief in an absolute God (...) What I saw in the new religion was not too different from what I saw in the Kom religion. For example, the common belief in Kom was that evildoers at their death would be banished to the land of the "red soil", where the heat of the sun would be unbearable, and good people would be born again into the land of the "black soil", where they would eat without having to work. The new religion spoke of hellfire and heaven. The Njinikom man was born very intelligent. Because of this, the Njinikom people realised that the whiteman's way of worship was better, since it had precise rules directly from God, to which one could neither add nor subtract. The Bible also says, like the Kom religion, that the first shall be last and vice versa.²

Educational opportunities attracted a great number of converts to Njinikom. Initially the schooling offered consisted of doctrine classes and basic literacy at a so-called hedge-school. Later, when the school was granted European leadership, Njinikom became known as *the* educational centre for Kom. (The education aspect of the mission enterprise will be discussed more fully in Phase Three).

The colonial administration was sceptical about the motives for conversion to Christianity. In 1922, the D.O. claimed that runaway wives who sought refuge at the mission compound were merely trying to "avoid their obligations to their husbands or parents."³ A year later, the alleged emotional appeal of the Catholic church was held to attract converts:

Religion, like anything else takes a hold on the native, is an innovation, and has a fascination for them but they should remember that the path to Christianity is encompassed with tribulation and sorrow and until civilisation makes more progress among them, their lot will not be an easy one.⁴

The other side of the coin alluded to by the colonial report was that converts relinquished to a large degree their position within traditional society. The price they paid for the perceived benefits of Christianity often amounted to ostracization. Former networks providing social and emotional security frequently ceased to function as such when someone chose to affiliate with the new religion. The dependence of the converts on the church community was, by consequence, far-reaching.

¹ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994. The "plague" referred to is presumably the influenza-epidemic which raged in the Bamenda Division in 1918-19, to which the first British DO in Bamenda, Podevin, also succumbed.

² Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994.

³ BNA-Sd 1921/1, first draft of a letter (not sent), DO to Mgr. Plissoneau, 16.2.1922.

⁴ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1923, pp.20-21.

In the Annual Report for 1924, D.O. Hunt demonstrated a remarkable perceptiveness regarding conversion:

The root causes that urge the pagans here to become Christians have given food for thought. They cannot be purely religious causes, any more than the mass movement of the Untouchables in Madras towards Christianity is religious in the full sense of the term. In India, it is a revolt against the social tyranny of the castes, but here it is difficult to diagnose. Perhaps it is in part the emancipation of youth, or it may be a revolt against the social tyranny of polygamy.¹

The D.O.'s hypothesis appears quite plausible. Although reliable data are lacking regarding the social make-up of the growing group of converts, it seems that, particularly in the first years of the Njinikom mission, young men constituted the majority of the converts, followed in number by young women. It seems that the promise of relative social freedom — *vis-à-vis* elders, husbands and fathers — exerted a particularly strong attraction for young Kom people. Within the emerging colonial system, they were presented with opportunities, however limited, which were previously unheard of. Many realized that a close association with the whiteman would increase their own social mobility and autonomy. According to one informant, the large contingent of young men among the converts can be explained by the fact that there were so many "free" young men: men generally did not marry until "middle age", and often resented the control exerted on them by their elders.² The frequency of reports concerning non-Christian husbands attempting to retrieve their wives from the grip of the church, or at least retrieve the bride-price for their runaway wives, suggests a power struggle between men and women: the description, above, of the runaway wives in the early years of Njinikom mission indicates that many young women viewed the role designed for them by the Catholic church as preferable to the role ascribed to them in traditional society.³

4.15 Summary and concluding remarks for Phase Two

The years following the First World War were, in terms of colonial administration, unsettled ones, as Britain struggled to determine her strategy in the new mandate territory, dealing with German inheritances and Lugard's proposed Indirect Rule. The uncertainties accompanying British rule informed to a large degree the way in which the missions were regarded during this period: a mixture of impatience and mistrust with regard to European missionaries, surprise at the persistence of the indigenous religious leaders, and increasing concern about the crumbling authority of traditional leaders.

¹ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.32.

² Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng's son), Njinikom 16.8.1994. See also BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1930, pp.62-63.

³ In 1927, 250 of the 688 baptized Catholics in Kom were female (BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.80). See also the figures in the appendix of this study.

Colonial policy was anything but uniform, with officials at the district level often demonstrating more scepticism than the more tolerant Resident. Warnings by the Bamenda D.O. regarding the conflicts he expected would arise from missionary activity in the Grassfields notwithstanding, the missions in Kom and Nso had been re-established shortly after British rule had begun in Cameroon. The larger colonial interest in continuing education and Christianization apparently outweighed the D.O.'s fears regarding the potentially unsettling effect of the missions. On the whole, the picture presented by government records of the early colonial attitude towards the mission is one of uncertainty and *ad hoc* intervention.

During this unsettled period, the conflicts pertaining to Christianity in Kom were more intense than during any other period in Kom mission history. The limits to the penetration of the whiteman's religion were as yet undefined and were vigorously contested. The response of the Fon, in particular, was vehemently hostile. Seeing his authority erode in many respects, he focused his resentment on the runaway wives who were granted refuge at the mission station.

The positions of both the Fon and the church were uncertain at this time in Kom history. When catechist Timneng shocked the Kom people and the Fon by defying the sacred staff, neither Timneng nor the Fon was singularly pleased about the presence of the whiteman. But whereas the Fon *feared* the colonial power, Timneng did not, and was able to pluck from the Western culture those elements which enabled him to improve both his own prospects in the changing social order and the prospects of the Catholic church. Like other traditional authorities in the Bamenda Grassfields, Fon Ngam found himself caught between two evils: since his people had in part turned to Christianity and thus declared themselves partially independent of him, Ngam had no choice but to ask for European support, as he himself had lost effective control over the Christian segment of the population. When this request resulted in his public humiliation during the re-opening of Njinikom church in 1921, a breach of trust between the Fon, the Christian movement and the British authorities was created which could not possibly be repaired during Ngam's lifetime.

The Third Phase: Leadership changes – compromise and consolidation, 1927-1940

The death of Fon Ngam in 1926 and the ensuing succession to the throne by Fon Ndi provided the colonial government with new opportunities to consolidate colonial rule in Kom and to ease the tension between Christians and non-Christians in the Kom kingdom. Just before Fon Ngam's death, the Kom Native Court had been established, with his reluctant consent. The transition in traditional leadership opened up possibilities to render the new court an effective tool for Indirect Rule. Further, negotiations with the new Fon were opened regarding the position of the Catholics in Njinikom.

The Catholic church also took advantage of the change of Fon to improve its position in Njinikom, appointing two resident missionaries, the Dutch priests Jacobs and Stokman, to lead the Njinikom mission, officially established as St. Anthony's Parish in 1927 (Waindim 1994: 1). Under the leadership of the resident priests, educational activities were dramatically expanded. The number of baptized Catholics attending Njinikom church rose accordingly, increasing by more than a thousand in the first year after the appointment of the Dutch missionaries.¹ For the local catechists, the presence of European missionaries entailed a legitimation of their authority and prestige on the one hand, while on the other hand their independence was curtailed by the more or less permanent presence of ordained priests at the mission station.

¹ In 1927 the Njinikom Catholic community numbered 1741 people (1017 baptized converts and 724 catechumens). In 1928 the community consisted of 3000 people. These figures are derived from records at the Njinikom Parish Archives, cited in Ndi 1986: 111, 300 fn.13.

This phase of the missionary endeavours in Kom, too, was fraught with conflict. Fon Ndi displayed a more conciliatory attitude towards the Christian church than Ngam had done, but his attitude was not matched by a desire for reconciliation on the part of the Njinikom community. Ndi continued to resist the erosion of traditional authority, and Catholics continued to insist on their autonomy. Fon Ndi was confronted by the problem of runaway wives even more than Fon Ngam had been. The presence of European missionaries initially aggravated the conflicts by lending European support to Catholics in court cases, and by conferring on the Catholic community a prestige previously lacking.

The colonial attitude towards the missions changed, however, and became far less conciliatory than it had been during the second phase. This reluctance to accept the mission culminated in 1930 in an ultimatum to the missions: they were summoned to either profess their wholehearted support of the colonial authorities and the system of Indirect Rule, or leave Kom altogether. The Catholic Bishop at Soppo, near Buea, complied, professing the mission's intentions not to counter colonial efforts, and henceforth the conflicts between mission and colonial state subsided considerably, at least at the highest level of the church and government hierarchies. But that is not to say that conflicts between Kom Christians and non-Christians subsided likewise. On the contrary, mutual resentment was rampant and continued to be so, though after 1930 it could not be openly expressed with the missionaries' support.

Thus, the period after 1930 was one of compromise and consolidation at an institutional level, and a period of continuing animosity, with occasional volatile confrontations, at a personal level. The intense, open conflict of the 1920s made way for negotiations between mission and state authorities and between colonial and traditional rulers, while the mission focus shifted somewhat towards consolidating and improving previously established institutions, such as the school at Njinikom.

5.1 Changes initiated by Fon Ndi

Following his enthronement in 1926, Fon Ndi expressed his wish to normalize relations with Njinikom. Ndi's attitude was considered a welcome change by the D.O., though the new Fon was greeted with apprehension by the colonial administrator:

The character of the new chief is the exact opposite of his late brother's. He is unassuming and wishes to please everyone, which attitude though not so difficult as that of the late chief will, I fear, not be strong enough to keep the peace between his Pagan elders and the Christians without much help from the Government.¹

Ndi began by receiving the catechist and the Christian converts at the palace, thereby re-establishing communications between Laikom and Njinikom.² Shortly after his enthronement, he announced that churches would be permitted to be opened in three

¹ BNA-Ad/1a, DO to Resident, 10.8.1926.

² BNA-Sd 1921/1, DO to Resident, Memorandum: Ndi, the Chief of Bikom, 10.8.1926.

other populous Kom quarters, besides Njinikom, for a probationary period of six months, during which the Christians were expected to return to their home villages and to prove themselves amenable to the authority of the chief and the quarterheads.¹ By stimulating the establishment of churches in various locations, Ndi hoped to disperse the Christian community at Njinikom. Most people living at Njinikom came from elsewhere, and it was considered preferable that people moved back to their own villages and families, practising their religion there.

The Christian settlers showed little inclination to leave Njinikom, however, leading the D.O. to describe their attitude as "disappointing in the *extreme*".² When in 1930 the majority of Christian converts were still at Njinikom, the D.O. was led to conclude that

it is not the full opportunity for the practice of Christianity that appeals to the squatters, but the life at Njinikom, where having broken away from all family control, the only loyalty they show is to a European priest (...) There can be no doubt that the priests are working to this end, the absolute antithesis of Native Administration.³

A second measure taken by the new Fon in an attempt to improve relations between Laikom and Njinikom was the appointment of a Christian chinda, whose task it would be to bring palace orders across to Njinikom.⁴ Less than a year after his appointment, however, the experiment was evaluated as a failure, since the Christians interpreted the appointment of a Christian chinda to be an "acknowledgement of their existence as a separate political community", and proceeded to replace the authority of the elders by a council presided over by the catechist.⁵

5.2 Problems of administration: taxation and labour

As during the preceding phase of missionary enterprise in Kom, the colonial government was plagued during the reign of Fon Ndi by the persistent refusal of Njinikom Christians to pay taxes to the colonial administration and to supply the communal labour customarily demanded of them.

The D.O.'s assessment that Fon Ndi was perhaps overly anxious to please everyone, including the colonial government, proved to contain at least a kernel of truth. In 1926, for example, the Fon set something of a precedent by secretly paying part of Njinikom's taxes out of his own pocket to meet the government poll-tax demands. When in 1927 the full amount was again demanded from the converts at Njinikom, they

¹ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, p.18.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The administration had requested that the non-Christian headman Tossa be removed, as his authority was not respected by the Njinikom people, but the Fon could not be convinced to comply. BNA-Ad/1a, DO to Resident, 9.11.1926.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.9.

refused to pay. Attempts to bring the "squatters", as the settlers at Njinikom were termed by the D.O., under the control of their own families and elders by stipulating that they should pay tax to their own family heads failed.¹ Njinikom church leaders established their own judicial council, and decided to take control of the tax-collection, bypassing the traditional elders and giving rise to large-scale tax evasion:

Great confusion resulted. One Christian was appointed to collect tax from the converts and another from the catechumens. As many of the Christians resided in other quarters or outside the actual bounds of Njinikom, these men had no idea of the numbers from whom they should collect and numerous evasions resulted. The authority of the elders had been so weakened that they did not even know who were living in their respective areas (...) By November, a large proportion of the tax was still outstanding and the chief of Nkom attempted to elucidate the situation by taking a new census. Despite the presence of the A.D.O. at Njinikom the chief encountered passive resistance to this attempt and the efforts of the inhabitants were more directed towards the suppression of than the supplying of information.²

A second census, taken by night, resulted in 25 convictions in the Native Court for tax evasion. The Christian chinda was accused of hiding taxable males, and was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour. Before the matter could be investigated and settled in accordance with the wishes of the colonial government, Fon Ndi had "with mistaken zeal, in order not to be late," again paid the whole of the Njinikom taxes out of his own funds.³

Not only the collection of government taxes was problematic in Njinikom, but also the organization of labour. The construction of the Njinikom road, for example, was delayed because Christians refused to do their share of the work. Only when the resident priest commanded them to do so, did the converts turn out to dig their portion of the 18-mile road, only to complain afterwards that the pay they received was inadequate.⁴ The refusal on the part of the Christians to provide labour for community projects and for the upkeep of the Fon's palace and farms continued until well after the Second World War.

5.3 Kom Native Court established (1927)

In May 1927, Kom Native Court was established at Laikom, where it was presided over by the Fon. Christians had opposed the opening of the court, to no avail, and refused to supply labour for the erection of the court building on the plea that the maintenance of the church and the unpaid labour demanded by the missionaries absolved them from

¹ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, pp.18-19.

² BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.9.

³ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, p.19.

⁴ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1930, p.16; BNA-Sd 1930/2, Fr. Stokman to Resident, 18.5.1930.

such duties.¹ The Christian community refused to acknowledge the application of Native Law and Custom as interpreted by the Native Court, complaining that they were being unfairly judged. According to colonial officials, however, these allegations were "entirely unfounded."² The government appointed a Christian member to the Court to ensure that the Christians were heard, but he was soon dismissed, since his position was seen to encourage the Christians in their conviction that they formed a privileged community, politically separate from the rest of Kom. In the words of D.O. Hook in 1935:

It is evident from reviews and appeals against decisions of the Native Court that the local native, already a self-willed and stubborn type, becomes even more so after embracing the Roman Catholic faith, and appears to be under the impression that he can totally ignore all native law and particularly that relating to inheritance and ownership of land.³

While in the early 1920s the colonial government had demonstrated substantial tolerance towards the Christians in the various conflicts with the Native Authorities, the administration's attitude in the 1930s was much less accommodating. No longer could differences of opinion be glossed over as being the outcome of culture conflict and misunderstanding, for in this period the exponents of the controversial attitudes towards the Native Authorities were themselves Europeans.

