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## **The 1904-5 Kom-German war: Dimensioning the power and leadership horizons opened and closed by the war**

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### **Abstract**

The Germans intention to subdue the Cameroon traditional ethnic entities (states) to implant their colonial project resulted in a number of resistances (wars). The Kom-German War of 1904-5 was one of a kind, which brought about drastic transformation and reconfiguration both to the way of life and the power ownership plus distribution patterns that existed here prior to foreign incursion. This paper moves away from the known general impacts of the War of resistances in Africa to situate the particularities of the short but severely eventful War between the Kom and the Germans. Based on its finding from primary and secondary sources, the paper argues that this war negotiated special horizons of power sharing and leadership equations between the Germans and the Kom traditional state thereby opening the flood gates for the penetration of so many alien elements into the Kom traditional fabric. This discourse is consonant to the entire ramifications that shape the fortunes of African economies and political life styles elsewhere.

**Keywords:** Kom state, German, war, impact, development

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### **Introduction**

Pursuant to the Hinterland theory that became the main resolution of the 1884-5 Berlin West African Conference of 1884-5 and the complications plus opportunities/possibilities provided by the July 12, 1884, Germano-Doula treaty, the German colonial administration decided to move into the interior of Cameroon. The need for inland exploration and implantation of foreign administration was further exacerbated by the German traders who desperately needed the cooperation of colonial authorities so as to enable them to get the required labourers for plantation assignment from the inland recalcitrant traditional polities<sup>[1]</sup>. The need for the percolation of German administration inland became so grave and urgent that Zintgraff confronted the natives with various forms of projects but all of them intricately linked to this relegation of the natives' traditional power barons to the heights of mere minions<sup>[2]</sup>.

With the need for labour and other resources that fell within the spheres of German prestige being in a horrific rise and the natives' traditional entities still prepared as much as possible to maintain their power sharing equation, wars of resistances and of subjugation became a common phenomenon. Wars of resistances were however not only a common future of the inland or coastal Cameroon tribes and ethnic configurations in Cameroon. It was a pattern widely in consonant to any the human established society that found itself in the realm of subjugation or total annihilation. The question begging for answers is not why were the wars fought or what general impacts were left on the sands of time by these Wars but rather; how special was the Kom-German War to the general landscape of native resistances in the Grassfields? Why was this War special? How was it fought? and which new zones of power and interest localities or horizons were opened and closed by these Wars? From its various archival and secondary sources, this paper brings out both revealing and fresh insides on the outcome of War, which essentially was a contest

of power and authority (leadership) between otherwise African traditional societies against an established continental European power. To understand the whole episode of War and the new fortunes it shaped, there is a need to have a full grasp of the Kompre-war environment along with the specificities of the locale.

### **The Pre-war Environment/Specificities of the Kom Locale**

The human and the natural environment to a very large extent were key recipes in shaping not only the conduct of the war but also its fortune within and out of that traditional niche. Unlike the coastal traditional groupings which by 1900 were already exposed to alien traditions and approaches to basic needs, the Kom locale under study was one of seemingly different configuration. Through trade and plantation life plus enormous exposure to Christian values, the coastal regions that posed more as hubs for external mores were far different in the power sharing mechanics and leadership tenures than inland traditional unit especially in the Grassfields where Kom formed part of its nucleus. The economies of these coastal peripheries by 1900 were already immune with a new matrix of dualism where African and European ways of life competed at one end and cohabited in the others. Conversely, the grassland states including Kom were still overwhelmingly entrenched in their pristine practices. These kinds of traditional practices accorded a lot of allegiance to the Fons who were not only at the pinnacle of power but also the epicentres of absolute authorities over every facet of the traditional fiefdoms. In Kom in particular, the Fon was held to possess extensive powers not excluding the right of life and limb over its subjects<sup>[3]</sup>. The mere facts that any other persons out of the royal lineage were required to offer automatic and elastic obedience to the Fon and the institutions thereof meant in essence that royal absolutism was still at its prime in Kom till the outbreak

of the Kom German War. With this in full operation, the Fon was seen and venerated not only as of the symbol of power but also the fountain of all wisdom. He was by dint of such quality traditionally held to be the lone figure bestowed by tradition and blessed by the ancestors and the gods to maintain the indispensable life link between the living and the dead. Placed within the ambit of immortal beings the Fon functionally became chief priests, the indispensable communicant of the past with the present as well as all kinds of cosmological structures that were erected in the realm of African traditional religion to sustain such economies.

In terms of territorial power base, the Kom state/Fondom had succeeded through Wars of expansion and quest for hegemony to impose her authority over nine chiefdoms<sup>[4]</sup>. By 1900 in spite of the incursions pushed down elsewhere on the traditional folk by colonial structures, this polity still regularly collected tributes from these chiefdoms. The establishment of Kom hegemony within her regional sub-setting was not a matter of accident. It was a combined effort of the Foyin Yuh Fukuins' realism accompanied by the apparent weakness of Kom neighbours at the time<sup>[5]</sup>. With a somehow superb military club called *Njong*<sup>[6]</sup> under the firm command of the Fon and his delegated proxies, Kom was able to dislodge a number of people like the Babankis and others from their original sites to new locations. This displacement had double implications all of them technically reinforcing the powers of the Fon over his subjects as well as his prestige among his vassal or conquered states.

