The Anlu Rebellion

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Summary and Keywords

From 1958 to 1961, Kom women in western Cameroon cast aside their regular domestic and agricultural duties to engage in a revolt against British administrative interference in agriculture—normally their domain—and the alleged plan by the ruling political party, the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), to sell Kom land to Nigerian Igbos. In keeping with the practices of *anlu*, a centuries-old women's organization generally deployed against people who violated the Kom moral code, women interfered with burial rituals; hurled insults at men in public; demanded the closing of schools, courts, and markets; set up roadblocks; destroyed and burned property; and defied both traditional and British authorities in the Bamenda Grassfields of western Cameroon. Their tactics included stripping naked in front of men. While local men considered the sight of the vagina in public to be a bad portent and thus understood the seriousness of the revolt, flabbergasted British officials had no idea what was to come. By seizing control of resources and demonstrating in public, Kom women disturbed local political power, and protested against British rule in the Southern Cameroons. They were a crucial force in the victory of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1961, which brought a restoration of political order at the time of independence.

Keywords: anlu, Cameroon, Grassfields, Kom, Africa, women, colonialism

A Mass Insurrection of Kom Women

Kom women in western Cameroon launched a revolt in 1958 known as the Anlu Rebellion in the Bamenda Grassfields. The area was termed the British Southern Cameroons as British administrators had control of it. The women were furious about rumors that a Cameroonian political party, the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), was considering selling Kom land to Nigerian Igbos. As anthropologist Eugenia Shanklin and historian Henry Kam Kah explain, the British colonial imposition of horizontal contour farming deepened their grievances because it subverted women's prevailing agricultural practices. *Anlu*, a centuries-old women's organization, expressed the discontent of the group.[1] For three years, the women stripped naked in front of the flabbergasted British officials and painted themselves in red camwood powder and oil.[2] While local Cameroonian men regarded the sight of the vagina to be a bad portent – as Kah notes in his research – and thus understood the seriousness of the revolt, British officials had no idea what was to come. The campaign, which Shanklin described as a "reign of terror," lasted from 1958 to 1961.

A key and early event of the *anlu* women's revolt occurred the morning of July 4, 1958 in Njinikom, a village in Kom. A member of the Wum Divisional Native Authority Council (WDNAC), local school teacher Chia K. Bartholomew (generally called C. K. Barth by his peers), had informed the women about the council's decision to approve the contour cultivation law colonial authorities had passed in 1955.[3] Barth had asserted that all political parties, including the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), a nationalist party *anlu* members supported, had passed the contour cultivation law. In spite of their demands, the WDNAC would not repeal the contour farming law, he insisted.

A sizeable group of women gathered outside of the WDNAC's meeting in Njinikom to protest.[4] Even before the council meeting adjourned that morning, the *anlu* leaders commenced their protest with the traditional shrill cry made with four fingers on the lips.[5] Shanklin described the scene: "People came running from all directions, in time to see the women begin to dance wildly."[6] She also described songs and screams.[7] Intermittent ululations assembled women into a formidable bulwark.[8]

The women wore rags and leaves, and as feminist activist Elowyn Corby notes, "they carried branches over their shoulders in imitation of guns," which African women were not allowed to use during European administrative rule.[9] The women began singing a menacing song about the KNC party leader, Emmanuel Mbela Lifafa (E. M. L.) Endeley, singing he "will not visit Kom. He has sold our land to the Igbos in Nigeria."[10] According to Shanklin, "[t]he singing continued until their first victim, C.K. Bartholomew, came out of the meeting and began to run. The women ran after him, screaming epithets and throwing stones."[11] In fear of his life, Barth ran to the local priest's house, where he quickly hid in a latrine.[12] The women retreated within a few hours, and Barth returned home. However, the women surrounded his home around 5 p.m., draped in rags and leaves.[13] Some of the women wore men's clothing, such as torn trousers and old dirty caps; and as Corby writes, it was a symbolic claiming of "power reserved for men."[14] They spent the night following the usual *anlu* practices of shaming Barth and polluting his yard: as Shanklin describes, "singing and chanting, shouting obscenities, urinating and defecating all over the yard, and even attacking the zinc roof of the house with bamboo staffs."[15] A male witness described the *anlu* thus, according to Shaklin: "No person looks human in that wild crowd, nor do their actions suggest sane thinking. Vulgar parts of the body are exhibited as the chant rises in weird depth."[16]