Missionaries and the Native Court

After nearly a decade without a resident priest, the Njinikom Christian community could, as of 1927, rely on daily guidance. The Christian community now often saw its actions legitimated by the presence of a white priest, whom the Catholics considered to be on the same side as the white colonial administration. Increasingly, since the establishment of the Kom Native Court and the arrival of European priests in Njinikom, the Christian community tried to avoid dealing with the N.A., preferring to deal directly with the British administration through European missionaries. The problem was closely connected to the troubles regarding the control over women. In particular, the numerous marriages contracted by Christians without going through the customary formalities were considered a slight to the Native Authorities: Christians applied for marriage licenses through the missionaries, so that in many cases the village heads did not even know the marriages had been contemplated.⁴

Indeed, the behaviour of the European missionaries frequently was cause for irritation on the part of both native and colonial authorities. The Dutch Father Jacobs had scarcely set foot on Njinikom ground when he was accused by the D.O. of attempting to influence the Native Court, resulting in the imprisonment of a man who

¹ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, pp.8-10. After the arrival of the resident European missionaries, a heavy demand on the unpaid labour of the Njinikom Catholics was made for the construction of a priests' house and a new school-building.

² BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.31.

³ BNA-Cb 1934/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1935, p.11.

⁴ BNA-Qa/b 1925/1, DO to Resident, 5.11.1927.

had forcibly retrieved his daughter from the mission.¹ The Resident called Jacobs' performance a "bad case of unwarrantable interference" with the courts, and his dealings with the Fon "more than a little indiscreet".² Father Stokman, also at Njinikom, riled the colonial authorities further when, in another case, he obstructed Native Court action by proceeding to the scene of trouble and holding an inquiry, collecting testimonies and complaints.³ In 1929, Father Scully allegedly caused a scandal by kicking a native sacrifice. His behaviour provoked critical commentaries from the entire colonial hierarchy, up to the level of the Lieutenant Governor, and was considered grave enough to warrant his imprisonment (Ndi 1986: 121). The colonial administration attributed the undiplomatic attitude of the Njinikom missionaries to their youth and lack of experience, describing Stokman as "an ignorant, tactless and fanatical Dutchman"⁴, and commenting:

A great deal of quite unnecessary friction would be avoided if more experienced priests could be sent to Njinikom, which, because of the political situation and the old bitterness (...) requires the most tactful handling.⁵

While during Fon Ngam's rule the local catechist Michael Timneng had been held responsible for the ever-increasing tension between the Christian community and the traditional authorities, the colonial government now attributed the difficulties to the alleged unsuitability of the European priests concerned. In the case of the Fathers Stokman and Jacobs, the missionaries' foreign nationality was considered to detract from their suitability. The fact that they were not English meant, according to D.O. Duncan, that "it is extremely difficult for them to understand our methods."⁶ In fact the Mill Hill mission as a whole was opposed to the British system of Indirect Rule, regardless of the nationality of the priests concerned, because Indirect Rule was largely based on the authority of chiefs, who invariably had large, polygamous households.

The ultimatum

Complaints regarding missionary interference with Native Authorities were not limited to allegedly young and inexperienced priests, nor were they limited to the Bamenda Division. Government officials convened with Bishop Rogan in Soppo and convinced him to repatriate the most renowned missionary troublemakers. Several priests were transferred to other districts, two were forbidden to write either officially or unofficially to the D.O., and Stokman was granted another chance to show his good intentions, under close supervision.⁷

¹ BNA-Sd 1927/3, DO to Resident, Confidential Memorandum, 10.8.1927.

² BNA-Sd 1927/3, Resident to DO, 18.9.1927; BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, p.41.

³ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, p.42.

⁴ BNA-Sd 1931/5, Resident to Secretary Southern Provinces, 14.5.1931, cited in Ndi 1986: 176.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, pp.42-43.

⁶ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1930, p.61.

⁷ BNA-Sd 1928/2, Interview granted by His Ex. Sir Donald Cameron to Mgr. Rogan OBE, 27.9.1931; BNA-Sd 1928/2, Mgr. Rogan to Resident, 10.10.1931.

Despite Rogan's attempts to call his priests into line, cases of court interference continued to disturb colonial authorities. By 1931, mission-state relations had deteriorated to the point that Bishop Rogan was presented with an ultimatum: either the church would profess her support to the British efforts to strengthen the recognized Native Authorities, or the Catholic mission would be forced to leave the country. Having been left little choice in the matter, Bishop Rogan complied with the government's request, issuing the following statement:

In view of the fact that the reprehensible actions of several Mill Hill fathers have led (the government) to believe that we refuse to recognize the authority (...) of the native Chiefs (I offer) my guarantee that any Father who recklessly interferes in any way with the legitimate business of native Courts and with the lawful jurisdiction of Native Chiefs, will be sent out of the country by me immediately.¹

He further instructed all the Mill Hill priests to send to him the particulars of any court findings with which they were not satisfied, rather than intervening themselves.

Though the intentions expressed by Bishop Rogan appeared firm enough to the colonial administration, they were not always interpreted accordingly by missionaries at the various outposts. An incident involving the Njinikom priest Kerkvliet in 1935 serves to illustrate the continuation of the tense relations between mission and government.² In spite of protests by the Bishop and by the government, a Christian settlement had been established in 1934 in Esu, near Kom, under the leadership of Father Kerkvliet. About 20 men had settled on mission grounds there with an unknown number of women and children, in a compound containing about 10 buildings.

In early 1935, the Chief of Esu lodged a complaint against the priest, accusing Kerkvliet of having insulted the chief himself and preventing his wives from farming on the mission grounds. Kerkvliet was reported to have uprooted a medicinal plant, planted there to ensure the fertility of the land. The priest maintained that the situation was the other way around: in his version, the chief's wives had been instructed by the chief to plant the heathen medicine on the farmland where Christians had been working. When asked what the *real* trouble was, the Esu chief replied that the problem was the women living at the mission, deserting their husbands and relatives, with the catechist regarding himself as quarterhead and Christians refusing to pay taxes.

The chief retaliated by trying to send all Christians back to their home quarters. When they refused to leave, he called in the assistance of the D.O., who supported the chief, instructing all Christians to leave the mission compound and return home within six months. In return, a promise was exacted from the chief that in future he would guarantee a just treatment of Christians. Bishop Rogan was requested to transfer Father Kerkvliet and Father Jacobs from Njinikom to another Division.

¹ BNA-Sd 1928/2, Mgr. Rogan to Resident, 10.10.1931.

² See BNA-Sd 1931/4, Investigation at Esu, Fungom NA area, into a complaint by the chief of Esu against Fr. Kerkvliet of the Catholic Mission at Njinikom, by DO Mr. M.R. Hook, 14.3.1935; BNA-Sd 1931/4, DO to Resident, Confidential Memorandum, 27.3.1935; BNA-Sd 1931/4, Notes of meeting held at Resident's office (Buea), 13.5.1935.

The situation at Esu appears as a mini-version of the Njinikom story related in Chapter Two. The D.O. judged the complaints against the priest justified, although he also considered the Christians to have been provoked by the chief. But the mission was clearly the disruptive factor, in the opinion of the D.O: the mission plot was unnecessarily large, the priest young (27) and new to Cameroon, and the male converts at Esu "a truculent and ill-behaved body of men".¹

Throughout the 1930s, the government continued to deplore the attitude of the missionaries with regard to Native Administration, commenting that "fanaticism untempered by wisdom" was the cause of many hostilities.² Since the mid-1920s, the colonial government had invested a great deal of effort in developing a form of Indirect Rule which would allow British legal concepts and African Native Law and Custom to co-exist, with a steady increase in autonomy and indigenous leadership intended to pave the way to independence. In the view of the administration, the missionary attitude was counterproductive, and in fact even contrary to the mission's aims, as the system of Native Administration was "eminently suitable to face the changes caused by a European regime; an organization, too, which does not necessarily insist on a share in pagan rites and ceremonies."³ The latter part of that comment is only in part true: though in theory participation was not required, the fact remained that the overwhelming majority of elders and other court members was anti-Christian, and lost no opportunity to demonstrate the authority vested in them by the colonial administration.

5.4 The mission school at Njinikom and the N.A. school at Laikom

The Catholic primary school at Njinikom had enjoyed great popularity right from its establishment. The school's popularity soared after the appointment of European missionaries to Njinikom.⁴ In 1927, 70 pupils were registered at the school, which had three teachers, two from Nigeria and one from Bafut. Ten years later, enrolment numbered some 250, including more than twenty girls.⁵ By 1936, the school had been raised to a full primary school, drawing pupils from all over the Grassfields, and boasted a staff that included a woman who taught sewing to girls.⁶ In 1938, there were only three such schools in the British Cameroons (Nkwi 1976: 166).

The popularity of the mission school was not matched by government enthusiasm. Early colonial reports describe the school as grossly inadequate. In 1927, the equipment was deemed insufficient, the teaching inefficient, and respect for native customs lacking.⁷ The teachers were described as ill-qualified and the pupils as:

¹ BNA-Sd 1931/4, DO to Resident, Confidential Memorandum, 27.3.1935.

² BNA-Cb 1937/1, Annual Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report, 1937, p.37.

³ BNA-Cb 1936/1, Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report, 1936, p.9.

⁴ See the appendix for enrolment figures for both the NA school and the mission school.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.41; BNA-Sb/k, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 9.5.1940.

⁶ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Fr. Jacobs to Education Department, 4.2.1936.

⁷ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.41.

mostly unintelligent and slow in answering the simplest questions, and the majority tend to sit quiescent, content to leave the answering of the questions to one or two boys.¹

Government criticism was not limited to the mission school. The N.A. schools, as well, were judged to be inadequate. Frequent outbursts of violence at the N.A. school near Laikom resulted in the dismissal of the first N.A. teacher, who was accused of ruining the morale of the pupils with his "aggressive and bullying manner".² In 1930 the staff was changed again, and in 1931, once more, the N.A. school teacher was fired. The Fon was reported to lack interest in the school, so that attendance dropped to 20, only increasing again (to 60) after warnings by the government.³ By 1933, the N.A. school was performing so poorly that closure was considered.⁴

While the Catholic community warmly welcomed educational opportunities, the predominantly non-Christian population was more sceptical about putting children at the disposal of the whiteman. D.O. Hook complained in 1935 that educational advances in the Bamenda Division as a whole lagged behind those in the rest of the British trust territory:

It will be some time before there is any noticeable cultural advance in the Bamenda Division. Undoubtedly education is popular and is becoming increasingly so, but at present the number of children receiving education is exceedingly low in proportion to the total non-adult population.⁵

In addition, few "Big Men" sent their children to school, so that the Native Authorities and the new literate groups scarcely overlapped: the British government was well aware that the growth of a literate elite *outside* the traditional elite might well erode the authority of the latter in time. But many traditional leaders feared that sending a chief's son to school would imply losing the boy to the whiteman. A chindo reflected:

After this Christianity thing came the school. The whiteman insisted that every child at school age must be sent to school (...) We realized that he wanted to take our children away from us so as to destroy our tradition completely. What we did was this: we hid the children who were interested in traditional matters at home. In so doing we were protecting them from the harsh treatment at school and preserving them to continue after us in our ways. The stubborn, worthless ones who gave us trouble were sent to the whiteman's school, as some form of retribution for their naughtiness. As such, the whiteman at that time never had any reason to fight us. You see we only later on realized that we were mistaken in our judgement.⁶

¹ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, Education Department, 16.10.1927.

² BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, pp.26-27.

³ BNA-Cb 1929/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1931, p.33.

⁴ BNA-Cb 1933/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1933, p.45.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1934/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1935, p.41.

⁶ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

In 1935, only four chiefs in the Bamenda Division had received some education, at mission schools.¹

5.5 Runaway wives

The example that had been set during Fon Ngam's reign by runaway wives, was followed on a large scale after his death, by both royal wives and the wives of commoners. Soon after the establishment of the Kom Native Court, the Native Authority declared that all runaway wives living at the mission compound would be served a civil summons unless they returned to their fathers until they were able to find Christian husbands who would refund the brideprice previously paid for them.² The priest at Njinikom recognized the Native Authority's decision and instructed his catechists that they would be dismissed if they were caught providing runaway wives with refuge, leading the D.O. to conclude, optimistically, that the practise had ceased. The D.O.'s conclusions were unfounded, however. Throughout the remainder of the mission's history, wives continued to run away and seek refuge at the mission.

The phenomenon of runaway wives was not limited to the Bamenda Division, and caused the colonial government increasing concern throughout the British trust territory. The women's decision to leave their husbands was in itself not problematic to the administration, but, rather, the invariably ensuing conflict, involving husbands demanding the repayment of the brideprice, and the church's inability or refusal to do so. While in the 1920s the colonial government had been perturbed by the asylum granted *royal* wives, in the 1930s the concern related to women from all segments of the Kom population.

The control over women

Both married women and young girls left their homes to reside at the mission compound. Their position was precarious and ill-defined. The missions tried to marry the women off to Christian men, but these were not always available or able to refund the brideprice demanded. In addition, the mission policy to restrict Christian marriage to those who had received baptism meant that the candidates had to attend doctrine classes at the mission for an extended period of time, sometimes several years, before being able to marry. A woman's decision to leave her polygamous husband almost inevitably entailed her marriage, after a considerable delay, to a Christian, not necessarily of her own choice.

In 1928, the D.O. of Mamfe Division described the position of a woman who had become Christian as "impossible", explaining that the troubles resulted largely from the custom of infant betrothal:

After paying a considerable sum and waiting for some fifteen years (a man) cannot be expected readily to abandon his wife to the mission because she has become a

¹ BNA-Cb 1934/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1935, p.44.

² BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.24.

Christian (...) It is known that the mission authorities consider conditions which prohibit women from marrying the men of their choice, are disgraceful, but custom cannot be changed in a day.¹

The D.O.'s sympathy for the cause of the Cameroonian man who saw his dearly purchased wife disappearing into the grips of the mission, is typical for the attitude of the colonial government towards the mission's refugee policy in this period. Earlier, the colonial administration had been particularly concerned with the runaway wives of the *Fon* and the resulting erosion of his authority, but now the government's concern focused on the common man's dissatisfaction and the potentially disruptive, undetermined status of the runaway wives.

The issue of "stray" women posed a threat to *all* kinds of established patriarchal authority — church, colonial, and traditional — namely that women were no longer directly under a readily identifiable source of control. An unattached woman was virtually unheard of, and a prospect nervously avoided by both colonial and church authorities. Many are the cases of women who were sent back and forth, from church to father to former husband, by authorities anxious to have them under some recognized authority. In one instance, the mission's response to the increase of runaway women was to establish a settlement especially for them, near Baseng, where the women stayed for periods from a few weeks to a year or more. The purpose of the mission settlement was, in the words of the D.O., to establish control over the women until their position had been "regulated".²

Increasingly, the government attitude towards the missions, with regard to the runaway women, was one of impatience. Exasperated by the church's involvement in marriage affairs, the colonial administration termed the mission a "marriage market."³ The D.O. complained in 1930 that the priests were blind to the moral danger involved when women left the "discipline of the family", maintaining that such women were "extremely likely to contract irregular liaisons."⁴ Divorce itself, he claimed, was not a problem to the natives, but, rather, the fact that the husband concerned had little or no chance of recovering the brideprice, at least for the duration of the woman's preparations for baptism.

The brideprice question

Of prime importance in the issue of the runaway wives was the question of brideprice, for many men experienced the running away of their wives as an economic set-back. Scores of cases in the Native Courts were devoted to determining who was to repay and who was to receive brideprice payments for wives or daughters who had become Christians.