By some kind of divine ordering, Kom incidentally grew from a number of *Petits* States owing allegiances to diverse authorities to have the palace situated at Laikom to act as its centre of authority. Laws of administration of Social justice of penalties of general wellbeing were therefore issued from Laikom under the solid leadership of the Fon and his regulatory institutions. As a regional giant, she was required to provide protection to the vassal states when and where ever this turned out to be of grave urgency. Indeed, it was in the latter half of the 1800s that the Southern sector of Kom was achieved following the displacement of the people currently settled in Nkwen, Bambui and Babanki. This was like the completion of the Kom unification process vigorously launched and executed by Fon Yuh Fukuin. Though the Germans by 1900s had barely scratched the surface in the general bargain of adulterating traditional administration by 1900, they were at least generally happy with Kom hegemony for a few reasons. Among these reasons towered the fact that the Germans were in favour of strong and central authorities and units inland on whom they could be able to push down their administrative directives. To this should be added the fact that the Kom central command within this region and the order imposed made the Komfon the most reliable vector of the forced recruitment of labour both for public work and for the plantation assignments. Working in the favour of German anticipation was the fact that Yuh Funkuin through brute force and skilful leadership succeeded to scare away internal and external opposition to his rule and was by 1900 having no direct regional contestant to his realm of leadership within these fiefs? Furthermore, the recruitment of Labour and attempt of pacification of Grassfields inland state by Fon Gelega of Bali following the blood treaty of 1891 found no real opposition in Kom. Conversely, a lot of people were supplied head on to perform the required assignments through Fon Yuhs' aid or

guardianship thereby identifying him as a possible prey to the German subjugation project.

The natural environment of the Kom Fondom in focus had much to offer in understanding the changing dynamics of the War. Kom is part of the western Grassfields state that straddles the Western plateau. It is situated some 40 Kilometres from away from Bamenda town where the German military station was found and by 1904 had no direct usable road to the centre. With its humid soils abundant hydrology, steep slopes plus hills and abundant pasture, the transportation of anything heavy that could be used by the Germans during the War remained a very cumbersome task. This was compounded by the fact that the Germans like most European on foreign soils had poor mastery of the terrain. The German task was further made worrisome on account of the fact the German combat squad were under the duress of covering very long distances to engage the Local militia and this did not only bring about delays and wanton waste of valuable time but also worked hard to destroy their morale in the battle field. Again, a part of some local militia, majoring from recruits among the already defeated tribes the German soldiers went through the scourge of hunger disease and fatigue. This was only exacerbated by the fact that once on the field, the soldier often lost track of almost everything back home given that it was practically impossible to communicate or ask for other supplies from the camps.

By 1903 the Germans transferred their administrative and military headquarters from Bali to the Bamenda station and this technically imposed new pressures on surrounding grassland traditional Oligarchies<sup>[7]</sup>. In context, the need to usurped the middle man advantages in the interior was already a given and what mattered most to Germans by this time was the need to establish military stations and control centres where inland chieftains could be brought under full control. Topical among the needs of the time too was the elastic desire often expressed by the German to get additional Labour for the growing number of plantations in the coast. Two mistaken apprehensions about the reality of the time seemed to have taken shape between the Germans and especially the Kom Traditional authorities by this time. On one hand, the Germans had taken the copious collaboration of the Kom Fon to provide most of the requested labourers for the plantation during the last years of 1800s as total submission while on the other, the Kom Fon had mistaken the German demand for labourers as the last of its kind to be made between a foreign power and an established monarch. It was this mistaken apprehension which was lavishly sustained by the German new geo-strategic atmosphere that loomed between the two authorities that occasioned the Kom-German war of 1904-5. An important development that made the Kom German war to stand unique was the special military disposition, War techniques and ammunition.

### **Kom Indigenous War Disposition and Military Techniques**

As for the military disposition, the Wars of expansion and the need to maintain regional hegemony by the different Kom Fons especially Yuh I, occasioned special; military rebuilding and dispositions. All of this calcified into the formation of a special local militia that reflected the thinking of the time and technological prowess of the Grassfields locale. The iron industries(blacksmithing) that flourished in the Ndop plain during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century produced so many weapons like

spears, cutlasses, knives, swords, shields and Dane guns, which incidentally became the instruments of warfare employed wholesale all over the Grassfields [8]. This was sustained by the chambers Wars in the grasslands and its surrounding environment which introduced the Bow and Arrows that gradually percolated to Kom. It was with these weapons that Kom was able to override and integrate the other vassal states into Kom framework. War in Kom like in many African societies did not depend only on physical artillery. Contrary to the Germans, who had regular armies with precise training on the techniques of War, the Kom Fendom in spite power-sharing its multiple successes in the War of expansion, never had a regular army. It was a collective duty to defend the supreme interest of the Fendom and so an army was quickly constituted by the Warlord each time the need arose.

As indicated shortly above, War was not only held among the local chieftains as an affair that was strictly restricted to physical combat. It entailed a morass of detailed preparation in high handed mysticism in the African mind or worldview. In this realm, so many things best understood within the bosom of African traditional and spiritual cosmology formed the basis of war preparation and performance in the field. The chief priests, Kwifoyn and other figments of religious practices coordinated by traditionally selected Warlords provided the War steam through sacrifices and other spiritual incantations, which dictated the morale and conduct of the soldiers in the battlefields. There were local ornaments, caskets and charms of various forms and sizes widely believed to protect the soldiers once in the field. Concretely, War in the philosophy of the grass fielders was locally held to be fought both on physical and spiritual levels and so the thought of the ancestors and their influence on each battle was kept alive and vigorously sustained.

