



The Presentation of the Bafaw People of the South West Region of Cameroon as an Outshoot of the 2022 Interdisciplinary Week Activities of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) Kumba

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Abstract: The Interdisciplinary week of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) Kumba has as one of its goals to expose the different cultures of the Anglophone extraction of Cameroon. This article presents the Bafaw tribe of Meme Division of the South West Region of Cameroon whose origin can be retraced from the great Esambe Ngoe of the Mbo plain. It takes into consideration its culture, and the institutions of: the family, religious orientations and economic practices. The methodology used is qualitative and the findings portray that the Bafaw are very hospitable, with a cherished culture and cultural practices, well defined institutions of the family, religious and industrious in its economic persuade through business, fishing and coca cultivation. The practice of Christianity has little or no conflict with the culture/tradition of the Bafaw. This is evident as the Paramount Ruler of the Bafaw and Chief of Kumba, His Royal Majesty, Nfon Mukete IV Ekoko is an astute believer and follower of Jesus Christ, a tradition which started with his Late Grand Father Chief Abel Nkembone MUKETE one of the pioneers who led the transition of the Basel Mission to the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, an exercise which took place at his Palace, where most activities of the early Presbyterian Church were done, and was passed through the Late Senator Nfon Emeritus VE MUKETE who later handed the mantle to HRM MUKETE IV EKOKO. The Development and Social Studies Department of the PTS, benefited from the informed knowledge of the Bafaw which has enabled pastors on training to acquire informed practices that will help them in practicing pastoral ministry, and in the Anglophone Cameroon in particular.

Keywords: Presentation, Bafaw People, South West Region, Cameroon, Outshoot, Interdisciplinary, Activities, Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) Kumba.



Fig 1. The Various cultural regalia of some tribes/clans of Anglophone Cameroon during the 2021/2022 Interdisciplinary Week at the PTS Kumba-Cameroon

Introduction

The 2022/2023 academic year interdisciplinary week of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary Kumba-Cameroon stems from a long background of a week set aside at the middle of the semester as a break for students and lecturers to reflect on what has passed in the previous semester and lay grounds for the rest of the semester. In 2012, students decided to bring out “nkoh”¹ as one of the ways of demonstrating a culture. As a response, it brought about a lot of discussing between the indigenous staff and the fraternal workers on the relationship between culture and Christianity. From the mystical ramifications behind the ‘Nkoh’ as one of the representatives of dreadful cultural Masquerades of the Anglophone tribes/clans in Cameroon, a worry was raised if such should be presented in the Seminary milieu. As a result from the debates between the faculty members and the Seminary Community at large, the name of the mid-semester activities was changed from ‘intercultural week’ to ‘interdisciplinary week’. This change of name however did not completely eradicate the presentations of some of the rich cultural practices of the people².

Unlike previous years, the academic year 2022/2023 was characterized by series of other innovations such as:

- **Cultural parade:** In this activity, selected students who represented the various clans and tribes displayed and interpreted their various cultural fabrics, the various symbols found on the cultural fabrics, meanings of other cultural items, demonstrating the material and none material aspects of Anglophone cultures in Cameroon. It was possible to trace the origins and identities of the various rich cultures from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Cultural dishes:** Cultural dishes such as “*Mpuh*”³, *Kwacoco*⁴, Kiban, njasi and *katikati*⁵, *achu*⁶, *ekwang*⁷,” amongst others. These were accompanied with cultural drinks such as “*Nchang/sha*”⁸

¹ One of the dreadful Masquerades of the Nso People of the North west regions of Cameroon

² Presentation by Rev. Prof Mbengu David, Dean PTS kumba at the opening of the 2022/2022 Interdisciplanry week at the Women Centre, PTS Kumba

³ A white flavoured sauce mostly eaten in tribes/clan of the south west regions of Cameroon. The key ingredient is fish.

⁴ Kwacoco is a traditional Bakweri dish. It is made from processing cocoyam ,mixed with ingredients, wrapped in banana leaves and steam to cook

⁵ Fufu, njamanjama and katikati is the traditional meal of the NSO, Mbum, Wum and many tribes and clans of the North West Regions of Cameroon

⁶ Achu is a traditional meal of the Bafut, Nkwen, Mankon and many other trines and clans in the North West regions of Cameroon. It consist of Yellow soup because of it color paid with mashed cocoyam

⁷ Traditional meal of the Bafaw, Oroko and Bakweri of the South West Region of Cameroon.