News of the *anlu* women's movement in Njinikom spread swiftly, and rumors began that schools and marketplaces would close because of the revolt. By the evening of 4 July, the official modern *anlu* demonstrations had started to gather rapid momentum.[17] Women from all over Kom, such as those from the town of Belo, soon joined the Njinikom women. Women from close-knit ethnic groups, such as the Laimbwe, Babanki, and Ngemba, also joined the movement by organizing protests in their respective villages and towns.[18] Laimbwe women contributed a whistle to the shrill cry of the Kom as a "complementary sound of confrontation."[19] Over three years, *anlu* participants crippled the traditional government and engaged in subversive actions against those who opposed them. Research shows that the women sabotaged nonsupporters' farming and that leaders who supported the new farming rules might be mock buried.[20] They also interfered with the rituals of the actual dead; heaped verbal insults on men in public; demanded the closing of schools, courts, and markets; set up roadblocks; destroyed and burned property—the records emphasize bicycles and cameras—and defied both traditional and colonial authorities.[21] Men ran away when their mothers, sisters, and daughters threatened to display their nudity in public, protesting against the leadership of the village and the changes in agricultural practices.[22] Women chased opponents from their compounds during *anlu* if they resisted; those who supported the colonial administration were also targeted. By seizing control of resources and demonstrating in public, Kom women strengthened their anticolonial protest and disturbed local traditional political power in the northern section of the British Southern Cameroons.[23]

Administrative mechanisms, both traditional and colonial, proved powerless during the protests.[24] It was, as oral interviews collected by anthropologist Eugenia Shanklin suggests, a world turned upside down.[25] Elowyn Corby asserts that women had a "tendency to grab men's rear ends as they walked by" and that this was one of many measures by which women "assert[ed] themselves over men and manipulate[d] traditional gender roles."[26] As she described, they pushed the envelope further by "openly mock[ing] the Fon, the traditional leader [or chieftain or king] generally regarded as partially divine."[27] Members of the revolt also created a parallel administrative structure.[28] Two women who were the central political female actors in the Kom region led the movement—*Fuam* (termed the Queen) and *Muana* (termed the Divisional Officer).[29] The leaders governed from the town of Wombong and interfered with *mukum*, and *kwifon*, the traditional all-male governing organizations.[30] For instance, *anlu* members forbade people to rebuild the palace in Laikom, the Kom capital, when it burned down.[31]

When the rebellion was finally over in early 1961, the KNDP, the pro-Cameroon party and the preference of the *anlu* members, defeated the KNC, the pro-Nigeria party and the ruling party in the British Southern Cameroons between 1958 and 1960. As Shanklin suggests, "*anlu* faded from importance in local Kom affairs" after 1961, the post-independence period.[32] Yet their victory at that crucial time demonstrates that African women could be powerful political and social forces in the final period of European rule in Africa. Through revolt, women from the Western (Bamenda) Grassfields of Cameroon spurred social changes and played a significant part in the struggle for independence from British administrative rule.

Historical Context

The area where the Anlu Rebellion took place, the Western (Bamenda) Grassfields, comprises the Northwest Region of contemporary Cameroon. It is one of two Anglophone (English-speaking) regions of modern-day Cameroon, the other being the Southwest Region. The Western Grassfields, as well as the rest of modern-day Cameroon, were under German colonial rule from 1884 until 1916. At the end of the First World War, a League of Nations mandate divided Kamerun between Britain and France. Direct administrative rule by the British prevailed from 1918 to 1954. Although the British governed the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria, the regions were administered separately. Nevertheless, Cameroonians living in the British Cameroons voted for individuals to reresent them in the Eastern House of Assembly in Enugu, Nigeria, until the early 1950s.[33] On December 6, 1946, Britain received approval from the United Nations to administer the British Southern Cameroons as trust territories. Soon thereafter, in 1954, Britain gave the British Southern Cameroons its own legislature, the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly, seven years before formal independence.

The two dominant political leaders at the end of British rule were E. M. L. Endeley, the leader of KNC, and John Ngu Foncha, leader of the KNDP. They had served succeeding terms as Premier of the British Southern Cameroons between 1957 and 1961, with Foncha serving second. As the Southern Cameroons prepared for independence, the KNC, which Endeley established in 1952, advocated for uniting with Nigeria. The KNDP advocated for unification with the area of Cameroon that had been under French control from 1918 until it attained independence as the Republic of Cameroon on 1 January 1960. These members broke away from the KNC and established the KNDP in 1955 as a pro-reunification with Cameroon party.[34] The two parties would figure prominently in the Anlu Rebellion. For instance, the KNDP mobilized *anlu* members as allies who supported their political activities in the late 1950s by endorsing the rumors that the KNC was considering selling Kom land to Nigerian Igbos.[35]