To this, the Kom Fons who were held to be the supreme commander in chiefs initiated an intelligence and information service that played the role of territorial survey and reporting. This service included those who did the physical work and those who were believed to be capable of dealing with the spirits of the ancestors and the gods to predict War outcomes. Though the military contingents were not full-time professional armies, the military corps was carefully regimented with the palace and the Fons bodyguards forming the first-class elite force and the Palace elite force *Njongntoh* under the direct command of the Fon supervising other military contingents. It was in this conception of Warfare and with this kind of artillery that the Kom people were forced to confront the Germans.

### **The War and its Operatives**

The Kom -German war was one crucial episode which helped in greater details to dramatize the general trend of forceful penetration and conquest that was the corner stone of the implantation of German administration in the hinterland of Cameroon and any of their colonial spheres. As pointed out earlier, the time that the Germans decided to take up arms against the Kom people came a little late compared to the rest of the wars of resistances the Germans encountered in the Bamenda Grasslands. This was due in part by the fact that Fon Yuhfukuin I c.a 1865 -1912 at first showed open collaboration with the Germans and proved in the main to be ready to keep this collaboration alive at least for the time being [9]. In spite of this, relations between the Germans and Kom still degenerated into a war which lasted for about thirteen months.

There existed some practical reasons why the Kom went to war with the Germans, but the general cause was that; there was a clash of authorities and entities that were diametrically different in profile, principle and outfit. The other causes can be divided into political, social and economic subgroups.

### **The Foundation/Origins of the Kom-German War**

Politically, the Kom-German armed confrontation came about as a result of the inability of the German officials/administrators to study and apply sound practical policies in Kom that conformed to the local realities. Added to this was the fact that; the German officials were cruel, and inconsiderate in executing orders dictated to them from Germany. This situation was accentuated by the fact that, their officials in Cameroon lacked professional experience in general administration not even to talk of colonial issues. Just with little experience, patience and clairvoyance, these administrators could have cajoled the Kom people to submit themselves under German control but this experience was not only lacking but almost completely absent. This was due partly by the fact that almost all German administrators sent to Cameroon from Germany were not formally trained in administration. Secondly, they were all young and Cameroon was their first mission abroad. The inexperience of these administrators most often led them to frame-up unpopular policies and exercised inconsistent commands that only helped to infuriate the Kom people. In view of this situation clashes, mutual shocks, repeated scandals and abortive attempts to challenge Germany cropped up. The inexperienced and provocative nature of the German administrators was even rich in confusion, short-sightedness and misguided zeal seen by many especially Krishna who lamented that;

With little practical experience in colonization, the Germans rushed with self-confidence and misguided zeal into the task, tremendous and beset with difficulties before which even an experienced colonial state like Great Britain might have hesitated. They were unfortunate in the selection of many of their early officials. Those that were domineering pompous and inexperienced were incompetent or corrupt [10].

This paints a picture of the German officials and system of administration in Cameroon. The age equation seemed to have been largely responsible for lack of prudence and foresight on the part of the administrators. Fanso [11] also states categorically that, the German administrators in Cameroon were all aged between 23 and 30years.

Drowning people from a boat can only be rescued by an expert or experienced swimmers or boat captain else all will get drowned. Unfortunately, if Von Pavel who led the German invasion to Cameroon was in a German boat controlled by Jesko Von Puttkamer with Bismark at the control tower, all of them lacked the expertise and experience that could have avoided a possible war with the Kom people. This kind of situation only helped to create animosity between the two systems of administrations which finally resulted to open war. There was equally a problem of authority mutual misconception and misunderstanding between the two systems. Yuh Funkuin had a misconception about the German. The friendly entertainments given to the Germans by the Fon of Kom made him think that he had won their hearts. They (Germans), were out to recognize new giants like himself for geopolitical reasons. He never saw them as over Lords over the Kom people. Such misconceptions made him treat

the German as equals or even inferiors. On the part of the Germans, they interpreted the behaviour of the Kom Fon to be a tacit demonstration of submission in perfect respect of the Germans as a superior race as spelt out in the “Herensvolk” “Hypothesis”<sup>[12]</sup> Buried in this confusion, both camps claimed overtly and implied, to be masters to the other. These twin debacle of miscalculations fuelled tension, friction and war came to be the ultimate solution or outcome.

Apart from political reasons, economic consideration equally joined to bring about the war. The German administration focused her activities more on economic gains. Of course, it was these colonial gains that coloured and advertised the series of wars in the Grassfields between the Germans and the local states. Paven and Adamitz succeeded in usurping the economic advantages enjoyed by the indigenous middlemen through trade. They also succeeded to get cheap ivory and palm products which were so useful to sustain their private gains and if possible, that of the German economy. German plantations in the coast were littered with labourers from the Grassfields and Kom. The usurpation of these economic advantages hampered long-distance trade on the part of the natives. As if this was not enough, the Germans continued to demand labourers from Kom. Though Fon Yuh Funkuin willingly provided labourers for the building of the German-station in Bamenda, he, however, refused to do that when the German made another request in 1904. It is widely believed that Yuh refusal was motivated by his accumulated grievances against the Germans. Yuh had respected the Germans in their entire request but blatantly turned down this one. This refusal stained the sheets of German colonial records that were not ready to accommodate this kind of open provocation. This un-readiness brought about the Kom German war.