A second by-product of the conversion of runaway wives was a notable increase in the level of the brideprice. Njinikom priest Father Jacobs noted a dramatic drop in the

¹ BNA-Sd 1928/4, DO Mamfe to Resident, 25.9.1928.

² BNA-Sd 1930/1, DO Kumba to Resident, 16.10.1930.

³ BNA-Sd 1928/2, untitled report, 1928.

⁴ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1930, p.58.

number of marriages in the 1930s, due to the fact that many young men had either travelled to Nigeria or to the plantations to earn money to pay the increased brideprice (Ndi 1986: 328 fn. 30). This proved to be a concern for both the missions and the colonial government, as high brideprices meant that marriage was often delayed, or was entirely beyond the means of young men. Both mission and government representatives feared the potential for immoral behaviour that the inflation of the brideprice implied.

In 1934, a survey was held to collect the views of colonial and mission authorities on the issue of brideprice. Some, including representatives of the Mill Hill mission, suggested that the colonial government instruct the Native Authorities to set a legal maximum to the brideprice, arguing that the high brideprice resulted in immorality.¹ The Bamenda D.O., however, maintained that the brideprice was not unusually high in his Division, except in areas such as Njinikom, where the daughter of non-Christian parents contemplated marriage to a Christian, the high brideprice being compensation for the loss of services which would have been rendered by a non-Christian husband.² The Cameroonian District Head in Victoria, as well, considered government interference in the brideprice issue undesirable, as the institution allowed for a certain degree of control over women:

The ordinary Christian convert clings to the dowry (ie. brideprice) because without dowry uneducated and uncultured women tend to loose living, and public opinion in the main still regards a woman married without a dowry as a loose woman. Where dowries are too high general opinion will reduce them to a proper level and crystallize the reduction by a court rule, but this has nothing to do with the Christian religion.³

The information gathered regarding the brideprice was supplemented by more general assessments of the position of women in British Cameroon, following inquiries in the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations.⁴ The District Officers maintained, by and large, that the position of women in the British Cameroons was preferable to the position of women in other parts of Africa, so that the British government need not intervene, while the missions welcomed the opportunity to plead for improved educational facilities.

The D.O. in Kumba, for example, maintained that women in his division did not suffer any particular difficulties, as the women were well looked after by their families and husbands. Contrary to the Baptist missionaries in his division, the Kumba D.O. saw no need for increased educational opportunities, interpreting the poor attendance of girls at the N.A. schools as an indication that the demand for female education was low.⁵ Likewise, the Kumba D.O. saw little need for extended health care, as "women take

¹ BNA-Sa 1933/2, Statement made by Mill Hill mission to Resident re. position of women, 7.2.1934.

² BNA-Sa 1933/, DO to Resident, 13.3.1934.

³ BNA-Sa 1933/2, Notes of a discussion with Mr Manga Williams, District Head, Victoria, in the Resident's Office, Buea, 29.3.34.

⁴ BNA-Sa 1944/7, Chief Secretary (Lagos) to Secretary Southern Provinces (Enugu), 6.12.1933.

⁵ BNA-Sa 1933/2, DO Kumba to Resident, 6.2.1934.

little interest in infant welfare and make little use of the facilities in connection with childbirth".¹ Since divorce was easily obtained in the Native Courts, the women in Kumba Division were judged to "enjoy a considerable amount of freedom", their standard of living, education and culture being "considerably in advance" of many other tribes in the British colonies. The Mamfe D.O., too, insisted that, though "the woman is universally treated as chattel", government intervention was unnecessary, as the condition of women was gradually improving and the women seemed content.² By contrast, the Catholic Mill Hill mission maintained that Cameroonian women faced "many and grave difficulties", and recommended that the mandatory power increase educational facilities.³

The inquiry resulted in recommendations for greater educational facilities for women, along with improved infant and adolescent care. In addition, the government recommended, in the vaguest of terms, that a legal maximum be set to the brideprice, though no limit was defined. The vague recommendations on the issue of brideprice are symptomatic of the Europeans' attitude to the question: neither the colonial government nor the church officials were able to conceive of a solution that might negate or at least bring under control the havoc that their presence had, often inadvertently brought about in the arena of marriage politics.

5.6 Indigenous versus European Catholicism

European support for the causes of converts in the Native Courts notwithstanding, the relationship between the European priests and the Cameroonian converts was not always one of sympathy and co-operation. The moral standards imposed by the resident priests were unrelenting, and were not seldom misinterpreted by the converts. Polygamy was not tolerated, for example, and all beliefs in witchcraft, juju's or other "medicines" severely punished. Numerous Christians, particularly women, were turned away from the mission station because their behaviour was deemed immoral by the missionaries.⁴ The infliction of corporal punishment for any moral lapse or lack of discipline was common.⁵ Though the colonial government professed to have no objection to corporal punishment by missionary leaders, so long as they did not abrogate colonial law, severe public floggings for sexual offenses became so frequent around 1930 that the concern of the colonial authorities was aroused.

In the case study of the preceding period in Kom, it came to light that some catechists abused their power to extract labour and goods from the Kom people. In this period, too, such cases were found, particularly in connection to marriage practices: the

¹ *Ibid.*

² BNA-Sa 1933/2, DO Mamfe to Resident, 20.2.1934.

³ BNA-Sa 1933/2, Statement by Mill Hill mission to Resident re. position of women, 19.1.1934.

⁴ For example, a woman was turned out of the mission compound at Fonjunge by Father Moran in 1928 when she was found to be pregnant after having resided at the mission for four months. The fact that she could not (or would not) name the father of her child proved too much for the priest. (BNA-Sd 1928/2, untitled report, 1928).

⁵ BNA-Sd 1928/4, Resident to Chief Registrar, Supreme Court, Lagos, 31.3.1930.

catechists concerned were in a position to extract payment by threatening to delay marriages (by postponing the baptismal training).¹ In 1930, the colonial administration found it necessary to warn the villagers that the mission had no authority to demand labour, after numerous complaints reached the D.O. with regard to work done for missions without remuneration.²

5.7 Fon Ndi in retrospect

To a large degree, the improvement in relations between Njinikom and the rest of Kom was due to the conciliatory attitude of Fon Ndi. Fon Ngam's policies had largely alienated the population of Njinikom from the rest of Kom, so that Fon Ndi's challenge was to normalize relations and regain control over the Christian converts. His own personality informed his policies to a certain extent, but there were also other factors which enabled Ndi to minimize conflict.

In the first place, he had the advantage of being able to learn from the mistakes which Fon Ngam had made: the persistence of the Christian faith in Kom had been demonstrated by the time Ndi was enthroned, and it was clear that fighting the church would be futile. Rather, regaining at least partial control over the Christian population became his goal. In addition, British colonial rule had been more firmly established by the time Ndi became Fon. In consequence, British policy regarding Christian missions, education, Native Authorities and so on was more clearly articulated during this phase of mission activity. Further, the leadership of the mission had changed hands, from the Kom ex-chinda Timneng to the European priests. For Fon Ndi, this change of leadership meant that conflicts with the church could largely be fought out by the colonial government, which had a clear interest in re-establishing and maintaining traditional authority in Njinikom.

This is not to say that Ndi's position was an easy or clear-cut one. Like his predecessor Ngam, Fon Ndi was confronted with the sometimes oppressive and frequently misunderstood colonial rule of the British. Although he reaped the benefits of his brother's experiences with the British, he was also forced to manoeuvre within the parameters defined by a foreign power, and to look for a way to appease both the English and the Kom people. People had become somewhat accustomed to the British presence, and the notion of an all-powerful Fon was no longer self-evident: "In the days of Ndi, the world was already open and people knew their rights."³

Fon Ndi's conciliatory attitude was appreciated by the British government, but did not always lead to the peaceful relations he had had in mind, as the Christians at Njinikom frequently interpreted his behaviour as a sign of weakness and as a recognition of their privileged status. The Fon's natural authority continued to decrease as a result of Christian resistance to traditional rule, but also as a result of colonial

¹ BNA-Sd 1920/1, DO Kumba to Resident, Confidential Memorandum, 7.6.1930.

² BNA-Sd 1930/1, Resident to DO, Confidential Memorandum, 18.7.1930.

³ Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994.

intervention in various areas, most notably in the establishment of a Native Court, which forced the Fon to adopt colonial ideas of justice and decision-making.

In the Annual Report for 1937, the all-round erosion of traditional authority in the Grassfields was attributed by the D.O. to a variety of factors:

The Tikars are gradually curtailing the privileges and unique authority of their once despotic chiefs (...) People demand more freedom of choice. They are not prepared to give unquestioning obedience to the commands of one man, and the autocrat must seek advice and get the weight of public opinion on his side if his orders are to be enforced. Other factors are the spread of Christianity with its demand for a loyalty that may clash with the customs of paganism, and of education; the detribalisation of those who leave their homes for long periods of time in search of work and knowledge, and the gradual abolition of rights and services once accorded by custom to the chiefs but now exacted only with difficulty or else forbidden. Much of the influence of a chief depends on the performance of his social obligations, but his power to execute these rests on the number of his wives, who make his farms. But there is no chief now who has as many wives as his predecessor had. He probably has not more than half. The lot of a Chief's wife is less happy than that of a commoner, unless she happens to be a favourite, and women are learning the value of freedom and the right to choose their own husbands.¹

The D.O. rightly referred to the role of education in eroding the authority of the Fon. Njinikom had acquired a reputation as *the* centre of education in Kom, and attracted pupils from all over the Grassfields. To a large degree, the educational factor overlaps the influence of Christianity, as the overwhelming majority of school pupils attended mission schools.

Another factor which surely complicated Ndi's attempt to maintain power was the increase in migrant labour. From the earliest colonial times, Kom had sent large numbers of young men to work on the plantations at the coast. In 1940, between 7 and 10 thousand men from the Bamenda Division worked on plantations in the Victoria and Kumba Divisions.² The D.O. considered the migrant labour to have a "tribal disintegrating influence", as was evidenced by complaints of traditional authorities that the migrants no longer paid the customary dues and refused to participate in communal labour.³ Again, the migrants' influence coincided largely with the Christians' influence, as a large portion of the plantation workers from Kom were Christians.

5.8 Summary and concluding remarks for Phase Three

In 1931, about 140 adult strangers resided at the mission compound in Njinikom, including a large number of women, either unmarried or living alone.⁴ They, and the rest

¹ BNA-Cb 1937/1, Annual Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report, 1937, p.11.

² BNA-Cb 1940/1, Annual and League of Nations Report 1940 Bamenda Division, p.14.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1931, pp.15-16.

of the Kom Catholic community, were led by five resident priests, all from Holland. The total Christian population residing at Njinikom and Fanantui was noted as 3000 in 1937.¹ The total population of Kom proper at that time was about 18 000.²

The focus of conflict had shifted, due to the presence of European missionaries: now *they* were the object of the colonial government's frustration, and to a certain degree traditional authorities and colonial authorities shared the same scepticism regarding the priests. The main source of conflict continued to be the control over women, but the nature of the conflict had changed, from exasperation resulting from the exodus from the palace to concern about the increasing tension resulting from the brideprice issue.

All in all, the situation was far less volatile than a few years earlier. Bishop Rogan's professed adherence to the British colonial system of authorized Native Authorities served to improve relations considerably. In addition, the "firebrands of a few years ago" had matured into men, according to the D.O., and had "outgrown the first heady effects of direct contact with the Priests and the control of their everyday lives by the Catholic church. These men are having a steadying effect on the youths."³

The situation was judged to be so favourable that in 1931 the colonial government, represented by Resident Arnett, was convinced of the inevitable Christianization of Kom. In the Resident's opinion, the Kwifon, the executive arm of the Fon's government, was destined to disappear because the younger generation was less easily impressed by the secrecy and solemnity traditionally surrounding the Kwifon, and increasingly challenged the religious foundation of the Kwifon:

The Christian opposes Kwifon as part of his duty to his new faith. The ex-school pupil feels superior to the mystery and ceremony by which the Kwifon imposes on the credulous multitude. The trader and traveller (...) ridicules the pretensions of Kwifon and resists all authority.⁴

The Resident recommended that the Kwifon no longer be recognized as a part of the authorized Native Authority. His estimate was that before long the ruler of the kingdom would himself be a Christian, rendering administration together with the non-Christian Kwifon impossible:

It cannot be many years before we find (...) that the proper successor is a Christian and refuses to take any part in the Kwifon or that several of the leading men who ought to have a controlling voice in the chief's public actions are standing outside public affairs because they are Christians and will not take place on a Kwifon council.⁵

¹ BNA-Cb 1937/1, Annual Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report, 1937, p.92.

² BNA-Cb 1940/1, Annual and League of Nations Report 1940 Bamenda Division, p.27: 5485 men, 5740 women and 6995 children were noted for Kom in 1940.

³ BNA-Cb 1932/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1932, pp.67-68.

⁴ BNA-Ia 1926/1, Resident to Secretary of the Southern Provinces, 10.7.1931.

⁵ Ibid.

He estimated that within twenty years, 50 per cent of the population of Bamenda would be Christian.

Though the Resident's estimates proved to be rather optimistic with regard to the imminent Christianization of Kom, Christianity had indeed become considerably less controversial in the 1930s. That is not to say that peace and tolerance reigned: animosity continued to impede relations between Christians and non-Christians, denominational rivalry between Catholics from Njinikom and Baptists at Belo persevered, and litigations concerning brideprice flooded the Native Courts, though the frequent outbursts of heated conflict which had characterized the 1920s had subsided.

Colonial attitudes towards the mission were stricter in this phase than previously, when the government had clearly been caught off guard by the immense tension surrounding the Christian missions in the Bamenda area. Since the posting of European resident missionaries to Njinikom in 1927, the government directed itself to its European counterparts, and, consequentially, tolerated less open criticism of the Native Authorities.

As in the previous phase, however, it is important to distinguish between colonial authority at the divisional level and colonial authority at higher levels of the colonial bureaucracy: in general, the Resident exercised more patience in his dealings with the missions than local officials did. The establishment of the Kom Native Court served to institutionalize and channel conflict into paths more easily controlled by the colonial government. The initial interference by missionaries on behalf of the converts in Native Court was not tolerated by the colonial administration, and thus tension in that area subsided as well in the 1930s.

All in all, then, the 1930s saw much less open demonstration of animosity between Christians and non-Christians, in part because of the more conciliatory attitude demonstrated by Fon Ndi, in part because of the fairly firmly established position of the mission and of British colonial rule, and in part because the missionaries themselves served as lightning rods, directing tensions towards themselves rather than towards the mission community as a whole.

The problem of control over women acquired a somewhat different flavour in this period, as the issue of brideprice became more prominent. Christian marriages were no longer uncommon, as they had been in the 1920s, so that, increasingly, disputes arose concerning the repayment of the brideprice for those women who had run away to the mission, as they continued to do in large numbers. Though the brideprice issue caught the attention of the colonial government, which was worried about social unrest, and the church authorities, who were worried about immorality as a result of increased brideprice levels, neither institution proved capable of developing, let alone implementing, measures to combat the frequent troubles regarding women converts.

The Fourth Phase: Continuity and change, after 1940

Though the fourth phase of the missionary endeavour in Njinikom lies essentially beyond the scope of this study, a brief discussion of a few recurrent themes and noteworthy developments will shed some light on the long-term ramifications of the missionary and colonial presence in Kom.