Women's Social and Political Authority

The women of the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon have had diverse reasons for political and social mobilization.[36] In the Southwest Region, this mobilization had its root in traditional societies from precolonial times in which women joined forces to respond to and prevent men's abuse. Among the Bakweri people, for example, the movement by which women mobilized for collective action against male offenders was known as *titi ikoli* (scholar Catherine Blackledge shares that "[b]y itself *ikoli* means a thousand, while *titi* is a juvenile word for 'vulva'").[37] In the Northwest Region today, the *Takumbeng* (or *Takembeng*) is a sacred association of older women in their 60s and 70s. Like *titi ikoli*, its history preceded colonial rule. Admitting only women who have attained menopause, *Takumbeng* has shared roots with *kwifon*, an all-male society that scholars Mark Dike DeLancey, Rebecca Neh Mbuh, and Mark W. DeLancey describe as having "responsibility for maintaining social order."[38] As they explain, when the *Takumbeng* disapprove of a decision the *kwifon* have made, they apply pressure on the men to alter it.[39] In such efforts, the say, "[t]he ultimate power the women possess is to appear naked in public, thus shaming and possibly cursing the men who are their 'sons.'"[40] The women's age, the scholars write, is significant to the shaming process—their senior age gives them authority drawn on maternal associations.[41]

Meredith Terretta describes the *anlu*'s function—she also references the *fombuen*, another village association women might belong to—as "safeguard[ing] agricultural and biological fertility."[42] As she writes, these groups were known to assemble "when they felt it necessary to publicly voice their disapproval of male chiefs and notables, [and] husbands."[43] As in the Anlu Rebellion, women used such associations to express opposition to colonial administrators' abuses of power as well as those of local men.

Origins and Practice of Anlu

The Kom are one of the largest ethnic groups in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. Among the Kom, descent is matrilineal.[44] Oral sources avow that all *fons*, the semi-divine male rulers, "descended from one particular matrilineage, traced back to the 'first *Fon's'* sister."[45] Traditional government institutions remain important in the Kom region. Today, the *fon* still lives in Laikom, the Kom capital, and retains political power. The *kwifon*, as the name suggests, are considered the *fon's* advisors, and they continue to be politically influential leaders of their communities. Kom oral traditions suggest that their first ancestors made their way to Laikom and then expanded territorially and in population from there.[46] Legend suggests that the Kom Kingdom was once a tributary of Mejang, a neighboring kingdom. However, the Kom Kingdom defeated Mejang and other powerful chiefdoms by the 18th and 19th centuries.[47] By the 19th century, the *fon* and the *kwifon* held political power on a kingdom-wide level.[48] Throughout the kingdom, the *fon* and the *kwifon* exercised wide-ranging political power such as judging land cases and condemning people to death for treason.[49]

Eugenia Shanklin notes that in the 19th and 20th centuries "gender relations within villages were more egalitarian than the kingdom-wide institutions, which emphasized male dominance."[50] The presence of the *Takumbeng*, the *kwifon*'s counterpart, reflects this. The matrilineal nature of Kom society also confers power on women. As anthropologist Paul Nchoji Nkwi argues, because Kom women "constitute the essential parts of the lineage," "they are responsible for the persistence and continuity of the lineage."[51] Moreover, women had absolute authority in agriculture, which gave them considerable social power, although men exercised most of the political power outside of this domain.[52] However, the Queen Mother, the lead female elder, had avenues of political power.[53] For example, in times of social or political crisis she might convene a meeting with local female elders who would decide a course of action.[54] Historian Henry Kah describes these practices: "During [the] meeting, [the women] examined

the issue [that prompted the crisis] and made suggestions for correction or improvement. Following on the heels of the meeting of these women elders there was a general assembly of women to discuss the practical implementation of decisions taken by the elders."[55] Kom women also used *anlu* to sanction men or women who disrupted women's absolute authority in agriculture, just as they would in the Anlu Rebellion.[56]

There are conflicting stories about the origin of *anlu*. One oral tradition traces the practice to an incident in which the women of Kom communities resisted Mejang invaders.[57] The Kom had paid tribute to Mejang during the early period of settlement at Laikom, building a house in the palace of the Mejang chief every year.[58] When they decided to cease the arduous practice, the Mejang invaded while most of the Kom men were on a hunting expedition, intending to seize the women.[59] However, the Kom women learned of the plans through spies. Under the direction of the Queen Mother, the women adorned themselves in men's clothes, decorated themselves with vines, and confronted the advancing Mejang force with sticks and weapons in hand.[60] On seeing the women, the Mejang warriors retreated, believing them to be men.[61] The Kom women captured one Mejang man who was disabled. The women stripped their war garments to reveal their true identity to the astonished man. They instructed him to tell the Mejang chief and the Mejang people that they were now to pay tribute to Kom. The story states that the Mejang Kingdom complied.[62] A second origin story states that *anlu* came into existence when a powerful neighboring enemy slaughtered all the physically fit male members of the Kom community through military trickery. The women decorated themselves in vines to defend their community. They kept guard and fought off enemy attacks while the few old men left hunted for food, rebuilt the houses, and paid the required tributes to the neighboring kingdom that had slain the Kom men.[63]