Aside, social friction between the Kom and the German equally contributed to the Kom German War. The German colonial policies were enveloped in their social philosophy. This philosophy stood at variance with the native view and approaches to life. Firstly, the German race as spelt out in Herrenvolk (master race) made them to treat any other people as inferior races. This same feeling made them to disregard any other institution especially those institutions whose relevance was buried in complicated traditional religion. This disregard made them to consider rituals empty or void of any moral or practical essence. The German had shown this disrespect throughout all the tribes they conquered and the fear of seeing their institutions submerge or swept away by this cruel colonial breed of people made the natives encouraged by their Fons hostile. This hostility coupled with a German genuine love for war brought about the war.

In a sum, all of these factors only helped to boil tension between the two camps. The real bomb that some sort of punctured the “Gorden Knot” came when the German station in Bamenda extended its demand for labourers and asked for a Kom princess. It was not only a sacrilege viewing the strong attachment Grassfields states had for Princesses but also a tempting and provoking request from the German that could poison the mind of any committed leader who cared about the wellbeing of his people. As a custodian of his people, Yuh’s replied to the Germans demonstrated not only a blatant rejection but also outright provocation. Without hesitation, the German war began and continued for the next thirteen months.

### **The Kom German War on Course (Specificities)**

The Kom war was unique not only because it was fought in Kom but also because it offers unique war lessons to both the Germans and Kom people. With respect to the weaponry and training received by the German soldiers, the Kom local War artillery plus the military disposition amounted to nought in case of a war but surprisingly a war that was anticipated by the Germans to be just an easy ride that could last just for days turned out to be a matter of a year. In spite of the thick foam of religious believe that animated the moral of the Kom local militia to go War the only thing they had that could make a substantial or evidential impact in the battle field was the gun and the Bows and arrows. Unfortunately, the guns owned by most of them were of very doubtful efficiencies given that most of them could only succeed to shot once and much time was required to reload them. This was made further complicated by the fact carrying such long and heavy guns over long distances with no secured boats and combat attire only helped to expose the soldiers to so many eventualities. The possibilities of such guns misfiring on their own were high and this incongruence was compounded that guns were met at home and the Gun powder was imported. Even with this complication, these gun could do some great job of inflicting casualties in the nights but the native’s firm belief in the sanctity of the night made the gun almost useless.

For reasons best understood by the German geostrategic planning, they decided to launch the Kom expedition in April 1904<sup>[13]</sup>. Onboard as soldiers on the German side were rank and files recruits of African origin majoring from among the Balis, Ewondos, Mankons and Sierra Leone. They were commanded by white skin Germans like FLW Mueller, Von Knobloch, Frier Gans Edler, Zu Puttlitz and KT Heigelin who used horses to get to Kom<sup>[14]</sup>. Their target was to capture the fon and everything that stood in the support structure of the Kom royalty since they knew all of that represented both the spiritual and physical power base to the Kom folk. Though Laikom, where the Fon resided, represented the final destination of the Germans, they were prepared to destroy anything or persons that could be identified as a hindrance to their project of forcefully bringing the Kom under their power matrix. The number of troops who finally embarked on the journey for Kom conquest remains unknown but it suffices to note that the contingent was a large and a mixed one with people of different assignments like soldiers, carriers and leads mostly of African stalk. Upon hearing, that the Germans were finally on the Way to conquer Kom the Fon and his warlords summoned all the intelligence and military disposition in view of ensuring that the Germans were out rightly defeated.

### **Kom War Disposition and Military Tactics**

The dispositions adopted by the Kom people in the war against the Germans fluctuated with time and field realities. Going by War dynamics this was a superb war strategy because of it sufficiently confused and delayed the German soldiers and their commanders to reach their target. The first disposition taken was a scheme undertaken to ensure that non-combatant subjects of the Kom Fondom like Children, disabled, women and the old were advised to relocate to sites further away from the German passage. They were further asked to displace any valuables that could give the German soldiers some form of comfort while in

the Kom land being sure that they were certainly going to run short of material supplies once in the field. With this Kom prepared vested all their hopes in destroying the Germans in the tiny passage in a place called *Antusi* which was a gateway to Kom. In every respect Kom was fighting a defensive War as everything with regards to war was to take place in their terrain which they had a firm mastery. The Antusi campaign, which the Kom held to be the most decisive, failed to yield the desired fruits because the advancing German troops choose to reach Kom via Mejang<sup>[15]</sup>. The failure of the Antusi campaign placed the Kom soldiers and the policies governing it in a quandary. With this, the Germans found access to the Kom land and continued to advance towards Laikom ragging havoc on anything connected to life that they found on their way. Kiawi puts this more graphically when he states that; Heavily armed German soldiers with modern weapons invaded Kom. Their war strategy was to bombard identified soldiers, kill or capture them or any other person that they came across burn houses destroy farms and loot property. They thought that with this barbarian methods, Kom will easily capitulate and the war will end in a few days they described the event as a punitive expedition and as a war of pacification giving the erroneous impression that the Kom-German relations prior to the War was one of master and servant. Thus in this frame of mind, the Kom people were rebellious servants or bold weaklings with undaunted courage which wanted to challenge a great power and ought to be taught a lesson of submissiveness. This confidence proofed to be very misleading to the invaders when they faced the realities presented by the Kom War tactics<sup>[16]</sup>.