The period after 1940 witnessed a crystallization of earlier themes of conflict, as well as a shift towards more explicitly politicized social relations. Though overt confrontations between church leaders and traditional authorities were few and far between, Njinikom Catholics continued to view themselves as a privileged political community, set apart from the rest of Kom. Changes in Native Administration, most notably efforts unleashed by the colonial government to co-opt the new literate elites into the authorized political authority, intensified the politicization of the religious community. Mission education played an important role in this process. A mass exodus of royal wives from the Fon's palace in 1949 illustrated sharply the degree to which the Fon's authority had been eroded.

6.1 Politicization and changes in Native Administration

In the early years of British Indirect Rule, a chief's authority over his subjects and his deference towards colonial authority had been of prime importance to the colonial administration. However, colonial sympathy for the "modern", literate segment of the population had been on the increase since the 1930s.

Colonial evaluations of the "traditional" Native Authorities became increasingly condescending and impatient in the 1940s. By 1951, the Bamenda area Native

Authorities, previously so crucial to the success of Indirect Rule, had acquired a reputation of being "illiterate, uninterested, grasping, irresponsible, idle and in general thoroughly unsatisfactory".¹ The colonial administration found itself confronted by a tricky dilemma: the growing body of "impatiently progressive elements"², largely mission-educated youths, made increasingly pressing demands for a larger say in the political affairs of the country, and for a corresponding decrease in the influence of traditional authority. The threat of anti-colonial, nationalist uprisings could not be ruled out, should the colonial administration fail to heed the demands of the new politicized literate groups. A visit to the Bamenda area by representatives of the United Nations Trusteeship Council in 1949 revealed considerable political discontent: during a visit to Laikom, the U.N. officials were presented with several addresses demanding the acceleration of social and economic development and progress towards self-government.³

In the words of the D.O., the question was "how to make use of the energy and enthusiasm of the younger men without losing the steadying influence of age and customary authority".⁴ The literate element could be recognized as legitimate authority only if it became associated with traditional authority. Thus in 1951 proposals were formulated for a new local council for Kom, in which both "traditional" and "modern" elements would be represented: the proposal envisioned a council composed of 10 "traditional" men, 2 women and 42 elected members. The Kom council would constitute a part of a new federated Native Authority, presided over by a council containing not more than 50 per cent traditional membership.⁵ It was hoped that the new council would weld together the representatives of educated classes and traditional elders, and "mobilize for constructive effort the somewhat vague African aspirations which at present tend to find no positive expression except in discontent with things as they are, impatience with the methods of government and distrust of the Bona Fides of Great Britain."⁶

Though the influence of the literate elite had been on the rise behind the scenes for many years, the institutionalization of their increased power was a serious blow to the authority of the Fon. In Kom, the Fon managed, at least at first, to maintain a large degree of his former natural authority, even within the modernized council. Thus, in 1953, the Kom council was judged to be largely ineffective as a forum of public opinion: the Fon's opinion was still *de facto* law. Yet the D.O. was optimistic about the potential for democratic government, and reported hopefully that the council and the Fon were "being educated to the idea of accepting cheerfully the decision of the majority, even though it may not conform with the views of the once all-powerful and infallible ruler".⁷

¹ BNA-Ci 1950/1, Annual Report, Wum Division, 31.8.1950 - 31.9.1951, p.1.

² BNA-Se 1947/4, E.J. Gibbons to all Residents (secret), 3.6.1947.

³ BNA-Ba 1949/7, Copy of telegram handed in at Bamenda, 25.11.1949.

⁴ BNA-Ja/b 1954/1, DO (Wum) to Resident, 15.11.1951.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ BNA-Se 1947/4, E.J. Gibbons to Resident, 3.6.1947 (secret).

⁷ BNA-Ci 1950/1, Annual Report Wum Division, 1953, pp.3-4.

The decision to incorporate the increasingly vocal, educated elite in the officially recognized Native Administration was, at least in Kom, partly motivated by the fact that power was being usurped from the Fon by people "behind the throne", in particular a few of his own sons, who "doubtless remember that by the Kom laws of succession the next chief will be chosen from a different family and that they will then have to revert to a private status".¹ Although the Fon himself ostensibly directed the council affairs, it was evident to the colonial administration that he was strongly influenced by people beyond the direct sphere of influence of the colonial government. These people posed a potential threat to British authority more elusive than the threat posed by the Christian converts, as the former operated *through*, rather than against, the Fon. It may be argued that the proposed reforms in Native Administration were in fact triggered more by this fear — the British fear of losing ultimate control — than by a longing on the part of the colonial government to meet the demands of the Christianized educated elite.

The elite which threatened the traditional *status quo* in the 1940s and 1950s had largely been educated at mission schools. Njinikom became the locus of political unrest as it intensified, because Njinikom's educational opportunities had been attracting political leadership away from Laikom (Nkwain 1963: 1). But the missionaries' role in, or response to, the growth of an increasingly politically conscious elite was ambiguous. Most missionaries maintained that their business was restricted to spiritual matters, and without political repercussions. Yet they provided the new movement not only with educational opportunities, but also with such concrete facilities as meeting places.

On the other hand, there is also evidence that some mission representatives quite consciously collaborated with government agents to counter, or at least to monitor, the young political organizations. The Dutch priest Bilderbeek, for example, was able to make use of his position as a church official to gain entry to a political gathering held at the mission station in Bamenda, details of which meeting he reported to the political department of the British administration. A trifle disappointed, he was obliged to report that the meeting had not resulted in any very sensational information.²

6.2 Education

While colonial officials lamented a "universal lack of interest in education"³ in the Bamenda area as a whole, education continued to expand in Njinikom, and, increasingly, to include girls and women. The colonial government depended heavily on

¹ BNA-Cb 1946/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1946, p.5; BNA- Ba 1949/13, Excerpts from Annual Report Bamenda Division 1946.

² Bilderbeek reported: "(...) the fact is, I just cannot get hold of anything! The meeting in Bamenda was held in Mankon Roman Catholic Mission, with or without the permission of the fathers. It was the Cameroons Federation (yours for the fatherland - that sort of thing). They have drawn up points to be discussed (???) (sic) with the delegates from UNO." He went on to name "hot Zikists" (supporters of Nigerian nationalist leader Azikwe), concluding that, as far as he could see, things in his division (Mamfe) were quiet, as "the Hoi Polloi, small traders, couriers, etc. know naught. The 'literate' class too is quiet." (BNA-Si 1939/2a, N. Bilderbeek to Mr. Angeloni, 11.10.1949).

³ BNA-Ci 1950/1, Annual Report, Wum Division, 31.8.1950 - 31.9.1951, p.2.

the missions to provide educational facilities, and increasingly the two institutions co-operated in the educational field, but the colonial appreciation of missionary endeavours remained tinged with suspicion. Religious instruction in schools disgruntled colonial officials, and the fact that the missionaries were not British citizens continued to elicit derogatory criticism from the colonial administrators, who described the continental missionaries as "far more uncompromising, intolerant and bigoted than any English missionaries, except those of outlandish sects".¹ Nonetheless, government initiative in the field of education remained virtually non-existent, so that the overwhelming majority of education continued to be provided by Christian organizations.

Education for women was viewed with apprehension, because it was feared that book-learning would render women disinclined to do agricultural work and dissatisfied in their marital relationships. In addition, it was alleged that girls who "savvy book" became prostitutes. The allegedly high percentage of girls who became pregnant while at school withheld parents from sending their daughters to school.²

The Fon of Kom opposed teaching women the three R's, but welcomed a training centre which would instruct the women in hygiene, child welfare and modern agricultural methods.³ In 1949 a women's welfare class at Njinikom succeeded, "with the help of the Rev. father", to attract 200 girls to learn knitting, hygiene, practical baby bathing and so forth.⁴ Despite persistent prejudice against education for women, female registration at the Njinikom mission school rose, from 3 in 1929 to 24 in 1940 and 79 girls in 1948.⁵ Njinikom mission school continued to grow, and soon became an accepted and central part of Njinikom community life: social gatherings were held in the school building on Sundays, when local elders and young men gathered to discuss with the teachers.⁶

6.3 The mass exodus of the Fon's wives

In 1949, the Fon of Kom was confronted by a mass exodus of royal wives from the palace. A precedent had been set in this regard in earlier phases of the case study, and was closely connected to the missionary presence at Njinikom. The mass exodus of wives in 1949 was prompted by the visiting mission of the United Nations Trusteeship Council and (reluctant) interventions by the colonial administration.

Trouble at the palace began to brew after an article describing the Fon's marital habits, written by a nun at Nso, was published in a missionary periodical in the late 1940s. The article was in fact largely a figment of the nun's imagination, but contained

¹ BNA-Sd 1936/8, Re. religious instruction in government schools, 10.8.1942.

² BNA-Ci 1950/1, Annual Report Wum Division, 1953, p.7. Remarkably, the DO considered the high pregnancy rate among school girls to be a consequence of parental nonchalance: "Parents have yet to learn that the inculcation of morals among their children is a primary duty."

³ BNA-Ad 1948/22, P.M. Kaberry to Prof. Forde, 14.12.1945; BNA-Cb 1947/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1947, p.28.

⁴ BNA-Ci 1950/1, Annual Report, Wum Division, Sept. 1949 - August 31, 1950, p.3.

⁵ See the figures and sources in the appendix.

⁶ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 30.9.1942.

enough truth to resemble the situation at Laikom, and infuriate the Fon, who complained that his marital affairs were of no concern to outsiders. Nonetheless, the article caught the attention of the United Nations Trusteeship Council, which demanded that an inquiry be held into the Fon of Kom's marriage customs.

The colonial administration was none too pleased with the international attention for the Fon of Kom, and attributed the concern to "missionary hysteria" (Reyher 1953: 25). Describing the Fon's wives as the best-fed, most beautiful women in Kom, pampered and proud, the D.O. complained:

The administrators are, and have been for many years, aware of the marriage customs of the Tikar Fons. It is essential to the welfare of the tribe that the Fon should be presented with virgin brides and for this reason there is a very deep popular support for the customs that make this possible (...) The Fon's wives themselves are almost all happy to adhere to custom and those who do not wish to enter the Fon's compound are not forced to do so. Every man and woman in Laikom is free to approach the DO and if his, or her, liberty is threatened immediate steps are taken to provide redress. The marriage customs do not interfere with the liberty of the subject.¹

Clearly, the "deep popular support" for the Fon's recruitment and treatment of royal wives was largely colonial wishful thinking. But the colonial standpoint taken here is not surprising: the local colonial administration clearly had an interest in maintaining the *status quo*, or at least in maintaining the peace, and previous desertions from the palace had caused enough uproar to convince the colonial officials that the Fon's polygamy was a can of worms better left unopened.

The administration's attempt to avert international intervention failed, however, and the Senior District Officer was, obliged in anticipation of the visit of the Trusteeship Council, to visit Laikom himself, and impress upon the Fon's wives concerned that they were free to leave the palace should they want to. Having heard that they would receive protection from the D.O. if they should leave the palace, nearly 50 royal wives fled, mostly to Njinikom. In the words of one runaway's daughter:

At that time in the palace there were 150 wives, not including old women. (...) The Fon had sent his most stubborn and eldest son, Sama, to school. When he finished his studies he had the ears of the whiteman. He told them there was a lot of abuse at the palace as the Fon was increasing the number of his wives just as a herdsman would increase the stock of his cattle. He came back to the palace and explained to the Fon's wives that they were being abused (...) He told them that they had a right to revolt and that the whiteman would be on their side if they did (...) The Nafoin bought his idea and teamed up with him to persuade the young wives to run away. This campaign was further strengthened when the whiteman came to the palace. They interviewed all the wives and were surprised to notice that more than half of those women had never had sexual intercourse with the Fon. Some of them had been to the Fon's bed only once or twice (...) The whiteman, Tifi (the Nafoin) and Sama Ndi, the only educated prince, in one day caused forty-three of the Fon's

¹ BNA-Cb 1943/1, Annual League of Nations Report 1946-47, p.16. (The file is wrongly dated: the report is for Jan. - Aug. 1948).

wives to desert him. Some of them, who were afraid of the chindas, did not stop over at Njinikom for purification, and some never came back to Njinikom at all (...).¹

The role of Prince Sama Ndi in the affair is unclear. The commotion caused by the publication of the aforementioned nun's article, is ascribed in oral tradition to initiatives taken by the educated prince. Yet colonial records suggest that Sama was not in the least pleased by the mass exodus, and he pleaded that the D.O. intervene to put an end to the unrest at the palace which ensued the exodus:

The villagers shout about that we, the sons of the Fon, have written a letter to report to the whiteman that the Fon keeps 600 wives. That the Fon catches women by force. The villagers mock us and say that you have promised to disclose the names of the chief's sons who wrote the letter.²

The prince begged the D.O. to do just that, and thereby put an end to the gossip, upon which he was curtly informed by the D.O. that not a prince, but a European source, had been the cause of the consternation.³

In November 1949, the Fon received the visiting mission of the Trusteeship Council. He presented the mission with an address, in which he protested against the alleged misrepresentations in the press regarding his domestic affairs, and handed the delegates a petition:

Where lies the need for the DO, who is not Bikom and who knows very little of the eventual progress at Bikom, to force me to abandon my way of life and to take his, which is entirely unknown to me and not wished for? (...) Peace of mind is gone of my people and me, This is so because of the mixture of cultures. The whiteman has come with his and we seem to abandon ours for the new one. This new one, we do not know. If in due course we come to know and appreciate it, we shall unanimously demand the introduction. But not, until we make the demand ourselves (...) There is no reason why we shall now be able to manage our affairs better than we used to before the advent of this civilisation (...) I had and I must have servants in the Kwifon compound. Without them I am unable to fulfil my duties.⁴

The Fon's petition was accompanied by one signed by "the women of Kom", who protested against the negative reports about the Fon's marital habits, stating that "we are very happy to live with our husbands. We do not grudge sharing husbands, we live with them happily."⁵

¹ Interview Princess Immaculate Mulessim, Njinikom 19.8.1994. It is interesting that, according to oral tradition, the *lack* of sexual opportunities was seen by the colonial officers as a justification for escape from the palace, whereas in the 1920s, the lack of sexual activity between the Fon and his wives was considered to be a justification for maintaining the polygamous household.

² BNA-Md/e 1943/1, President of Native Court to SDO, 24.2.1948.

³ BDO-NW/La/a 1935/1, Sama C. Ndi to Resident, 20.3.1949; BDO-NW/La/a 1935/1, DO to Resident, 29.3.1949.

⁴ BNA-Td 1950/9, Petition from the Fon of Kom to UN visiting mission (T/PET.4/36), 20.11.1949.

⁵ BNA-Td 1950/9, Petition from the women of Kom (T/PET.4/38), n.d. (autumn 1949).