Notably, both stories position the *anlu* as the defenders of the Kom against external threats, instead of the internal ones that commanded their attention in recorded history. Wearing men's clothing was a frequent practice of the *anlu* during an action; as historian Henry Kah asserts, during British rule, the women's "adoption of male dress was a challenge to masculin[e] [ideals]."[64] During the colonial period, it became a powerful tool that women used to renegotiate gender norms and behavior. The moral rules the *anlu* enforced upheld core values such as fertility, food, and prosperity.[65] They did not necessarily prevent all physical abuse against wives, but a person who beat a pregnant or nursing mother would be a target.[66] A man or woman who mistreated his or her parent would also feel the *anlu*'s wrath. Incest and insulting one's mother, for instance, by uttering obscenities such as "your vagina is rotten," also violated their code.[67]

The origin and definition of the term *anlu* say much about the purpose of the practice. Shanklin writes that "*Anlu*, in its traditional form was ephemeral, appearing only to '*lu*'. . . a person and then disappearing after the person had repented. The [Kom] verb, *se lu*, means to leave, to set apart or to isolate, and isolation is the operative meaning in this context." Thus, as Shanklin concludes, "*anlu* ostracized or isolated its victims from the rest of the community."[68] Thus, in addition to public shaming and violence such as C. K. Barth experienced, individuals the *anlu* marked for punishment were barred from social contact with members of the community, including their close kin group, until the *anlu* lifted their condemnation.[69]

Anlu refers to a period in which the group was addressing a problem as well as the group itself. Women held complete authority in the community during *anlu*, and they would commit actions that would otherwise violate the community's moral order to underline the enormity of the offense and to pressure the offender to make amends.[70] Vulgar speech, stripping in public, wearing men's clothing, and damaging the offender's property all became acceptable.[71] By challenging dominant Kom social values, these acts showed the gravity of the crime committed.

Shanklin describes a typical *anlu* during British rule. Women assembled in a compound after deciding to *lu* an offender. They would cook garden eggs, a type of small white eggplant that is used as a food crop in several countries in Africa, which was believed to diminish a person's vital force and possibly cause death.[72] Then they would approach the offender, as Shanklin describes, burning grass at each junction in the road and put a garden egg in the burning grass, carrying a drum. "When they reached the offender's compound," Shanklin describes, "they sang lewd songs, used obscene gestures and language, urinated and defecated in the house and yard to defile the compound, and threw garden eggs at the offender."[73] The women then "placed the pot of garden eggs on the offender's household hearth and withdrew" and oral tradition asserts that if "an unrepentant offender removed the pot, he or she would soon sicken and die."[74] Shanklin writes that the targets of *anlu* "usually repented quickly." Men's only role in *anlu* was in the reconciliation. Offenders "informed *anlu's* messengers of their decision and the messengers called the other women to assemble. On the next rest day, the women received the offender's proof of penitence: ten fowls and a large basket of corn flour."[75] Other reports suggest the village regulatory society *(akum)* might determine the date and place of the purification exercise and fees to be paid.[76] The *anlu* would take the offender to a stream and immerse him or her in water to begin the purification process.[77] They would shave the offender's head and rub it with camwood (*Baphia nitida*).[78] They would also clean the offender's compound and cooking utensils —a necessary step, as the *anlu* would have urinated and defecated on the grounds and surroundings—before he or she could be readmitted into the village communal life and the *anlu* would end.[79]

Nkwi, who observed the Anlu Rebellion in the late 1950s, described men's virtual powerlessness. Social life ground to a halt, and the traditional chiefs and councils were weakened.[80] Men in the community would not intervene; *anlu* would target them as well if they did. Moreover, the husbands of women involved in *anlu* carried out their wives' everyday domestic chores.[81] The *akum* could not interfere with any action the *anlu* took to punish a culprit. The *kwifon* could act only if several villages were involved. This was the case in the Anlu Rebellion of 1958–1961.[82]