Left with no option, the Kom soldiers retreated and concentrated on guerrilla warfare which was complete in ambush together with the hit and run techniques. Though the Germans had superior weapons and surveying instruments, the Kom rugged terrain worked to their disadvantage as it was difficult to spy and locate the enemy from distances as it was obtained in Bafut and Mankon in 1902-3. Kom soldiers targeted the Germans from their caves, ravines and valley hideouts and shortly inflicted heavy casualties on them. Another tactic of War which was unique only to Kom was that of cutting off known bridges to avoid the Germans advancing and to possibly trap them to be able to do their sporadic attacks. However, this tactics of War only delayed the advancement of the German soldiers towards Laikom<sup>[17]</sup> but had its main merit in that it made the German to run out of supplies especially food. As the German military contingent inched forward in spite of the casualties, Kom adopted another technique of faking ceremonies of celebrations were poisoned food was kept and later abandoned. The hungry and tired advancing German troops most often ate this food and died in their numbers. After going through an ambush, road barricades and charm theatres of different sorts along their way to Laikom the German military contingent finally reached Laikom where they were expected to arrest the Fon and end the campaign by ensuring that Kom signed a treaty of total submission. Surprisingly to the Germans they spent three months of active search and waiting in the Palace without setting their eyes on their target the Fon of Kom. With the aid of the palace and Fondom intelligentsia, the Kom Fon had been tactfully taken away to a hideout in a forest in the southern sector meaning that the war was still a long way to victory. In utter dismay, the Germans burnt down the palace and continued to the southern sector where they attempted in vain to get the Fon. Several months were spent but the venture proofed

futile. On the contrary, the Germans lost an elite officer whose corpse was transported and buried at *Tumukuh* where they had set up their camps. With no trace of the Fons and possibilities of further losses accompanied by acute shortages of food and other welfare materials, the Germans abandoned the Kom expedition and retreated to Bamenda via Belo. Though an air of suspense loomed again in Kom for the next six months, the killing of the German officer officially ended the phase of opened combat<sup>[18]</sup>.

### **The Horizons opened and closed by the War**

There was a deal of contrast in the anticipation and expectations of the Germans during and after the war. The war turned out to an opportunity where the confusing strands of command and leadership between the Kom on one hand and the Germans on the other was going to end to rest finally. Since war is usually an affair of a winner deciding the fate of the vanquished, it was anticipated that the Kom soldiers were going to provide the lone exception in the landscape of continuous defeat. However, the War ended in some form of confusion without a clearly calibrated winner and for the time being gave room for both sides to continue to claim victory. It was in August 1905 that things became clear that the war has ended when Captain Hauptmann Glauning returned to Laikom to negotiate the terms of the Peace treaty. This treaty figured out a new relationship equation between the two powers. Among other things, the Kom-German peace Deal or treaty made the Kom Fon to accept that he will more than anytime else, help in the provision of labourers, ensure that the German system of administration and its policies were going to be applied without any alteration within the Kom land, provide the necessary labour for the construction of roads and other works of cooperate essence and cooperate as much as possible to make the Germans build their military stations within the Kom land. In return, the Germans accepted to assist financially to the rebuilding of the Kom Palace and above all to respect and protect the authority of Kom over its vassal states.

### **The Kom German Peace Deal July 4<sup>th</sup> 1905**

Curiously the Kom German peace treaty decided to be silent about the question of princesses being sent in the contingent of those supposed to do manual work either in the plantation or other assignments like road construction. The German found such an issue either too trivial to be handled by such a treaty or sensitive enough for them to remind the Komfon on the issue that caused the war, Since it was the German determining what had to be the terms of the treaty, the Kom Fon and his subjects interpreted that silence to be a tacit recognition of the error and as such a genuine recognition of the immunity vested on royalty as a whole.

The war brought a new orientation in Kom traditional politics within its regional sub setting. It made them to accept though force that colonization and its ramifications had come to stay. It became clear that the traditional system of administration and the European system were supposed to co-exist. This co-existence born out of force and shame needed a lot of readjustments on both sides. The German needed to readjust to be more patient, cautious and kind with the traditional system of administration as it struggled to cope with the new realities. The Kom traditional administration on its part needed to readjust to gradually accommodate the new demands of the Germans and to seek ways of constant pacifications. In the course of this readjustments/changes and adaptation, the Germans discovered that it was wise

to encourage a stronger Kom which could be useful in the maintenance of law, order and could equally help in the propagation of all the different components of German colonial policies.

### **The New horizons of the war to kom**

In any case, the Kom German war effectively turned out to be a tragedy of miscalculation by the belligerent's with a variety of lessons to learn. To the Kom folk and most especially those of the military agency, the war to a very large extent exposed the nudity involved in charms and other detailed spiritual apparatus that found its essence in the bosom of African traditional religion. The question of numbers as a military strength was brought to nought as the few German soldiers generally overpowered the Kom military with its numerical strength. Though there existed very little statistics as to the number of soldiers that were killed on both camps of War, the fact that the Fon of Kom was forced as a result of increasing pressure to relocate to a forest meant in essence that the Kom military might fail short of protecting their own Fon and the sanctuary that justified royal absolutism. For the first time, the Kom military might found itself helpless in the face of an external invader (the Germans) which incidentally forced Fon Yuhfor the first time not only to consider the possibility of sharing his power with another agency but also to see all the need to do so or even play the role of a second fidel. It is true that unlike other wars of resistances in the Grassfields where the Germans defeated some ethnic units and imposed a war indemnity on them, the Kom treaty never had such a clause but the very fact that the Kom Fon was by that expected to provide labourers with as deemed suiting by the German colonial authorities could equally be considered as a disguised form of war indemnity.