Interestingly, the Fon demanded to know "what fairness is there for the D.O. to order an exodus of my ex-wives without a refund of dowry."¹ The introduction of brideprice in the discussion of royal wives is a new and significant element. Oral testimonies insistently repeated that brideprice was of no relevance in royal marriages: marriage to the Fon was a compulsory obligation, and not rewarded by marriage payments in any way. Yet as wives left his household in increasing numbers, the issue of brideprice cropped up in colonial reports, suggesting that the commoditization of marriage was not limited to commoners' marriages. The importance which brideprice payments achieved in the Fon's economic affairs is suggested by a reference in the annual report for 1950-51, where, referring to the Fons of Kom and Bum, the D.O. described the two elderly Fons as "eking out their days fortified with the knowledge that a steady income can still be provided, for dowry claims on the women who have left their households under the more relaxed conditions obtaining nowadays."²

The visiting mission of the Trusteeship Council concluded that the Fon's private life was not within its jurisdiction, but the Fon's marital habits continued to command attention. Shortly after the U.N. delegates' visit to Laikom, the Fon received a visit from an American writer, Rebecca Reyher. After staying at Laikom for several weeks, Reyher published a highly suggestive (and very impressionistic) book entitled *The Fon and his Hundred Wives*, in which she painted an extremely negative picture of the Fon and tried to evoke sympathy for his, in her view, grossly victimized wives. The publication of the book further aggrieved the Fon, who accused the mission at Njinikom of having sent Reyher to Laikom. The result was a further increase of tension between the Catholic mission and Laikom.³

The mass exodus of 1949 set the scene for continuous desertions from the palace. Ten years later, the Fon's authority had been whittled away to such an extent that he complained in desperation to the D.O. that he could no longer perform his state duties for lack of wives:

Nearly all my wives have deserted me and scattered about everywhere in Kom against the Kom Native Law and Custom (namely) that no Fon's wife is allowed to stay anywhere in Kom other than the Fon's compound. Nobody has any right to converse with the Fon's wives except their relatives. But now the Fon's wives go about the town contrary to the custom. Their duty to the Fon is to cook food for the Fon to entertain the people visiting him (...) Now I suffer tremendously for want of food for the entertainment of Kom and the strangers visiting me which badly tells on me (...) I know this matter is in the Kom Clan Council and I am only begging the DO as my supporter and adviser to lay stress on it so as to accelerate the return of my wives (...).⁴

¹ BNA-Td 1950/9, Petition from the Fon of Kom to UN visiting mission (T/PET.4/36), 20.11.1949.

² BNA-Cb 1949/1, Annual Report Bamenda Province, 1950-51, p.19.

³ Interview Fr. H. Bots, Oosterbeek 17.3.1994.

⁴ BNA-Md/e 1956/1, Fon of Kom to DO (Wum), 16.11.1959.

6.4 Summary and concluding remarks for Phase Four

The fourth phase of the missionary presence in Njinikom witnessed a further erosion of the traditional political structures: incursions into the Fon's authority were institutionalized by administrative reforms, and painfully illustrated by the collective desertions by his wives in 1949. The main threat to the Fon's authority no longer derived explicitly or primarily from the Christian converts, though they continued to refuse to provide customary labour and to pay taxes, but from the Fon's own sons and the growing literate elite, bolstered by colonial support. In the background, the mission continued to fuel this process, primarily by providing educational facilities and a relatively liberal climate conducive to political organization. The missionary presence was no longer cause for violent outbursts between Catholics and non-Catholics, at least not to the same extent as in the earlier periods examined in this study. But the effects of processes initiated earlier on continued to erode what was left of the foundations of "traditional" Kom society.

While in 1942 the D.O. was able to report that Fon Ndi continued "the even tenor of his feudal existence with his accustomed skill, undisturbed by the enlightening winds that blow from Njinikom two thousand feet below him"¹, by 1949 the confusion sown by European interference in Kom political affairs had reached the point that Fon Ndi no longer knew which way to turn:

We are confused and we do not know exactly which we are to follow: whether direct rule or indirect. If the latter should we go according to Native Law and Custom? (...) Should we be developed to be able to rule ourselves to be in line with other Nations of the World? If so, how and when?²

A decade later, the Kom Fon begged the D.O. to help him regain some measure of authority over his people:

I am very much ashamed (of) this my town Kom: they have spoiled their Native Law and Custom with politics (...) Sir, Fons and Chiefs only depend on the DO to help them in their village to make people obey laws, and their Native law and Custom. There is too much disobedience in my town Kom. I don't know what to do.³

The Fon's poignant helplessness illustrates the extent to which political relations in Kom had been transformed: no longer was the British government relying on the Fon's support to consolidate British hegemony, but, rather, on the eve of Cameroonian independence, the Fon was entirely dependent on the goodwill of the British authorities to help him re-establish authority over his subjects. Mission-educated politicians rather than traditional authorities wielded effective political power. Rather than enhancing the

¹ BNA-Ba 1942/3, Divisional Summary, p.4.

² BNA-Td 1950/9, Welcome address by Fon Ndi of Kom and L.Y. Fouchang, secretary for the Kom council, n.d. (autumn 1949).

³ BNA-Md/e 1956/1, Fon to DO Wum, 20.7.60.

authority of the Fon, British Indirect Rule had stripped the Fon bare of virtually all political power, while the missionary presence ensured that his natural authority slowly but very surely dissipated as well.

Part III

CONCLUSIONS

The case study in perspective

7.1 Missionaries and the colonial state: allies or adversaries?

A recurrent question in the literature on the impact of missionary penetration in Africa, is that of the relationship between missions and the colonial state. A large body of literature sees missions and colonial governments as bedfellows, sharing important aims, and co-operating in their own respective interests. Another interpretation maintains that Christian missions, their teachings of equality, their resistance to oppressive colonial policies, and the educational opportunities they provided, mitigated colonial domination and furthered incipient African nationalism. This case study shows that the relationship between the state and the missions in British Cameroon was ambiguous and subject to change: the dichotomy which labels missions as either collaborators or as champions of African resistance proves to be of little use.

The viewpoints

In African nationalist writings, missions have generally been seen as operating "on the wrong side": their connection to the European powers implied that missions induced, or at least encouraged, submission to European control. Ayandele, for example, points out that in many cases missionaries were, quite literally, "pathfinders" for colonial governments, more or less paving the way for European exploitation (Ayandele 1966: *passim*). Welbourn follows the same line of thought, claiming that missionaries facilitated colonial administration by pioneering education, medical care and so on (Welbourn 1971: *passim*). According to Lonsdale, missions in Kenya were "committed to support the colonial system" (Lonsdale 1968: 148). Markowitz describes the relationship between missions and the state in Belgian Congo as symbiotic, a consistent and conscious policy of collaboration (Markowitz 1973: 11-12). According to Markowitz, Belgian policy makers conceived of missions as agents of social control, encouraging respect, subservience, and fear of the colonial administrator.

From the missionaries' point of view, collaboration with the colonial government may be seen to have been a strategic choice. Missionary aims could be achieved only if peace and order reigned in the communities in which the missions were active, and European colonial hegemony was seen to be the best guarantee for peace (e.g. Obdeijn 1983: 87). This position is taken by the Cameroonian historian Fisiy, who considers Christianity and colonialism to have been two sides of the same coin, joining hands to carry out their so-called civilizing mission (Fisiy 1988: 271).

To a certain extent, colonial documents in Cameroon support the thesis that state and mission had mutual aims, at least in the opinion of the administration. The Annual Report for 1923, for example, proclaimed optimistically that "the Mission and the Political services can undoubtedly help each other in their own sphere of work."¹ Intentions are not necessarily consistent with practice, however: the Kom case illustrates that co-operation between the mission and the colonial administration in Cameroon was hampered by the divergent and sometimes contradictory interests of the two parties.

Some studies see missionaries not as allies but as opponents of colonial rule. In this view, the conflict between the colonial support of "Native Law and Custom" on the one hand, and the missionary goal to do away with such customs as polygamy on the other, is seen to confound mission-state co-operation. Karin Fields, for example, in a study on Zambia, contends that missionaries' struggle to combat paganism amounted to nothing less than a concerted campaign against colonial law and order: although the missions might serve the colonial power by disseminating Western cultural notions, they could not underwrite the institutions of Indirect Rule, because the success of these institutions depended on the perpetuation of African custom, while missionary success would entail its disappearance. Fields emphasizes that Christianity provided Africans with principled grounds for denying customary obligations such as arranged marriages and communal labour. The fact that the Christian converts in her case study were notorious rebels, who destroyed ancestral shrines, disrupted communal rituals, insulted non-Christian elders, and aggressively displayed the material advantages of mission affiliation, is put forth as an indication of the anti-colonial nature of the mission endeavour (Fields 1982: 99).

Indeed, potentially overlapping aims aside, missions and colonial governments were frequently at loggerheads regarding the preservation of traditional authority. Throughout the 1920s, colonial governments in Africa protested against the establishment of Christian communities like Njinikom, which remained beyond the control of chiefs, and as such represented a disintegrative force (Markowitz 1973: 33). Missionary interference in native disputes and colonial Native Courts was certainly not unique to Kom, and was seen by European administrators as generally harmful to the prestige and the authority of whites.

With regard to Cameroon, the Kom anthropologist Nkwi may be regarded as a representative of the missionaries-as-anti-colonial-agents view. His detailed knowledge of political and social institutions of the Kom kingdom notwithstanding, he asserts that the various missions were in Cameroon were "to all intents and purposes defenders of

¹ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division 1923, p.19.

the interests of the natives" (Nkwi 1976: 169). While the case study of Njinikom shows that the Catholic mission was indeed frequently engaged in conflicts *vis-à-vis* the colonial government, and often defended the behaviour of Christian converts, "the interests of the natives" cannot be said to have been the missionaries' prime concern, either.

In addition to studies which conceive of the missions as either allied with or opposed to government rule, there are some which observe that the partial community of interests was not a matter of conscious policy, but rather "a happy accident" (Oliver 1952: 179). In this perspective, mission-state co-operation is considered to be more or less inevitable, though not necessarily a chosen policy: the single fact of collaboration does not justify labelling missions as appendages of European colonialism. Rather, mission and state were "condemned" to do business with each other, and neither party was in a position to seriously challenge the other with impunity (Gray 1978: 90-93).

Shortcomings

The more closely the context is examined, the more apparent it becomes that the relationship between Western Christianity and Western colonialism is a highly contradictory one, and that missionary endeavour cannot be evaluated accurately as either pro-or anti-colonialist. Both perspectives contain kernels of truth. Yet both contain serious shortcomings, as well, both at an empirical level and at a more fundamental, analytical level. In Kom, mission and state interests coalesced at times, but at other times the mission posed a grave threat, intended or otherwise, to colonial control. It is of little interest here to "prove" the shortcomings of these views by showing that the Njinikom case does not empirically "fit" the general picture: countless episodes in the case study can easily be found to satisfy either one perspective or the other. Of more fundamental importance is the conceptual weakness of the commonly applied dichotomy.

It is not so much the fact the dichotomy is too simplistic and static to capture the complexities of the empirical situation which renders it problematic: such is the inevitable consequence of generalizations. Nor is the problem the tendency of the customary dualism to lean on at best ill-defined concepts. Rather, the insistent attempt to measure the degree of co-operation or confrontation between missions and state detracts from the more important issue of the *African* contribution. In focusing on mission-state relations, for example, the discussion ignores entirely the fact that, in a crucial period of missionary development, mission leaders were Africans. Though they represented European cultural institutions, they adapted these to their own ends and imbued them with African elements, informing both mission and government policy. Indigenous power struggles were incorporated into church-state relations such that any interpretation which reduces the missions to mere auxiliaries of European imperialism will be inaccurate. In Kom, Africans, be they traditional rulers or Christian converts, *manipulated*, sometimes quite consciously, the relationship between colonial government and mission authorities, and used their own changeable status to further their own interests.

Bayart, among others, pleads for recognition of the African role in Cameroonian history, stressing that the cultural and political changes which have taken place in the past century are not only a consequence of Western dominance and interference, but a result of the "common enterprise of black and white actors, the former looking to manipulate the latter within their particular strategies" (Bayart 1986: 262). A more fruitful approach appears to be one which takes into account the dynamic nature of the relationship between mission and state, as well as the role of the other parties involved. An emphasis on the interests and strategies appears more promising than an emphasis on collaboration or opposition. A simple, generalized dichotomy between two extremes in mission-state relations not only fails to describe the empirical situation, but, more importantly, lacks the tools to *explain* that situation.

7.2 Interest groups and issues: recognizing African input

"The" African response to mission activity clearly does not exist. In Kom, certain social groups had reason to join the church, while others had reason to combat the institution. Among those who converted to Christianity, different motives led to different attitudes towards the mission and towards the colonial state. What follows is a brief analysis of the interest groups in the Kom case study.

Mission and state interests

From the point of view of the colonial government, the mission in Kom was a double-edged sword: useful in providing educational facilities, but also undermining state authority by encouraging tax evasion, refusing to meet demands for communal labour, harbouring runaway wives, and consistently failing to recognize the authority of the Fon.

The attitude of the British colonial state was subject to change however, depending on the degree to which British authority had been consolidated and depending on the long-term aims of the colonial government. Thus, directly after the First World War, the state had an interest in establishing authority along the lines of the German administration, with a minimum of coercion: in that phase of colonial rule, the establishment of cordial relations with the Fon, while at the same time demonstrating tolerance towards the already flourishing Christian community, were pillars of British policy. As the policy of Indirect Rule became more fully operational, the state's interest shifted towards maintaining a strong Native Authority while concurrently allowing for the gradual education and socialization of a semi-Westernized elite destined to assume a role in future self-government. Once Native Administration had been fully established, however, the British demonstrated growing sympathy for the Christian literates while abhorring their anti-authoritarian attitudes.

When the interests of the colonial state at large and the interests of officials at the district level are differentiated, it becomes apparent that the interests of the District Officer in Bamenda, namely to keep the peace and uphold the authority of the Fon and

Native Courts, were primarily short-term and thus often in conflict with the interests represented by the Resident in Buea, who was more concerned with long-term goals such as education and the modernization of local government. As the Kom case shows, the Resident was inclined to gloss over outbursts of conflict in the interest of long-term development, resolutely ignoring the D.O.'s pleas for interference and more than once hinting that the D.O.'s heated reactions might be attributed to his youthfulness or lack of administrative experience.

The interests of the Catholic missionaries varied, too. In their evangelical effort, they were dependent on government co-operation only to a very limited extent: of more direct importance was the relationship of the mission with the traditional rulers of Kom. Parallel to hierarchical differences of opinion within the colonial apparatus, the central religious authority in Cameroon, Bishop Rogan, did not always agree with individual missionaries. The Bishop's interest in establishing a sound working relationship with the colonial government often conflicted with the interests of locally active missionaries, who were far less conciliatory, and were confronted with entirely different sets of problems.

It should be noted that, though they may have used each other to achieve their own ends, missionaries and representatives of the colonial government were not in fact part of the same society, African perceptions to the contrary notwithstanding (cf. Kulp 1983: 22). While this applies in a figurative sense to mission-state relations in Africa in general, this comment acquires a literal connotation in Cameroon, where the missionaries were more often than not European continentals, and not British nationals.

Kom interest groups

Traditional authority and elders

Part One of this study showed that Kom, though a highly centralized, stable kingdom in the 19th century, was troubled by power struggles prior to the onset of British colonial rule. Fon Ngam's legitimate authority on his accession to the throne was apparently disputed. He obtained the support of the German administration to do away with his most threatening rivals, but did not succeed in muffling dissension within the royal lineages. Likewise, the trouble that runaway royal wives gave the Fon seems to have been a problem dating back to pre-colonial times.¹ Both discontented royal wives and rival royals joined the young Catholic community in Njinikom.

The Fon was not only troubled by threats to his authority over the people of Laikom, but also by the uncertain position of Kom *vis-à-vis* the chiefdoms subjugated in the preceding era. Kom hegemony over sub-chiefdoms such as Besinaku was undermined in colonial times: certain sub-chiefs refused to pay tax through the Kom chief and attempted (without success) to obtain first German and later British support for secession.