Overview of the Anlu Rebellion, 1958–1961

Within a few weeks of the initial July 1958 eruption in Njinikom, there were seven thousand members meeting in *anlu* branches throughout the Kom region to plan resistance.[83] Their grievances included at least four points. First, the cows of the Fulani, a nomadic ethnic group that is primarily Muslim and scattered throughout many parts of West Africa, were increasingly encroaching on Kom women's farms and eating the women's crops. Second, "[t]he British establishment of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve in 1951 and restrictions on the exploitation of resources" had placed limitation on Laimbwe women's use of their own land.[84] The Laimbwe were a neighboring ethnic group of the Kom. Third, British officials had enacted a law in 1955 requiring all women farmers to use a new crop implementation strategy called horizontal contour cultivation. Women had long relied on vertical contour farming "to prevent soil erosion in the mountainous terrain."[85] The rumors that the KNC would take their land and sell it to Nigerian Igbos were the fourth, and perhaps the most alarming, reason. The KNC had secured almost total political control in the Southern Cameroons in 1958 and were already known to be aligned with Nigeria.[86]

As many as six thousand Kom women walked up to forty miles to gather in Njinkom to join the rebellion. As Corby writes, they left "their husbands at home to take care of the house, crops, and family," between May 1958 and January 1959.[87] As summer 1958 began, the women held "weekly demonstrations in the marketplace and disruptions of colonial meetings of which they disapproved."[88] By the late summer, "women camped outside the main

colonial office for all of two weeks, mocking colonial forces" and the Cameroonian men who had positions of relative power.[89]

The alignment with KNDP became explicit early. KNDP was actively disputing with KNC about whether the Southern Cameroons should be part of the British or French colonial sphere, and the Anlu Rebellion became part of this dispute.[90] The KNDP favored unity between the French and British sectors of Cameroon while the KNC preferred integration into a federal system in Nigeria.[91] In fact, colonialism had drawn relatively arbitrary lines and neither answer was obvious. The various ethnic groups that lived in Cameroon had no particular connection until Germany colonized it in 1884, and whatever unity those 24 years had created had considerably weakened under the dual control of France and Britain.

Anlu rallies gradually developed into KNDP grassroots cells.[92] As Corby notes, it was common for *anlu* actions to collaborate with the KNDP or to be undertaken to support the party.[93] The *anlu* ostracized KNC supporters, forbidding members of their communities from visiting the homes of people believed to support the party.[94] Moreover, they took action against school teachers who they considered to be allied with the KNC party, as for example on the July 7, 1958 action disrupting classes at the school that anthropologist Paul Nchoji Nkwi attended in Njinikom.[95] Nkwi, who was completing his last year of primary education, attended school on that day. He recalls that the *anlu* women, draped in vines and leaves and wearing men's clothing, entered the school singing obscene songs and stormed the classrooms. They began to beat and intimidate the teachers and warned the students not to attend class. They demanded that the school remove four teachers the *anlu* believed to be allied with the KNC (according to Nkwi, one of these teachers had no such alliance).[96] The school was forced to close for the day, and only reopened the next day because it was known that the *anlu* had another target.[97]

The next target was St. Anthony's Catholic School, an all-boys school in Njinikom. In the first major mass demonstration of the rebellion, thousands of women gathered in Njinikom and demanded the removal of KNC teachers at this school as well. Henry Kah writes that women wore "torn male . . . shirts, trousers, dry banana leaves, fresh creeping plants, and . . . paint[ed]. . . faces with charcoal and wood ash. Babanki women consciously disguised themselves in old clothing intentionally mixing bright and often garish colors, necklaces of old bottle tops or wild seeds, and sometimes wearing dried grass tied [in] knots."[98] Women also painted their bodies to underline the gravity of the movement. They frequently sang songs critical of supporters of the KNC regime, local officials, and the new farming rules enacted by the British administration.[99] Hitting bamboos on the ground and blowing whistles added to the intimidation. They danced jujus—traditional musical styles—for men, such as *kooh, mebuh, kembaikoh*, and *libah*. School officials who did not comply with *anlu* requests found their schools half empty, as members removed their own children from the school system; estimates put the loss at 50–70 percent of students, and many schools had to close.[100] The women also halted the activities of the (customary) courts that enforced indigenous laws.[101]

Other anti-KNC actions included the ceremonial burial of Joseph Ndong Nkwain, the KNC chairman of the Kom region, as well as other KNC leaders and supporters.[102] Nkwain had supported the implementation of contour cultivation; the women also held him responsible for St. Anthony's Catholic School's failure to meet their demands with respect to teachers they considered KNC supporters.[103] When Nkwain died suddenly in late December of 1958, some people believed the *anlu* had caused it.[104] Kom death rituals are among the community's most important; the all-male *mukum* carry out the funerary rituals and dance for both men and women throughout the celebration.[105] Thus, the mock burials disrupted community norms both because no one had died and because women carried out the rituals.