On the side of the Germans, it should be recalled that the German authority in the grasslands was in dispute especially over inland polities like Kom but it did not require only a war to ensure that such utter show of disrespect was scatted away. With a bit of gumption complete in pretence and gambit, the probability that the Germans could have still secured the collaboration of the Fon remains high. These were chances the German did not want to take especially as they were driven by the erroneous conviction that the Kom war was going to be just a matter of days. This wrong conviction was further compounded by another grotesque feeling that there was only the conventional war of armed battle. As event presented themselves in the field, the German troops met both a strange and complicated indigenous fighting force that gave them daunting War assignments. The tactics of guerrilla warfare constituted a whole lot of embarrassment to the well-armed and trained to advance German troops. The Kom troops had rudimentary fighting weapons quite alright but their tactics of war proof quite advanced taking the Germans ignorance of the terrain and such tactics into account. Going by the clauses of the treaty a conviction is borne in mind that the Germans were victorious over the Kom like elsewhere in the Grassfields but the lessons drawn from the Kom German war were not only unlike but overwhelmingly strange. It was certainly for these reasons that the Germans decided to drop some of the obnoxious demands that provoke the war.

For sure, the German administrators realized that the use of traditional leaders and their different departments of government could be of help to the Germans in many ways. The first help was that this could mitigate the occurrences of resistance against the

Germans, secondly, it was viewed that such a design could pacified the natives and grant them some chances for total recognition of German supremacy and thirdly, it was thought that this could make it cheap and easier to govern since few Germans will be required to do the supervision. In almost every sense the Germans were right because the natives of the Grassfields in general and Kom, in particular, could only accept and work with the German through the expressed permission of their legitimate traditional authorities. This scheme which ensured the integration of traditional leaders and institutions in government led to gradual "rapprochement" between the different ethnic nations and the Germans. This was due in part by the fact that the administration of Theodore Seitz who succeeded Jesko Von Puttkamer proved to be more responsible, foresighted and giving cautious respect to the native's laws, rights and custom <sup>[19]</sup>. This yielded the fruit of establishing warm relations between the Kom and the Germans. Although Fon Yuh Fukuin I was forced as a result of the German war to escape to the forest at the eastern part of the state, in the neighbourhood of Oku, there was reconciliation later.

This reconciliation gave him security to return to Laikom. In fact, as early as 1906, relations between Kom and German could be described in the main to be warm and cordial. The Fon willingly accepted to continue to provide labour both for the construction of the German station in Bamenda or to work in the German plantations and for road construction.

Also, the German station in Bamenda needed young men to serve in the German army. Following the frequent visits of German administrators to Kom and far more by the friendship treaty signed between the Fon and Captain Clauning on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1905, relations continued to improve. The continuous improvement in relation made the Germans to set up two German military stations in Kom. These were set up in a village called Sho found in present-day Belo sub division and Njinikom. These stations were kept under German commanders who worked with the Fon in maintaining law and order, recruitment of labourers and supervision of road construction work <sup>[20]</sup>. Besides opening up the Kom state to a wider world and its neighbouring chiefdoms, the road construction and constant recruitment of labourers especially among the young active population adversely affected the Kom economy. This was because many young men who constituted the labour force of both the Fon and his state either travelled to the coastal area, Bamenda or to the German barracks. The sub chiefdom used this as an excuse to claim independence from Kom control. This was further polished by the fact that for the first time ever, Foinyuh was defeated and forced to bow to the German. Secondly, after the war, he was misconceived and projected to be heralding the Germans as masters. This could have been taken as true if the Germans never introduced a number of renovations which sought to indirectly unite the nine sub chiefdoms under Kom authority. Among these renovations were the tax system introduced in 1909 and the German school that was opened in 1913.

### **The German Taxation Machine**

In a bid to raise funds that could sustain and sub-vent the cost of German administration in Cameroon, they introduced the tax system in 1902 and it only reached the Grasslands in 1909. It was a form of Head tax which every male was expected to pay. The payment of tax was defined to be each member's contribution to

the welfare of the state. In fact; the Head tax required that each male was to pay six marks which were equal to 30 days of manual labour every year. The Fon of Kom was assigned to collect taxes from his entire state including the entire sub chiefdoms. He was to use all the institutions within the ambit of his administration to collect the taxes and to report any recalcitrant cases to the German colonial government represented by the station commanders. This assignment gave new signals to the sub chiefdoms that Kom authority over them was not only intact but strengthened by the Germans. This confirms the fact that the Germans were always very ready to keep their own part of the peace treaty contract especially in cases that worked in their favour. This dismantled the hopes earlier nursed by these sub chiefdoms to become independent. Empowered as such, Kom retainers under the command of Kwifoyn acting on behalf of the Fon toured the neighbouring villages and chiefdoms collecting taxes and bringing defaulters to book. This new rules subtly established Kom authority over her sub chiefdom and improved upon the welfare of the traditional folk <sup>[21]</sup>.

It was not only taxation alone that moderated traditional diplomacy of Kom at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Another feature of German colonial administration was Christianity and education. Unlike Britain which sometimes painted her colonial missions over her colonies to be purely philanthropic (civilizing mission), Germany did not pretend. She was not ready to disguise herself as “good angel” or as a philanthropist. Her mission, conduct and principles in every way and almost anywhere sought to arrogate herself as economists who were ready to make maximum gain even with little or no investment. It was for these reasons that the implantation of Christian missions did not constitute a prime place in their colonial agenda particularly in Cameroon. This notwithstanding, the Catholic missionary society that had obtained permission to operate in non-protestant areas in Kamerun extended its missionary activities from Bajongo to Nso and Kom in 1913. This was the second missionary body in the Grass fields. It was second to the Basel mission that was established in Bali in 1903.