A further threat to the Fon's natural authority was posed by the increasing mobility and independence of youths in the kingdom: participation in wage labour not only

¹ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1918, p.4; BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.33.

resulted in the increased independence of youths by granting them (a degree of) control over their own economic resources, but threatened the previously unquestioned authority of the Fon by bringing the youths into contact with Western ideas, represented by European planters, colonial officials and missionaries, as well with as ideas of other African ethnic groups. The conscription of a large number of young Kom men into the German army during World War One exacerbated the erosion of the Fon's power. In addition, the Fon encountered increasing difficulties in recruiting young chindas because of Christian objections (Chilver 1988: 7).

It is evident that the Fon had a large personal interest in maintaining his own position as omnipotent ruler: in the early phase of British colonialism, in particular, he ostensibly had little to gain by co-operating with the church, but was forced to take up a defensive position by the various attacks, from both internal and external sources, on his authority. Earlier, before colonial rule was consolidated, Fon Ngam had collaborated with the German mission to a certain degree: then, his interest was not so much to defend his own authority from overt attacks, but to gain entry into the potentially powerful whiteman's world by establishing cordial relations with the missionaries and educating a select group of Kom boys in the mission school at Fujua. Fon Ndi, on the other hand, had an evident interest in restoring cordial relations with the mission and with colonial leaders, as his own authority had yet to be consolidated.

Fon Ngam's personal interest in maintaining control was compounded by the fact that he, as a hereditary ruler, was responsible for the continuity of Kom, including the socio-political relations which governed the kingdom. His resistance towards the church's subversion of his authority must be at least in part attributed to his role as defender of the kingdom. Threats to his personal authority meant, by implication, a threat to the continuation of Kom as a kingdom. As such it was the Fon's responsibility to combat colonial and Christian influence, and he was supported in this by the other traditional leaders in the Kom kingdom, who, like the Fon, had not only a personal but also a wider political interest in maintaining the *status quo*.

It was noted earlier in this study that the founding of the (later) Catholic settlements Fanantui and Njinikom was probably connected to troubles at Laikom. The exact nature of the underlying conflict could not be established in this study, but the fact that in oral tradition the founding of the Njinikom settlement is unanimously connected to witchcraft indicates, at any rate, underlying social tensions. Though we can only speculate on its exact significance, a connection between the alleged predominance of witchcraft in Njinikom, the presence of the mission, and the early Kom political disputes seems evident. Other studies have noted an increase in accusations of witchcraft after the introduction of Christianity, or in connection with social or economic change (Geschiere 1988: 2, Welbourn 1971: 325). Ardener's assertion that witchcraft beliefs are best interpreted as expressions or reflections of the dominant tensions of the society, and not as separate causal agents, seems most plausible (Ardener et al. 1960: 221 fn. 1).

Youths, traders, migrant labourers

Of special interest to this study are the youths of Kom, because they constituted the driving force behind the Catholic mission in Njinikom. It is clear that the majority of active Christians in Njinikom were young people, particularly in the early years of the mission. This must not be considered unusual or surprising: many studies of African missions have noted that young men and migrants were more prone to join the church than other social groups (e.g. Perham 1937: 238, Eades 1983: 151, Bayart 1986: 265). With regard to Kom, this propensity of youths to join the mission seems to be connected to two contradictory processes: the increasing participation of young men in migrant labour or colonial military service, and the Fon's persistent refusal to share his authority with other groups. Compounding these factors was the sheer shortage of old men in Kom as a result of the large number of deaths sustained in the war between Germany and Kom in 1904-05. Institutionalized political power in Kom was limited to elders, though limited opportunities for social mobility were available via wealth, wisdom, or proven leadership qualities. Furthermore, in the 19th century economic developments had rendered traders and merchants more powerful. Thus, social mobility, though marginal, was not unknown in Kom.

From the turn of the century, the German colonial administration had extended its policy of forced labour to include the Kom kingdom. The impact on social relations cannot be overestimated: while only a generation earlier geographic mobility was largely restricted to the Bamenda Grassfields, now many young men were engaged in new economic activities — migrant labour and trade — which lay largely outside the control of elders. By conscripting large numbers of Kom youths into the armed forces, the Germans unwittingly discredited the traditional rulers, thereby undermining their own rule. In consequence, they helped to create a power vacuum, which in Njinikom the young converts attempted to fill. The struggle to take hold of shifting power relations was well underway before British rule could be consolidated in the Grassfields.

Though data on the numbers of Kom men who engaged in migrant labour at this early stage is not available, the following tables indicate that migration from Kom was remarkably heavy, and participation in trading activities particularly high in Njinikom.

Table 1: Farmers and traders in the populations of 8 Kom settlements in 1925

Village	Total	Farmers		Traders	
	pop.	(abs.)	(%)	(abs.)	(%)
Belo	729	141	19.3	9	1.2
Anyajua	791	98	12.4	12	1.5
Njinikom	1307	103	7.9	131	10.0
Fanantui	1655	257	15.5	198	6.5
Yang	469	121	25.8	3	0.6
Mbaw	338	74	21.8	7	2.1
Abu	544	122	22.4	—	0.0
Fundong	583	122	20.9	—	0.0

Source: BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927.

Although the figures in Table 1 cannot be taken at face value, since it is unknown which criteria were used in to determine "farmer" or "trader" status, it is evident that in Njinikom a relatively high proportion of the population was actively engaged in trade.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the volume of labour migration from Kom over the years, let alone disaggregate the data to obtain insight into the situation for Njinikom specifically. Limited data, confusing and inaccurate tribal labels, and frequent administrative reorganizations render attempts to estimate the quantitative effect of Kom labour migration futile. It is clear, however, both from oral sources and from previous studies, that Kom supplied a relatively large portion of the plantation labour force.

Between 1949 and 1952, the number of young men who travelled from Wum Division (which then included Kom) to the coast to earn money required for marriage payments, tripled.¹ In 1955, the Bamenda plateau, including Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe Divisions supplied 32.8 per cent of all plantation workers. Wum Division provided 10.6 per cent of the total plantation labour forced (2608 workers) (Ardener et al. 1960: 27). Ardener et al. have made a breakdown for the ratio of plantation workers to the home population by tribe, as reproduced for the situation in Wum Division in 1955 in the Table 2.

Table 2: Ratio of plantation labourers to population for various tribes, 1955

Tribe	Number of plantation labourers to total population	Ratio of plantation labourers to total population
Aghem	1505: 9443	1: 6
Beba—Befang	209: 9538	1: 46
Bum	234: 4951	1: 21
Esimbi	88: 5636	1: 64
Fungom	576: 20,382	1: 35
Kom	637: 26,419	1: 35

Source: Ardener et al. 1960, p. 406 (appendix 1, table 2).

It is evident that other areas such as Aghem more intensely affected — at least quantitatively — by migration labour than Kom was. But the fact remains that in Kom, the ratio of people out at the coast to the people at home was 1 to 41. If roughly half of the population was female, then we can safely say that one out of every twenty males was away. In general, only young men were sent away — not children and not older men — so that a large portion of Kom young men, perhaps one in ten, will have been

¹ BNA-Ci 1950/1, Annual Report, Wum Division, for 1952, p.2.

away at a given moment. It might even be safe to say that the great majority of Kom men at one time or another participated in plantation labour.¹

Such was the situation in 1955. It is known that a peak in plantation employment occurred before 1936 (Ardener et al. 1960: 206). It is clear that in earlier periods, a large portion of coastal plantation labour derived from Kom. According to Ardener, only Kom was an early source of labour: 256 Kom men were in Victoria for plantation work in 1928 and 518 in 1938. The high proportion of Kom labourers is attributed by Ardener to the relative accessibility of Kom, compared to other regions of Wum Division. One might also consider the effects of Christianity. According to data collected by Ardener et al., 62 per cent of the plantation labourers from Wum division were Christian.² These figures seem to suggest that participation in migrant labour was more common among Christians than among non-Christians.

Admittedly, the data present no more than a very sketchy picture, and they do not provide us with information regarding Njinikom specifically, but combined with oral testimonies and references in colonial reports to the high incidence of migrant labour among especially Christian youths, the data do seem to justify an interpretation which considers the frequency of migrant labour and the predominance of Christianity in Njinikom to be related phenomena. The precise nature of that relationship is as yet undetermined, however, as the influence of plantation life on the migrants is subject to debate. While colonial officials and missionaries complained of the "detribalization" of young men exposed to plantation life, Ardener et al. maintain that "far from becoming 'detribalized', most of the men maintain close contact while they are at work, both with their homes and with their compatriots in the plantations".³ Whatever the case may be as regards tribal solidarity, it is beyond a doubt that migrant labour not only provided young men of Kom with cash income and opportunities to acquire new ideas, but also conferred on them a prestige not otherwise possible in the strict social hierarchy of the kingdom.

Closely related to the rise in the frequency of migrant plantation labour is the conscription of Kom youths into the German army, which was discussed in the case study. Enlistment in the army brought the African recruit in contact with a new world, resulting in experiences not unlike those encountered by migrant labourers (Killingray 1994: 205). In Kom, the return of the recruits after their long, close association with German masters and church leaders led to such a culture clash that the Catholic mission in Njinikom and the presence of the ex-German soldiers were almost synonymous in the minds of traditional authorities, colonial administrators and Christians alike.

The Kom case study illustrates that conflicts focusing on the mission in Kom cannot be understood without recognizing the development of a potentially powerful, large group of young men with shared interests and grievances, united by their various

¹ One can scarcely imagine what the consequences must have been for Aghem and Bum, where the ratio of migrants to home population was astonishingly high, according to the figures presented here.

² The figures are much the same for other regions, the averages for the Bamenda Plateau being 67.7 per cent Christian and 31.9 per cent pagan. (Ardener et al. 1960: 67 table 22).

³ See for example BNA-Cb 1940/1, Annual League of Nations Report 1940 Bamenda Division, p.14; Ardener et al. 1960: 62).

migrant experiences and their association with the whiteman's culture, increasingly independent of the control of elders due to their access to new sources of wealth, and resentful of the restrictive traditional social hierarchy which did not provide for an increase in political power to match their rising social status. The contradiction between increased economic possibilities and enhanced social prestige on the one hand, and a rigid social structure with a fiercely defensive, conservative and autocratic Fon blocking all roads to power within the traditional political system on the other hand, may be considered to be largely responsible for the development of Njinikom as a "state within a state" in the 1920s.

The mission offered the youths a new avenue for social mobility: political power might be withheld from them in the traditional setting, but in the mission setting new, prestigious roles were available. Educational opportunities created an entirely new kind of social status, theoretically open to anyone, regardless of age or position: not only did education pave the way for jobs in the government service, the mission as well offered numerous employment opportunities and the possibility to gain social prestige. Affiliation with the mission meant that an alternative focus for loyalty could be developed, and that the authority of the Fon could be dismissed as irrelevant. The European priests could be relied upon to provide at least a certain degree of protection against unjust persecution by the Native Courts or otherwise. The church community took on the role of the traditional social network which was often relinquished upon conversion to Christianity. In short, young people in Kom had a very strong interest in joining the mission to escape the stifling control of traditional authority and elders, and to construct a new system of social relations which would grant them some power within their own sub-culture.

Women

There have been few detailed historical studies of missionary attitudes towards African women, and fewer still of the disparate responses of African women and men to Christianity (Hay 1988: 437).¹ This study of Kom suggests that this is an important theme: the response of women to the mission, the attitude of the mission towards the women concerned, and the positions assumed by both traditional and colonial rulers in this regard, proved to be a recurrent source of conflict. If only because of their sheer numbers, women constitute a significant sub-group worthy of special investigation: in 1927, 36.4 per cent of the registered, baptized Catholics at Njinikom were women.²

The flip-side of the strengthening of the all-male Native Authority was a weakening of the already restricted power of women. Having developed a system of colonial administration that leaned heavily on the "traditional" authority structures, the administration could not afford to tolerate any threat to those structures by agents outside its control. Thus, the women of Kom certainly had an interest in attempting to increase, or at least protect, their autonomy by joining the church, even if that meant exchanging one kind of subservience for another. The Njinikom mission provided

¹ One recent exception may be noted, namely Larsson 1991.

² BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.80.

women with a relatively safe, previously unknown opportunity to escape the direct control of husbands and fathers.

The frequent running away of wives, be they wives of the Fon or of commoners, to seek refuge at the mission, indicates that Kom women utilized Christianity to negotiate for increased autonomy in a male-dominated world. They took astute advantage of the shift in social relations whereby control was slipping out of the hands of the traditional authorities and elders, and into the impersonal hands of the colonial state (cf. Larsson 1991: 14, 87). In addition to relative autonomy, Christianity proved to offer women economic benefits: Kaberry noted in Nso that Christian women were generally more innovative in economic enterprise than non-Christian women, and that married Christian women more often engaged in trade and had considerable incomes (Kaberry 1952: 136-37).

The phenomenon of runaway wives was certainly not limited to Kom: this was a common strategy pursued by women to escape from marriages perceived, for whatever reason, to be unsatisfactory.¹ Women's refusals to marry their appointed husbands, their desertion of unwanted husbands, and their flight to missions and urban areas, was interpreted, correctly, as a serious threat to African male authority and thereby to the entire system of Indirect Rule. Everywhere, the perceived threat to patriarchal authority led to streams of protests by polygamists against the "seduction" of their wives, criticism of the unpaid labour which the women refugees performed for the missions (and the consequential loss of labour for the husbands or fathers), claims of sexual promiscuity among the runaway women, and so forth. In Kom, traditional, colonial and mission authorities joined hands to ensure that male control over women was maintained, though they did not necessarily agree as to exactly how that was to be organized.

Control over women was particularly essential in Kom, as women represented both a source of labour input, which was scarce, and a source of income, in the form of brideprice to their fathers.² A change in the *status quo* would not only imply increased autonomy for women, but a shift in economic relations, as Fon Ndi put it in 1953:

If we allow women to remain free (unmarried) many of them would be free and the husbands and fathers would be put to difficulties (...) Many women now do not prefer to take husbands and (...) by so doing they throw their parents into

¹ E.g. regarding French Cameroon see Joseph 1980: 15. Regarding Tanzania see Larsson 1991: 37-40 and Mbilinyi 1989: *passim*.

² There is some confusion in terminology here, as mission and colonial documents repeatedly refer to *dowry*, which strictly speaking refers to the custom of giving parental property to a daughter on her marriage. The relevant custom in Kom is *brideprice*, where property is transferred from the male kin of the groom to the male kin of the bride. As opposed to dowry, brideprice does not confer status on the bride, but is a means by which to compensate the bride's kin for the loss of her labour. (Cf. Moore 1988: 45). It is not clear whether the incorrect terminology in colonial reports ought to be attributed to purely semantic inaccuracy, nonchalance, or a fundamental misunderstanding of the customs concerned.

difficulties financially (...) I very much beg the D.O. to warn all women in such ways.¹

Colonial officials shared with the Native Authorities a concern for the increase in the number of divorce cases and the number of unattached women in the area.²

In Kom, brideprice became an issue of increasing importance during the first two decades of the missionary enterprise in Njinikom. Two trends may be noted: an inflation of the brideprice itself, and an increase in litigations aiming to retrieve the brideprice paid for runaway wives. In many African communities, Kom inclusive, elders responded to the emancipation of youths by increasing the level of the brideprice.³ This put marriage beyond the means of many young men and enabled rich male elders to accumulate women, increasing tensions between elders and youths. Increased taxation exacerbated matters, as livestock which otherwise would have been used to pay the brideprice was sold to meet taxation requirements.⁴ It became increasingly common for fathers to take their daughter away from a man unable to pay the brideprice, and hand her over to a wealthier man: a corresponding rise in the divorce rate was noted.⁵

Both runaway wives and their lovers, usually younger Christians, had an interest in escaping the control of male elders and evading the regulations that reinforced brideprice. Thus, women's resistance against unwanted marriages increased the possibility of alliances and shared interests between young men and women, a possibility which further infuriated male elders.⁶ Ironically, the mission's presence in Njinikom was in part responsible for the inflation of brideprice, for education had led to higher earnings and thus elders demanded a higher brideprice.