The *anlu* movement also attempted to obstruct E. M. L Endeley's visit to Njinikom in 1958. At the time the KNC leader and the premier of the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly, Endeley was scheduled to travel to Kom to prepare for the 1959 elections.[106] He had been warned that the *anlu* were a threat, but nonetheless arrived on the 11th of July.[107] He intended to travel from Wum to Njinikom, but *anlu* women blocked him and his entourage in Bafmeng, which required him to take a much longer route.[108] They also set up roadblocks that prevented many supporters from attending his appearance in Njinikom, such that only a handful of supporters were able to greet him.[109] The KNDP had initiated the total boycott of the visit and the *anlu* women had succeeded in intimidating Kom men such that very few attended the meeting.

On July 14, 1958, the *anlu* held another mass rally at Njinikom. This time the British Divisional Officer, Ken Shaddock, attended. The demonstrations were so rampant that police action could not subdue the situation. Even the *fon* at the time, Alo'o Ndiforngu, was powerless to reestablish peace. His assurances that rumors that Nigerian Igbos would buy Kom land were false fell on deaf ears, as did Shaddock's assurances that he would suspend the cross-contour farming regulation if the women would only return to normal daily life.[110] While they did not comply, he did in fact suspend it until the KNDP assumed political power in the 1959 elections. Shaddock also promised the women that all those who had been convicted of violating the law would be released and face no punitive action.[111] He rebuked the *anlu* for harassing students whose parents continued to send them to the school. He explained that removing teachers from schools was beyond his purview. A Catholic mission ran and administered St. Anthony's.

The *anlu* women continued to target KNC partisans, and rallies continued in the villages.[112] Arrests continued as well, but the *anlu* fought back. In late July 1958, the police were sent to arrest the leaders of the *anlu* movement in Njinikom. The women peacefully surrendered and said they would go with the police to Bamenda, the closest place where the government might hold a number of people. Protesters from throughout the region gathered in Bamenda; the leaders' immediate subordinates mobilized a group of protesters. Henry Kah writes that traditional rulers, including those of the "Aghem, Bu, and Mbengkas, pooled their resources to provide bail for the women, whose presence had "created panic."[113] The authorities also provided food and transportation home for the protesters.[114]

Another large *anlu* demonstration took place in late November 1958. On Thursday afternoon, November 20th, two thousand women left to walk thirty-eight miles to Bamenda, festooned in vines and with unwashed bodies painted black. Four thousand women they had left behind from the area surrounding Njinikom, many of them elderly women or nursing mothers, descended on the Njinikom market to await their return. The leader, Nawain Muana, ordered the travelers not to speak to any man and to consume only food and drinks they carried with them. They arrived in Bamenda completely exhausted, their feet swollen, some having never traveled such a distance before. They spent the night singing songs. On November 22, the two-thousand-women delegation marched to the government office in Bamenda. In a lengthy statement to the police, Muana, who had led the delegation, lamented women's loss of control over food production and fertility because of the new British administrative policies.[115] The police took no action against them. In fact, the police loaned them two trucks that took them part of the way back to Njinikom and they returned in triumph, satisfied with successfully, and peacefully, vocalizing their grievances.[116]

Organization and Strategies of Resistance

The two women who led the Anlu Rebellion, Nawain Fuam and Nawain Muana became the central political actors in the Kom region during the rebellion.[117] Their titles, Queen and Divisional Officer, mocked the British colonial administration. Calling Faum "queen" mocked Elizabeth II and calling Muana the divisional officer, or D.O., mocked the leader of the British colonial government.[118] Faum and Muana governed from the town of Wombong, where the *anlu* created a parallel administrative structure.[119] Moreover, Wombong replaced the traditional capital of Kom, Laikom.[120]

The *anlu* rebellion was well organized and all participants had clear responsibilities. As historian Henry Kah describes, "every community [had] a recognized local leader who worked closely with her subordinates. This local leader also worked very closely with other selected leaders from the different wards or quarters of the village and solicited at all times the support of other leaders in neighboring communities."[121] For instance, in the Bu fondom of the Laimbwe ethnic group, the leaders included Sangah Buh, Futele Chou, Fuehlejheh, Musso Mbong, Naiisi, Ngwo Ndai and Kebwei Zei.[122] These leaders were "responsible to a central leadership and gave an account of their stewardship to a commanding officer at the center."[123] Women also mobilized during *anlu* meetings in various villages, at which they were briefed on the development of the *anlu* and how they might mobilize and cooperate.[124]