In keeping with the philosophy of German interest first and by ensuring maximum control at minimal cost, the German accepted the Catholic missionaries because they thought that such a scheme will provide informed clerks, messengers, interpreters and other auxiliary agents that could help their stations. Missionaries could equally help to implant schools where the German language, culture and greatness could be taught. Embedded in such reflections, the Germans opened up the Grass fields to missionary bodies. As indicated, the Catholic mission started their first church at Fujua in 1913. It should be understood here that the catholic mission aims in the Grass fields reflected the German expectations to a very limited extent. They were not simply out to train clerks, interpreters and informed auxiliary agents of the Germany administration but were also to preach and extend Christianity to larger parts of the Grass fields. Logically, the training of such agents was not really part of the missionaries’ agenda. They were burdened with the problem of evangelization and therefore contemplated to establish strategies to penetrate the heathen. To sustain the missionary work, a missionary school was opened in the church premises.

Following the hostilities that existed in Cameroon against pro-German sentiments after the departure of the Germans by February 1916, the soldiers interned at Fernando-Po were not

immediately sent back home. In fact; from 1915 to 1919, they were kept in this island which was largely a Roman Catholic territory. Most of them embraced Christianity both as a way of life and as a religion. Secondly, most of them became accustomed to a new system of life where the modern (European) administration determined public and individual conduct, not the Fon. Thirdly, their association with the Christian brand of Europeans made them to understand that, there were fundamental differences in the character of the black and white race. Based on this, most of them saw the officials of the Church as trusted friends. Such feelings brought a lot of mixed sentiments to the Grasslands including Kom when they were released and sent home in 1919. This situation is vividly painted by Jacqueline de Varies when she emphasizes that <sup>[22]</sup>.

Nonetheless, their service in the German army left strong impressions on the recruits. Living and working in continuous direct contact with the Germans gave these men an intensive introduction to (a particular brand) of western culture. As for the case for the migrants from Kom who had been away to work in the German 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 the Europeans for a continuous stretch of about five years. Their immersion in that particular Wartime society of interned Germans mostly soldiers presumably all Christians, had great repercussions on the development of Christianity in Kom, for it was the returning soldiers who re-established the Catholic Church in Njinikom <sup>[23]</sup>. A feature of mixed blessings brought forward in this testimony is the brand of plantation workers who had served in the German plantations. Upon return to Kom, they saw themselves as having been endowed with great values, wealth and prestige. With such self-acclaimed rankings, they conferred upon themselves a class beyond common compare, which most of the time fuelled tension and confusion in the traditional order. All of these new opportunities produced by the demands of the Indirect Rule gave Fon Ngam (chief) the impunity to rule the Kom state by Decree <sup>[24]</sup>. He concentrated his policies within the tax collection paradigm to impose Kom hegemony over Kom proper and his vassal states. However, Ngam in spite of this empowerment faced a serious internal problem from the Christians of the Catholic Church in Kom. The problem made him to be considered as a virulent anti-Christian monarch as Walters Chemfom bong indicated that; Chief Ngam would appear to have been an intolerant conservative Autocrat who was unwilling to have anything to do with the Christian Mission in his district. It would also appear that his intransigence which prevented his subjects from joining the new faith freely caused him enormous problem as far as the implementation of his Native Administration policies was concerned <sup>[25]</sup>.

This evidence clearly indicates that Fon Ngam placed himself at odds with the Catholic mission in his state referred to them, as a district. Though not mentioned here, the anti-Christian attitude of the Fon was provoked by the repeated challenges on his authority from the first Kom catechist Michael Timngeng. This challenge came to the apex in 1924 when many royal wives (wives of Ngam) escaped from the palace and sought refuge at Njinikom. In a desperate attempt to bring them back, the Fon met with concerted resistance from the new Christian converts residing at Njinikom under the leadership of Michael Timngeng. The struggle

made the Fon to authorize the banning of the church by a traditional seal. Record <sup>[26]</sup> concurs on the fact that the D.O of Bamenda after following every bid of the palaver, publicly humiliated the Fon. Evidence of this humiliating drama that demonstrated how far the D. O was ready to infringe on the authority of the Fon read, [...] 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 Ngong Fendoh 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 than to succumb as he was commanded <sup>[27]</sup>.

Though it is an established fact that the resident intervention led to the opening of the church by the Fon himself, the above evidence seem to bear an exaggerated dramatization or magnification as the existing administration at the time presented the same situation more subtly in the following words, "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 of the church" <sup>[28]</sup>.

It stands clear that the empowerment of Fons as native authorities and the attribution of functions went alongside jurisprudence. This practice gained weight during the British era but its roots were traced as far. The British officials in the course of the application of the indirect rule cared little about the personal pride of the Fons a situation which the Fon considered to be a stab on his back. We do not argue in absolute terms that this action reduced Fon Ngam to the level of a potent force of only tax collection. This is because, considering the other attributes of the systems which favoured the Fons, this could be considered as just an unfortunate episode in the records of an empowered NA (Fon Ngam). However, it had a lasting impact in Kom diplomacy because until his death in June 1926, he voluntarily decided to keep Njinikom out of his ambit (sphere) of administration.