While initially disputes about the runaway wives focused on achieving the return of the women to their husbands, or at least to their families, increasingly, litigation in marital disputes focused on the retrieval of the brideprice paid by the deserted husband and not so much on the actual return of the woman concerned. Paradoxically, this commoditization of marriage, which no doubt was counter to missionary aims, can be seen as an indirect consequence of the missionary insistence on monogamy. Colonial officials and mission leaders noted the commoditization of marriage and the inflation of the brideprice, and warned that inflation would put marriage beyond the means of young

¹ BNA-Md/e 1950/1, Fon Ndi to DO (Wum), 26.5.1953.

² BNA-Cb 1955/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1955, p.7; BNA-Md/e 1956/1, DO (Wum) to Native Clan Council (Laikom), 28.11.1959.

³ See for a Tanzanian example Mbilinyi 1989: 217.

⁴ BNA-Ad 1948/22, Report by Phyllis Kaberry to Prof. Forde, 3.9.1947.

⁵ In some areas, the divorce rate for women was 22 per cent. BNA-Ad 1948/22, Report by Phyllis Kaberry to Prof. Forde, 3.9.1947.

⁶ In Kom, litigation concerning brideprice reached unprecedented heights between 1946 and 1949, when a "crazy soar" of divorce cases flooded the courts. Former soldiers caused considerable unrest by marrying women of their choice, disregarding the wishes of elders and husbands. The soldiers posed a serious threat to the *status quo*, as they were in a financial position to refund the brideprice without trouble. By 1950, however, this enthusiasm for romantic love had cooled down, with allotment money all spent. Local songs ridicule the soldier episode and mock the women who had run away from their husbands. Cf. Nkwain 1978: 3-4 and Chilver 1988: 5.

men, and increase promiscuity and social unrest, but they were unwilling to undermine the authority of senior men.

The issue of brideprice is a highly complex one, and cannot be done justice here. It is clear that the subject justifies further detailed research. Suffice it to point out here that women's response to Christianity in Kom, based on their interests in maintaining a certain level of autonomy in the changing colonial context, in increasing their freedom by taking advantage of opportunities provided by the missions, and in escaping the control of elders, resulted in complex changes in the functioning of the age-old system of brideprice, and heavily influenced colonial and mission policy in this regard. This is not the place to debate whether the ensuing changes were in the interests of the women concerned: the response of women to the presence of the mission has illustrated sufficiently the interests of patriarchal authorities in maintaining control over women.

Conversion as a rational strategy

A variety of motives lay behind Kom people's choice to join the mission. In the preceding discussion of the various interests that lay behind African responses to Christianity, a number of motives for conversion have been pointed out in passing. A variety of motives led Kom people to join the mission, but the discussion here will focus on material, social and political motives.¹ It should be noted in advance that a *mixture* of motives will have played a role in conversion. Further, the importance of the social and economic context notwithstanding, it must be pointed out that context itself cannot be considered an explanation, in itself, for the growth of the Catholic mission in Kom. In the final analysis, conversion was an innovative response of *individuals* to changing conditions.

Many informants referred to the material benefits which accompanied affiliation to the church. These benefits took many forms. The mission was a large employer in Njinikom, hiring carpenters, care-takers, carriers, cooks, messengers, house-boys, and of course catechists and teachers. In the light of the increasing monetarization of the local economy, the attraction of wage earnings is evident. Furthermore, the mission was renowned for its economic innovations: the widespread acceptance in Njinikom of coffee as a cash crop, as well as the cultivation of eucalyptus trees for fuel and building materials, is commonly attributed to the persistent encouragement of European missionaries (Boh 1987: 5). The church stimulated trade and, later, founded co-operative societies. A more indirect material benefit derived from the prospects provided by education. The converts demonstrated a keen awareness of the fact that in the emerging colonial society, social mobility and the material benefits which were perceived to accompany it, were largely dependent on education. To many, the whiteman's wealth and power was intimately related to his practice of Christianity. Christian converts acquired material status symbols which set them apart from the non-Christian community, and which were proudly flaunted: clothing, tools and other objects of European manufacture.

¹ This choice is a pragmatic one, and should not be interpreted as a disregard for the emotional or religious appeal of the mission.

Economic gain was not the sole motive, however. Many people sought protection, from witches, for example. But those accused of witchcraft might, as well, seek the protection provided by the church. Runaway wives, it has been shown, were granted refuge. Individual prestige may have been a motive, particularly after the mission had been firmly consolidated and Christian converts had gained positive reputations. Collective prestige was certainly an issue, too: the presence of a white leader, conferred status on the Christian community. The white leader also embodied the connection to the colonial power, being of the same "tribe" as the colonial ruler, speaking the same language, and representing — in the eyes of the converts — the same culture. Prestige may be interpreted in a very practical sense here: connection to an important whiteman could have very tangible consequences for those involved, in terms of obtaining employment, satisfactory decisions in court, and so forth.

The attraction of schooling cannot be overemphasized. Educational opportunities provided by missions created an entirely new kind of social status, based on the ability to read and write, on professions and wealth, as opposed to former categories determined largely by descent, age or mystical power. The European's ability to read and write was sometimes regarded as a kind of magic, and nearly always as the key to material well-being and influence.

In the light of profoundly changing social relations, conversion to Christianity was, for many people, a highly rational decision, a strategy for survival in a society perceived by the converts as favourable to Christians, and a safe way out of the stifling power relations and the increasingly despotic rule of the Kom traditional leader. People who either were on the margins of society or were threatened with marginalization — youths, women, those accused of sorcery — took advantage of the erosion of indigenous authority to improve their own positions.

7.3 Christianity and cultural change

The missionary presence left virtually no aspect of African life unaffected. Missionaries can be seen as *intermediaries*, not in a one — way transfer of norms and policies, from colonial government to African subjects, but also vice versa. Likewise, the missionaries could, as they did in Kom, assume the role of intermediary between traditional authorities and Christian converts.

The missionary as a cultural broker

According to Whiteman, missionaries were "innovative advocates", facilitating contact, easing cultural shock and interpreting it (Whiteman 1983a: 431). Though it is doubtful whether culture contact in the Kom case was actually "eased" by the presence of the Catholic church, Whiteman's interpretation is a valuable contribution to the literature on missions, because it takes into account the role which individual missionaries did play, in trying, with varying degrees of success, to reconcile evangelical aims with colonial domination. In addition, Whiteman's approach takes account the very different personalities of the missionaries concerned: in Kom the relations with the colonial state

were strongly coloured by the stance taken by individual missionaries in various conflicts.¹ A drawback in Whiteman's analysis, however, is that it does not take into account the very unequal power relations in which this cultural change was embedded. They were merely not disinterested translators between two cultural systems.

A more critical view of the cultural change effectuated by the missionary presence is expounded by Beidelman, who sees the commitment of missionaries to their cause as a kind of spiritual imperialism:

Christian missions represent the most naive and ethnocentric, and therefor most thorough going, facet of colonial life. Administrators and planters aimed at limited ends, such as order, taxation, profits, cheap labour and advantages against competing Europeans (...). Missionaries invariably aimed at overall change in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body. Pursuing this sustained policy of change, missionaries demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to rule than political administrators or businessmen (Beidelman 1982: 5-6).

It is a matter of debate whether the "limited ends" ascribed to the colonial leaders were in fact so superficial. What is more, these aims cannot be seen as disjunct from the aims pursued by Christian missions, nor can the aims pursued by church representatives be evaluated outside of the local context. Again, as in the question of whether or not the state and the missions were allies, the danger of preconceived dichotomies crops up.

It seems most promising to envisage the missionary in Africa as a kind of "cultural broker", *mediating*, if not exactly facilitating, in a variety of ways, intended or inadvertent, the transition from isolation to contact with the Western world, the development and implementation of Indirect Rule, and the integration of the mission community into larger society.

This is not to say that missionaries perceived of themselves as cultural brokers. Even in retrospect, many missionaries were not in a position to gauge the effects of their presence. They often underrated the impact of their actions, claiming that they pursued only sacred aims and denying any political implications.² But by presenting Christianity as somehow connected to literacy, Western health care, work ethos and material gain, missionaries imparted far more than just a religious message to their followers.

Whatever their intentions, the changes effectuated by the missionary presence far surpassed solely religious changes. Important social changes may be noted. The village settlement pattern, with Christians concentrated in new communities like Njinikom was new. Leadership became connected to religious knowledge, traditional authority subverted by Christianity's individualism, and new roles, like teachers and catechists came into being. Marriage politics were heavily influenced by the emphasis on monogamy, Western ideas about women, and the brideprice issue. The "accidental"

¹ The common caricature of the missionary as a Victorian Englishman rushing out to "civilize the natives" bears no resemblance to the Kom missionaries whatsoever: most missionaries posted to Njinikom were from poor Dutch farming backgrounds; many had not even chosen to do missionary work, but had merely been sent to Cameroon by their superiors.

² Cf. interview Fr. J. Bots, Oosterbeek 17.3.1994. See also Beidelman 1982: 27 and Markowitz 1973: 14.

consequences and by-products of the missionary endeavour are as just as significant as the intended "achievements".

While missionaries staunchly maintained that their aims were solely evangelical, Africans readily perceived the missionaries as ambassadors of another culture, "brothers" of the colonial administrators, and thus as potentially useful sources of information about that other world known as "whiteman country" (Welbourn 1971: 311, Kulp 1983: 22).

The importance of African input

An important role in the process of cultural change was played by the catechists. Their tasks included teaching at mission schools, teaching catechism in doctrine classes, and so forth. In the absence of a resident missionary, the catechist virtually ran the mission on his own. The catechist often became a notable in his home village, as the village's interpreter of the European world, although "those with the most fervour were not necessarily the most knowledgeable" (Markowitz 1973: 15). According to Markowitz and Oliver, the appeal of the catechist often lay less in the religious message he bore than in the worldly powers he represented, preaching emancipation from the old laws, and "opening vistas of a more ideal life which was attainable at least by the young and enterprising" (*Ibid.*: 15, Oliver 1952: 202).

Essential to the success of the Christian movement in Kom was the fact that it was led by a man from Kom. Not only was there no language barrier between Timneng and the Njinikom people, he also had access to the whiteman's language, and thus to powers which surpassed those of other Kom people, and perhaps even surpassed the powers of the Fon. Timneng was an intermediary between the two cultures, and made keen use of that position to enhance his own power and prestige.

Wherever a mission gained a large body of converts, important internal distinctions in prestige and lifestyle developed among the native Christians (Beidelman 1982: 24). In Njinikom, teachers and catechists were ascribed far-reaching authority. Internal disputes and disciplinary actions within the mission community were common. Internal stratification seems to have increased alongside the consolidation of the mission. It appears that social relations of religion are only a part of a wider fabric, and that wider patterns of social organization reassert themselves in religious institutions (cf. Eades 1983: 162).

7.4 Conclusion

By the end of the 1950s, Njinikom had become the scene of recurrent, volatile political unrest: inextricably intertwined issues, including missionary penetration, education, women's autonomy, the erosion of traditional authority, mission-state relations and the emergence of nationalist political parties led by Njinikom-educated politicians, culminated in the women's uprising known as *Anlu*, referred to at the outset of this study. In the *Anlu* movement, Christian women from Njinikom Parish played a leading

role, egged on behind the scenes by their male Christian counterparts, mystifying colonial and missionary observers alike.

It is hoped that this study has illustrated that the eruptions of violence which shook Kom on the eve of Cameroon's independence cannot be understood without taking into account the repercussions of half a century of colonial and missionary penetration. Though the precise nature of the relationship between the missionary presence in Njinikom and the *Anlu* outburst defies definition at this stage, it is clear that the Njinikom mission unwittingly caused, or at least contributed to, social and political changes which helped, to trigger the *Anlu* outburst in 1958.

It is also clear that the relationship between mission and state is an exceedingly difficult one to categorize. Dualistic conceptions of the missions as either "for" or "against" the African cause proved inadequate to capture the ambiguities of mission-state relations. Likewise, the relationship between the colonial state and the traditional authorities resists simple classification, as does the relationship between the mission adherents and the other actors involved. Perhaps the most striking result of this study is the sheer *complexity* of the case: the more closely one looks, the more one is confronted with overlapping layers of interacting change. At one level, Kom was embroiled in a triangle of institutional conflict, colonial government, mission and traditional authority battling their way through a power struggle launched by colonial imperialism. At another level, the institutional struggle was adopted by various social groups and individuals fighting a battle ostensibly more concerned with social and economic mobility than with overt power, but a struggle for power nonetheless. Different interests both within the various institutions and within the various social groups led to shifting alliances which in turn redefined the social and political contours anew, time and again.

Yet, while demonstrating the need for repeated dissection and micro-level research, this study also pleads for contextualization, an approach which *integrates* structural and individual-level analyses: the conflict between the mission and the Fon with regard to the runaway wives, for example, is devoid of meaning unless it is examined through the continually changing prism presented by colonial measures, Kom political parameters, missionary purpose, the persistence of patriarchy, and so forth. While, for the sake of analysis, an attempt has been made in this study to disentangle the various sets of forces at work, neither ostensibly exogenous nor endogenous forces can be fully understood separate from each other. Likewise, social structure, institutional policy, and individual action have been shown to have interacted to such a degree that it is virtually impossible to isolate the various strands.

On the sidelines of this study, a number of issues have cropped up which deserve further attention. The matter of migrant labour, for example, could not be fully discussed here, but the subject demands further investigation so that we may assess the consequences, for both the Kom community and the migrants, of the relatively heavy labour migration from Kom.

The issue of social stratification within the mission community comes to mind as well. It remains open to debate whether the missionary presence reinforced or weakened social stratification, for while the mission offered *new* possibilities for social mobility, the concept of social hierarchy was nonetheless maintained, and social mobility as

presented by missions was not equally accessible to all segments of the population. One wonders whether missionary endeavour succeeded in liberating the most oppressed, or, rather, provided a frustrated middle-class with opportunities to climb the social and economic ladder. It seems that as the Catholic mission consolidated its position in Kom, stratification and dissension *within* the mission community increased, even to a degree that mirrors social relations in the "outside" world of Kom at large.

Regarding the question of women's responses to Christianity, further research might determine the precise aspirations, perceived and real benefits, individual and social consequences, both short-term and long-term, resulting from female conversion. In the Njinikom case the issue of female Christianity is particularly relevant in connection with the *Anlu* uprising of 1958. The *Anlu* united women's issues, local political competition and nationalist politics in a manner not yet fully understood: a detailed analyses of the role of the mission in the era of party-politics might provide useful insights. In fact the whole issue of politicization calls for further investigation, for the transition from colonial rule to independence was closely connected to the politicization of the Njinikom Christian elite.