Anlu women used various strategies to mobilize and collaborate. Kin-groups and related ethnic group networks, such the Kedjom Keku people, were sources of power to mobilize. They also used the assistance of Augustine Ngom Jua, a local KNDP politician, to convince Kedjom Keku women to join the movement. Women in numerous Kom communities also mobilized by sending material assistance and housing women who traveled for actions. For instance, in late 1958, nearby villages housed women who protested in Bamenda to demand the release of imprisoned *anlu* leaders.[125]

The *Anlu* Legacy

The KNDP's triumphant election in 1959 brought greater measures of victory to the *anlu*. KNDP officials knew that they owed their seats to the *anlu*, as leadership primarily directed how women voted in the 1959 and 1961 elections, which brought the KNDP a more decisive victory and broader power in the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly.[126] The Anlu Rebellion dissipated in 1959 and ended completely with the 1961 election; women who had participated resumed their normal daily lives, including their daily agriculture and domestic tasks.[127] However, the repercussions of the revolt drove social change in their home villages and *anlu* chapters.[128] For instance, *anlu* leaders retained importance—Muana, the divisional officer, became a prominent judge in the customary court. The traditional authorities also moved the court to Njinikom from Laikom based on *anlu*'s demands.

Anlu still exists, but no reports suggest that it has been enacted since 1961. However, the rebellion's legacy is evident in more recent protests by older women who use the power of their age and maturity to shame individuals who misbehave.[129] The *Takumbeng* still meet in secret in rural areas and it is believed that these heirs of the *anlu* legacy are women in their 60s and 70s.[130] Their protests cross ethnic lines and join women from throughout the Northwest Region together, just as the Anlu Rebellion did. As Henry Kah notes, the *Takumbeng* used the "symbolic power of the vagina" as recently as the early 1990s "to frighten gun toting military men in Bamenda into submission."[131] After the reintroduction of multiple parties in Cameroon in 1992, the Francophone regime took action against the defeated leader of an Anglophone political opposition party, John Fru Ndi. *Takumbeng* women surrounded his compound, armed only with staffs, to thwart his formal arrest and provided him with food and access

to supporters. When the national military came to arrest Ndi, the women disrobed, knelt, and lifted their breasts with their hands. The women successfully repelled the advance of the soldiers armed with guns, tear gas, and grenades who feared their exposed vaginas and breasts that, as Henry Kah describes it, "became . . . guns of war."[132] Rumors among people in Bamenda assert that the soldiers who advanced on the *Takumbeng* either died or suffered from severe ailments. Most recently, on September 22, 2017, the *Takumbeng* led mass protests in Bamenda against the social, political, and economic marginalization of Anglophone persons in Francophone-dominated Cameroon.[133] Ultimately, as history evidences, movements such as the *Takumbeng* and the Anlu Rebellion demonstrate that Cameroonian women have long used various outlets, such as traditional women's associations, to spur social change and exercise political authority during politically turbulent times.

Discussion of the Literature

Scholarship on the Anlu Rebellion from the 1960s to the 1990s chiefly concerns the politicization of *anlu* in the course of it. Shanklin draws from oral interviews with Kom informants in the 1980s "[t]o explain the meaning of *anlu's* activities in the precolonial and colonial contexts in which they occurred."[134] She notes that while *anlu* historically ceased disruption when offenders such as men who beat their pregnant wives or disrespected their mothers made amends, they were an active, ongoing force in the 1958–1961 period. She distinguishes the pre-1958 "traditional" *anlu* from the political movement that arose at that time. While traditional *anlu* focused on transgressions against social norms, as she describes, the Anlu Rebellion protested British administrative policies and paralyzed local traditional rule in the Kom region for explicitly political ends.[135]

Scholars also contend that nationalist politicians played a role in the politicization of the *anlu* in this period. For example, Robert E. Ritzenthaler (1960), Paul Nchoji Nkwi (1985), and Henry Kam Kah (2011) assert that KNDP politicians took advantage of Kom women's grievances with the new British farming policies in order to derail the KNC party, which was in firm control in 1958. For instance, Nkwi notes that the substance of the women's demands made it clear that the KNDP was "the brain behind" them, citing the fact that the demonstrations occurred at the same time as the KNC leader's visit to Njinikom, as well as the fact that the *anlu* did not assail or ostracize KNDP leaders even though they were not apparently associated with the rebellion, as additional evidence.[136] Shanklin shares that some of her Kom informants even believe that KNDP politician Augustine Ngom Jua "engineered events and spread rumors calculated to bring on women's fury."[137] Writing more recently, Kah affirms that the KNDP effectively exploited Kom women's grievances for political advantage.[138]