Secondly, political developments in Nigeria made it in such a way that the residents D. O and other British officials were either appointed or transferred from there. Additionally, all ordinances of land, law and education were fabricated or issued from Nigeria. It was this evolution that led to the introduction of the indirect rule, Clifford's constitution, the Native authorities and local government. Each of these transformations affected Kom relations with her neighbours within her regional sub-setting. Concretely, the Native authority introduced brought about Native courts and the Native treasuries. The Native court that was created in Kom in 1927 helped to increase the powers of the Fon. The native authority court which in principle replaced the customary court that was in the Fons palace took over the settling of disputes presided by the Fon. Although the Fon going by his level of awareness had a faint knowledge of justice within the preview of European understanding, he managed to rule almost by degree. The village court and the councils continued to handle cases within the scope of their jurisdictions. The native court of Kom like those of their neighbours with centralized administration became courts of the second instance having the capacity of handling cases from the village councils. It was only the D. O. who had the latitude to repeal cases of the native court. Some of them could be referred to as the commissioner or resident for satisfactory solutions.

The powers bestowed on the Native Authority (Fon) gave him extensive rights over his people. The Kom Fon (Ndi) interpreted the tax policy to be a way for him to exert his supremacy over his sub chiefdoms. It gave him opportunities to employ the full use of Kwifoyn and the palace retainer to collect taxes for the colonial enterprise. The main handicap of the tax collection programme in Kom came from the Christians. They opposed the tax and the court projects for two reasons. The first was the fact that the tax policy did not take into account their economic situation and was by such considerations considered unfair and secondly, they held the judgement of cases by non-Christians to be based on empty figments of traditions which bore no relevance to the biblical teachings. To these points could be added the fact that their Christian standings made them to put the effectiveness of laws issued by ordinary mortals to question. It should be noted that relations between Fon Ngam and Christians in Njinikom grew so rigid to the extent that the Fon refused to collect taxes from them. Since the British colonial administration desperately relied on these taxes, a Christian was appointed to do the job. Some sources argue that the Njinikom Christians established their own juridical system and method of tax collection as found in the following evidence put forward by Jacqueline Des Vries, One Christian was appointed to collect taxes from among the converts and another from the catechumen because many of the Christians resided in other quarters or outside the actual bounds of Njinikom. These men had no idea of the number of people from whom they should collect taxes and as a result, numerous [tax] evasions resulted. The authority of the elders had been so weakened that they did not even know those who were living in their respective areas of residence [...]. By November, a large proportion of the tax was still outstanding and the Chief of Kom 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 effort of the inhabitants were merely directed towards the church than the supply of information <sup>[29]</sup>.

The right to the collection of taxes by a Christian at Njinikom was short-lived. This came about because it was judged in the colonial circles that such a right to an ordinary native was not only at variance with the indirect rule system but sought to arrogate Kom Christians and the Njinikom kith as an extraordinary breed of individuals which could encourage them to be recalcitrant to established authorities.

Christianity, internal squabbles between the members of the royal family, confusion and reluctant adjustment to foreign models by the Fon and his local representatives were the key characteristics of Fon Ngam reign 1912-26. To this can be added the complicated problems of administration created by his predecessor Yuh I during his close to half a century leadership of Kom. Fon Ngam had the misfortune of inheriting a vast state formed through alternating diplomatic strategies and in the process of adaptation to change. The public humiliation he got from the colonial government proved that his enemies were from three different realms. There were; British colonial government, the Catholic missionaries and semi-educated Christian elite. As indicated earlier, Ngam died in June 1926 and was succeeded by his brother Ndi.

## Conclusion

The Kom German war was one of kind apart. It was similar to other wars of resistances in the grasslands and elsewhere in



Africa especially at the heights of its origin but diametrically different in its characteristics and the horizons it opened and closed. In the first place, the Kom local army though not regular performed far better and even exceptional than expected by the advancing German squad. Upon departure from their main camp in Bamenda, the Germans were sure of a very swift battle and so their success in the war was not a matter of anticipation but apt certitude. The events/episodes of the war turned out to be a hall of embarrassments as the German soldiers were repeatedly halted, forced to retreat, or even killed by the Kom local squad. To a very large extent, the mastery of the terrain plus coordinated attacks played so well against the German folk and for some time brought their military prowess to a quandary. However, such actions only delayed the war as the German finally reached Laikom and ransacked the seat of the Fon plus the precious artillery that formed the basis for the people wellbeing. By 1905, it became clear both to the Germans and to the Kom traditional authorities that the wear project was no longer sustainable and the only way forward was to strike a deal that could end it. Though the clear victor in the war remained eclipsed in the orbit of doubts, the Kom military folk came to the nude realities of their much-acclaimed traditional militia which moral and even physical strength depended on an elastic belief in the intricacies of African traditional religion and anything related to the local perception of war.

Except for the Bums in the Northern sector who had recorded a surprise defeat to the Kom military squad, the Kom German War though short by German expectations presented serious nightmares to the prestige of Fon Yuh. For once in the military history of the Kom Fandom, the Fon was forced by circumstances beyond his control to escape out of his fief and to seek refuge in the bush far away from Laikom then. Concerning power and leadership tenure a matrix of cohabitation where the Kom traditional authority was accountable to the German administration as worked out during the 1905 Kom-German peace deal. The Kom German war was indeed short going by time span but enormous in impact as it negotiated and paved a crucial path leading to the fortunes of the Germans in the WWI in Cameroon in particular and African at large.

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