Another area touched upon in this study, but not fully investigated, is the issue of education. In Kom, as in many other African societies, education in the colonial context proved a veritable arena of struggle: between mission and state, between competing groups of Africans, between Africans and colonial authorities, between rival denominations, and between mission adherents and European missionary leaders as well.

Further, comparative research appears necessary in order to integrate the findings of this study into findings on the wider issues of colonial and missionary impact in African colonies. One wonders whether other cases echo or perhaps contradict the results of the Kom case as regards, for example, both the local influence on colonial policy and the influence of colonial policy on local social change. Studies on other areas of Cameroon would prove useful in explaining the propensity of certain communities above others to accept the missionary presence, and in mapping out the various strategies adopted by traditional rulers and converts alike to accommodate or influence social change. Studies of missionary organizations other than the Catholic mission studied here, might highlight aspects of the mission-state relation which did not come to the fore in Njinikom.

The final link between the missionary enterprise in colonial Kom on the one hand, and the political turbulence of the 1950s on the other, has yet to be laid. It is hoped that this study has provided insights and guidelines to facilitate that link in the future.

Appendix I: Statistics

The size of the Catholic community

Few reliable data are available regarding the size of the Christian community. The following figures have been extracted from various sources for Njinikom:

1922	500	Catholics attending Njinikom chapel ¹
1927	1741	² (including both baptized converts and catechumens)
1928	3000	³ (including both baptized converts and catechumens)
1953	5000	⁴ (baptized Catholics only)

For the entire Bamenda Division the figures are as follows:

1922	24	RC churches	2219	baptized and learners ⁵
1924	40	RC churches	4896	baptized and learners ⁶
1925	47	RC churches	6000	baptized and learners ⁷

¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Plissoneau to Resident, 11.2.1922

² Statistics in Njinikom Parish Archives, noted by Ndi 1986: 300 fn. 13. BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, p.80. The figures noted here must include converts from outside Njinikom, as the total population of Njinikom in 1927 was estimated at 1307 (BNA-Ad/2, Bikom Assessment Report, 1927, Appendix II).

³ Sacred Returns Feb. 1928 and Aug. 1928, Njinikom Parish Archives, cited in Ndi 1986: 111.

⁴ Reyher 1953: 42.

⁵ BNA-Cb 1918/2, AR 1922, p.18

⁶ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, p.20.

⁷ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1925, p.21.

School attendance

Figures for registered school attendance at both the NA school and the Catholic Mission School at Njinikom are presented below. Unless otherwise noted, the figures have been extracted from Nkwi, P.N., *Traditional Government and Social Change*.

	NA School	RCM School	Comments
1924	60	58	
1925	24	62	
1927	29 ¹	70	
1928	28	88 ²	
1929	58	60 ³	
1930	46		
1931	40 ⁴		
1932	29	102 ⁵	
1933	43		
1934	30		
1935	52		NA: incl 1 girl
1936		217 ⁶	RCM incl 22 girls
1937	98 ⁷		NA incl 3 girls
1940	92 ⁸	217 ⁹	NA incl 3 girls RCM incl 24 girls
1941		270 ¹⁰	
1942		234	RCM incl 15 girls

¹ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, p.27.

² BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 6.3.1928.

³ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Draft Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 9.8.1929.

⁴ Average attendance for the year 1931. BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1931, p.33.

⁵ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Annual Returns: Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 1932.

⁶ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Annual Returns: Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 31.12.1936.

⁷ BNA-Cb 1937/1, Annual Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report, 1937, p.42.

⁸ BNA-Cb 1940/1, Annual and League of Nations Report 1940 Bamenda Division, appendix.

⁹ BNA-Sb/k, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 9.5.1940.

¹⁰ BNA-Sb/k 1933/2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 7.3.1941.

Appendix II: Maps

List of archive sources consulted

1 Cameroon National Archives, Buea (BNA)

Ab 1955/39	Bamenda Area Intelligence Report
Ad 1948/22	Dr. Phyllis Kaberry, Lady Anthropologist, Intelligence report on Wum and Nsaw, 1948
Ad 1963/29	Administrative reorganization of Njinikom sub-division
Ad/1a	Bamenda Division: Bikom chiefship
Ad/2	Bikom Assessment Report (G.V. Evans), 1927
Ba 1942/3	Annual and League of Nations Reports 1942-1946, Bamenda Division
Ba 1947/7	Re-organization of Cameroons province
Ba 1947/9	U.N. Trusteeship: petitions
Ba 1949/2	Re-organization of Cameroons Province, 1949
Ba 1949/6	Visiting mission of United Nations Organization, 1955
Ba 1949/7	Trusteeship Council, Visiting Mission 1949
Ba 1949/10	Re-organization of Cameroons Province
Ba 1949/11	Trusteeship Council Visiting Mission 1949 (secret)
Ba 1949/12	Confidential report re-organization of Cameroons Province
Ba 1949/13	Confidential report re-organization of Cameroons Province
Cb 1918/2	Annual Reports Bamenda Division, 1918 - 1923
Cb 1924/3	Annual Reports Bamenda Division, 1924 - 1927
Cb 1928/2	Annual Reports Bamenda Division, 1928 - 1931
Cb 1932/2	Annual Reports Bamenda Division, 1932
Cb 1932/2	Annual Reports Bamenda Division, 1933
Cb 1934/1	Annual Reports Bamenda Division, 1934-1935
Cb 1936/1	Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report 1936
Cb 1937/1	Annual Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report 1937
Cb 1938/3	League of Nations Report 1938, Bamenda Division
Cb 1939/1	League of Nations Report Bamenda Division 1939
Cb 1940/1	Annual and League of Nations Report, 1940, Bamenda Division
Cb 1944/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1944
Cb 1945/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1945
Cb 1946/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1946
Cb 1947/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1947
Cb 1948/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1948
Cb 1943/1	Annual and League of Nations Report 1946-1947 Bamenda Division
Cb 1949/1	Provincial Annual Reports 1949, 1950, 1951
Cb 1953/1	Bamenda Province Annual Report 1953
Cb 1954/1	Bamenda Province Annual Report 1954

Cb 1955/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1955
Cb 1956/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1956
Cb 1957/1	Bamenda Division, re-organization
Cb 1958/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1957
Cb 1959/1	Annual Report Bamenda Division 1958
Ci 1950/1	Wum Division: Annual Reports 1950-1954
Ci 1954/3	Wum Division Native Authorities: United Nations Organizations Reports
Ci 1966/1	Economic and Political Reports, Menchum Division 1966-1972
Ga 5	Various Notes on Wum Division 1929-1954
Gc/b 1945/2	Handing-over notes, N.A. correspondence office Bamenda, 1945
Gc/b 1949/1	Bamenda Province, handing-over notes
Gc/b 1960/1	Handing-over notes Bamenda Division
Gc/h 1955/1	Handing-over notes, D.O. Wum
Gc/h 1961/1	Handing-over notes, D.O. Wum Division
Gi 1957/3	Annual Report Wum Division 1955, 1956, 1957
Ia 1926/1	Nkwifon society, 1926
Ja/b 1934/1	N.A. and Native Court reforms, Bamenda N.W. Federation
Ja/b 1954/1	Bamenda N.W. Federation council 1954
Jb/a 1951/1	Provincial staff meeting Bamenda Province
Jb/a 1952/4	Provincial conference Bamenda
Jb/d 1960/1	Kom council, Wum Division
Lf/b 1964/1	Specification of composition of Kom-Bum council 1964
Lf/b 1965/1	Kom-Bum area council monthly returns
Lf/b 1965/2	Kom-Bum area council monthly returns
Md/e 1943/1	Nkom Native Court Area: complaints 1943
Md/e 1950/1	Kom Native Court Area: complaints 1950
Md/e 1952/1	Kom Native Court Area: complaints
Md/e 1955/1	Nkom Native Court 1935
Md/e 1956/1	Kom Native Court Area: complaints 1956
Md/e 1960/1	Kom Native Court Area: complaints 1960
Mi/b 1954/1	Soil conservation orders and rules made by N.A. Bamenda Division
Oa/d SHA/1	Shaddock, Mr. K. Admin. Officer
Oa/h 1940/1	Various confidential reports 1940
Od 1957/1	Petitions and complaints, Wum Division
Of 1931/1	Sama C. Ndi, Mr. of Bikom
Pa 1960/2	Kamerun Ex-Soldiers' National Union
Pc/b 1926/1	Riot at Belo village, Bikom, Bamenda Division 1925
Pc/c 1958/1	Mme disturbances - Wum Division. Petition from Fon of Kom
Qa/b 1925/1	Application of the Marriage Ordinance to the Cameroons Province
Qa/b 1932/2	Native marriage laws, divorce, etc.
Qc/a 1958/1	Agricultural Department, quarterly reports
Qc/b 1949/1	Agricultural Department, annual reports
Sa 1933/2	Measures for the improvement of the condition of women
Sa 1944/7	1. Conditions of women in Cameroons under British mandate; 2. Dowries
Sa 1957/1	Participation of women in the Native Authorities
Sa 1963/2	Women's Social Welfare and Community Development Programs
Sb/a 1938/8	Education of African communities
Sb/a 1938/12	Annual Report, Education Department
Sb/a 1939/12	Educational policy in the Southern Cameroons
Sb/a 1945/6	Girls' education, British Cameroons

Sb/a 1946/7	Secondary schools for girls
Sb/a 1947/4	Inspection reports RC Mission Girl's school
Sb/a 1947/17	Woman Education Cameroons Prov. General correspondence
Sb/a 1948/3	Petitions and complaints from teachers
Sb/a 1948/4	Training of Women Teachers
Sb/a 1948/12	Non-government teachers: conversions, pamphlets, ...
Sb/a 1949/3	Educational policy, general (confidential) 1949
Sb/a 1950/3	Eastern Regional Board of Education
Sb/a 1950/8	The 'Nigeria' magazine
Sb/a 1953/2	Returns from RC Mission schools 1953-1954
Sb/a 1956/2	Magazines and periodicals and schoolbooks
Sb/a 1956/3	Inspection reports
Sb/a 1957/1	Terms of service committee: non-government teachers
Sb/a 1958/4	Educational matters (secret)
Sb/a 1960/3	Education of Women
Sb/k 1933/2	Njinikom R.C. Mission school, correspondence
Sd 1909/1	RCM Property at Ndian (Kassa), Kumba Division
Sd 1916/3	Missions of the Sacred Heart in Bamenda Division
Sd 1916/6	Visit of Fr. Shanahan
Sd 1916/8	German missionaries in Cameroons Province
Sd 1917/5	Missions: recommendations against re-establishment of, at present, Bamenda Division 1917
Sd 1919/2	Enemy Missions: property (general) - evaluation of
Sd 1921/1	RC Mission, Adamawa and new RCM Bamenda Province
Sd 1921/6	RC Mission, a complete detailed report
Sd 1923/5	Mission activities, Mamfe 1923
Sd 1923/6	Report on Protestant Christianity in the Mamfe Division 1923
Sd 1923/7	RC Mission Kumbo and Njinikom
Sd 1925/3	Returns of Christians, Christian learners and schools
Sd 1927/1	Missions: Land for Missions, spheres of influence, catechists' certificates
Sd 1927/3	RC Mission Bamenda Division: interference with Native Courts
Sd 1928/2	RC Mission Mamfe Division: interference with Native Courts
Sd 1928/4	RC Mission Mamfe Division: interference with Native Courts
Sd 1929/2	RC Mission Banzo: insult to native religion
Sd 1930/1	RC Mission Kumbo Division: complaints against
Sd 1930/2	RC Mission Bamenda Division: resistance to Native Authorities
Sd 1931/1	RC Mission Njinikom (Bamenda), general correspondence
Sd 1931/4	RC Mission Mankon, Bamenda Division: complaints against
Sd 1931/6	RC Mission native marriages
Sd 1931/7	Reports on events of political importance
Sd 1933/4	Registration of mission schools; establishment of vernacular schools; approved schools
Sd 1933/5	Spheres of influence of mission societies
Sd 1933/10	RC Mission miscellaneous correspondence
Sd 1936/7	Employment of mission students and teachers in government service
Sd 1936/8	Record of missions and religious movements
Sd 1941/1	Immorality amongst teachers
Sd 1942/4	RC Missions Wum Division
Sd 1943/3	Colour problem: racial discrimination
Sd 1944/2	Employment of women in wartime duties
Sd 1952/1	RC Maternity Home, Njinikom
Sd 1953/1	Opening of schools, RC mission
Sd 1960/1	United Nations Regional Seminar on the Participation of Women in Public Life.
Sd 1960/3	RC Mission property, Sasse
Sd 1963/3	Mission hospitals
Sd 1963/4	Cameroon Baptist Mission: land matters
Sd 1963/10	RC Mission monastery, Bamenda
Se 1945/1	Relations between government and missions and other voluntary agencies in relation to development plans

Se 1947/4	People's Development Plan
Se 1948/1	Annual Report on General Progress of Development and Welfare scheme
Si 1939/2	Nigerian Youth Movement, correspondence re.
Si 1939/2a	Nigerian Youth Movement and other political unions
Si 1939/3	Nigerian Youth Movement
Si 1942/2	Cameroons Welfare Union, Buea branch
Si 1958/3	Southern Cameroons Youth Movement
Si 1961/1	Kamerun National Youth Movement
Td 1949/2	Petition from the Bamenda Improvement Association
Td 1950/9	Petition from the Fon, village heads and council of Kom to the trusteeship council, concerning the Cameroons under British administration
Va/b 1952/1	House of Assembly question nr. 134 by Hon. S.C. Ndi regarding German emigration after World War I
Va/b 1952/2	House of Assembly question nr. 132 by Hon. S.C. Ndi regarding Development Funds
Va/b 1954/1	House of Assembly question nr. 138 by Hon. S.C. Ndi regarding the result of the anthropological survey undertaken by Dr. Phyllis Kaberry
Va/c 1954/5	House of Assembly question nr. 5 by Hon. A.N. Jua regarding the hospital at Wum
Va/c 1958/1	Southern Cameroons House of Assembly elections 1959
Va/c 1958/2	Southern Cameroons House of Assembly elections 1959
Va/c 1959/1	Southern Cameroons House of Assembly miscellaneous papers

2 Bamenda District Office Archives

NW/La/a 1935/1 Petitions and complaints from natives of Bamenda Province

3 Mill Hill Mission Archives, Roosendaal (Holland)

Various untitled files and periodicals.

List of interviews conducted

Bo Chung (Njinikom elder)	Njinikom 18.8.1994
Bots, Father Hermanus (missionary)	Oosterbeek 17.3.1994
Chindo Ngonkoukele (former chinda)	Njinikom 16.8.1994
Iytena, Monica (daughter of Fon's runaway wife)	Njinikom 18.8.1994
Mbain, Prince Henry	Buea 31.8.1994
Mulessim, Princess Immaculate	Njinikom 19.8.1994
Ngomneng, Aloysius (brother of first Kom catechist)	Njinikom 16.8.1994
Nke, Valentine (grandson of first Kom catechist)	Bamenda 22.8.1994
Nkuo, Thaddeus (diplomat)	Njinikom 18.8.1994
Tim, Patrick (son of first Kom catechist)	Njinikom 16.8.1994
Yindoh Mbah (Njinikom ruler)	Njinikom 15.8.1994
Yindoh Nsah, James (former chinda)	Njinikom 17.8.1994
Yongabi, Polycarp (Catholic school teacher)	Njinikom 17.8.1994

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