In spite of their agreement that the KNDP co-opted the Anlu Rebellion for their own political ends, scholars such as "Ardener [assert] that it was a women's movement concerned solely with women's issues" because it defended women's agricultural rights while others assert it was mostly a political movement. Ritzenthaler concludes that the movement was really the work of male political elites, such as KNDP leaders. Prominent British anthropologists Elizabeth M. Chilver and Phyllis Kaberry argue that E. M. L. Endeley's KNC government was the primary target.[139] But Shirley Ardener concludes that it was truly a women's movement because its chief concerns were related to women's issues and to changes specifically affecting women.[140] Conversely, Shanklin asserts that it was anticolonial as well as directed against women's issues, based on the beliefs of her Kom informants.[141]

As Shanklin notes, most scholars who have written about *anlu* have relied on "second-or third-hand information" about *anlu*, rather than interviews with members; for example, Ritzenthaler "mentions only one woman, who was at that point no longer a member of *anlu*. Ritzenthaler's primary Kom informants were men."[142] Shanklin claims

this failure has led to "misinterpretations."[143] For example, while acknowledging that the KNDP may have co-opted *anlu*, she disputes the accounts of Ritzenthaler and others that claim the KNDP controlled the *anlu*.[144] Even the prominent British anthropologists Chilver and Kaberry, both of whom had worked extensively in Kom before the uprising, could not interview *anlu* participants; British colonial authorities forbade them to interview women about *anlu*.[145] Shanklin counsels less skepticism of Nkwi's and Nkwain's accounts, as they drew on their own eyewitness accounts, although it is important to recall that Nkwi was a child. As Shanklin notes, Nkwain was away in Ghana for school in July 1958 when the rebellion began, but he returned home a month later, and, as the son of a leader within the *anlu* organization, he witnessed events between August 1958 and 1961 from a close vantage point.[146]

Henry Kam Kah's 2011 work, however, collects data of *anlu* participants from three fondoms, as well as the surviving families of those who had died.[147] This includes Nawain Muana, a key leader. However, he acknowledges that a full understanding of the rebellion is impossible since scholars have not fully considered the women's anticolonial mobilization efforts in many of the fondoms in the British Southern Cameroons at the time, such as the Laimbwe fondoms of Bu and Mbengkas.[148]

Apart from Kah, Shanklin, Ritzenthaler, Nkwi, and Nkwain, Africanist scholarship that mentions the Anlu Rebellion does so as context for either African women's participation in anticolonial protests generally, or in relation to the *Takumbeng* protests in 1990s Cameroon. The former scholarship frequently highlights the similarity of the strategies of resistance between the Women's War of 1929 in colonial Nigeria, which sounded the alarm on women's possible taxation by the British, and the Anlu Rebellion. In the former event, Igbo women utilized the traditional institution of "sitting on a man" to humiliate British colonial authorities, just as they traditionally did to local African men who violated the Igbo moral code.[149] The latter scholarship generally highlights the similar strategies of resistance that *Takumbeng* and *anlu* women use. For instance, both women's associations draw from the vagina's power to instill fear by disrobing in public in politically tempestuous circumstances. Such comparisons demonstrate the social and political power of traditional women's organizations in West Africa generally.

Primary Sources

The main types and major collections of primary sources on the Anlu Rebellion are imbedded in eyewitness accounts, secondary sources, and in the **National Archives of Cameroon in Yaoundé and Buea**. Anthropologist Paul Nchoji Nkwi includes eyewitness accounts in his 1985 work, **"Traditional Female Militancy in a Modern Context**." This work recounts Nkwi's personal experiences during the rebellion as a school-age child as well as oral testimony from his father. Francis Nkwain's unpublished recollections, which he wrote in 1963, "Some Reflections on the 'Anlu' Organized by the Kom Women in 1958," is the major eyewitness account. However, Nkwain's unpublished recollections are in mimeographed form and not easily accessible; the sources are housed in the Buea Archives, Cameroon.[150] Primary sources are also embedded in secondary sources. Robert E. Ritzenthaler's **1961** work, **"Anlu: A Women's Uprising in the British Cameroons**," includes an interview with one woman who participated in *anlu* as well as primary Kom male informants such as C. K. Bartholomew, a target of the rebellion, and Bartholomew's father-in-law. Eugenia Shanklin's **1990** work, **"Anlu Remembered**" and Henry Kah's **2011** work, **"Women's Resistance in Cameroon's Western Grassfields**," also include extracts from oral testimonies.

Government Archives and Private Collections

It remains to be known if the administration during British rule took notes of the rebellion and if they did so, where such documents might be found. It is also unknown if other archival satellites in Cameroon house information or materials on the rebellion, such as the Cameroon Photo Press Archives and the archives in Bamenda, the stronghold of the Anlu Rebellion in the Northwest Region of modern-day Cameroon.

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