⁸ Nkang/Sha is a Cultural drink produced by the NSO, Wimum and some tribes in the North West Regions of Cameroon. It is a product of fermented maize which is grounded and brewed into local corn ligour and mostly consumed by people of the North West Region of Cameroon

particularly from the *Nso* land and fresh palm wine from *Kokobuma*. Also, with Kolanuts, pepper, *banyete*(garden eggs) known as “njakatu” and groundnut paste.

- **Traditional dances:** Traditional dances from the North West and South West were equally presented by students. These cultural dances together with the various costumes and dance steps brought out the beauty of social interactions between indigenes from different cultural backgrounds in Anglophone Cameroon.

It was therefore deemed necessary for these rich displays to be made public by identifying one of the tribes in the Anglophone Cameroon, the one which has played a major role in the history of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary Kumba- Cameroon, by offering the vast land where the institution is located-the Bafaw. Zimmermann 2000:89 attest to the fact that a plot was bought at Matoh Road with the size of 21.4 hectares. Oral source attribute this transaction to the Late Nfon Emeritus Victor E. Mukete who also embraced Christianity in his kingdom and was a fervent Christian until his passing away to join his ancestors. His son who succeeded him, the present Chief and paramount Nfon of the Bafaw people, Nfon Ekoko Mukete IV; following in his father’s footsteps has also embrace and is practicing Christianity as a Christian of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. As an outshoot of the interdisciplinary week events, this paper therefore seeks to present the Bafaw people of the South West Region of Cameroon with special consideration to their history (brief), culture, cultural symbols, the economic and religious institutions.

Historical Background of the Bafaw People

The origin and settlement of the Bafaw clan.

The Bafaw were (and still are) generous, hospitable, homogeneous and patrilineal people before colonialism stepped in and dismantled the organization of this society. Their generosity and hospitality led to the influx of lots of strangers who came to work and live with them in peace and harmony. The history of the Bafaw can be retraced from the great EsambeNgoe from the Mbo plains who settled at a place called “Mashue” found near *Kokobuma* (one of the ten Bafaw villages). One of his sons, who was a fearless hunter named *Midiki Uke Bokeng* went hunting and founded Kumba around 1640. He was discovered under an umbrella tree called “Ekomba” in Bafaw by a Portuguese explorer. When asked what his names were, he thought the explorer asked what the name of the tree was, so he said “Ekomba” and the explorer wrote down “Kumba”. Hence the name “Kumba” today which the real name of the village is “Midiki” named after MidikiBokeng, the founder. This simple mistake was done owing to the language barrier. The explorer could not understand Lifo (Bafaw Language) and Midiki could not understand Portuguese. Bafaw in real was called *n’faw* which means “one” (Chia, Tanda&Neba 2011).

A historian and native from the Bafaw clan Professor Lovert Elango reveals that the Bafaw would have hailed from a location called “Nwekan”, boarding the ‘Mbo’ plain- an infertile barren area. Following the admonition of their ancestor to move in a south watery direction so as to meet with the Mibungu (Albinos or the whiteman) most probably the Germans who would provide them with Whiskies in abundance. They then set out in the sunset; “Mwekens” which according to this source, is certainly the place of its origin. It is stated that the Nfaw formerly inhabited the country to the East and North of ‘Kokobuma’. Their first settlement after leavingMwekan was in Bakossi land where they sojourned for some time. They were founders of a number of settlements around Nyandong. Elung was one of the biggest of the villages they founded. One of the historical fact attest that the Bafaw’s and the Elung’s interacted peacefully/friendly , sealed by intermarriages with the Bakossi people (Chia, Tanda& Neba,2011:2-3). What brought problems between them was the clash over fishing rights on the Mungo River. They also clashed over land and women (Njume, 2000:9). These clashes led to fierce battles between the Bakossi and Bafaw in Kurume village.

They continued their southward movement along the Meme River basin (Ndian River) , they founded many villages including Kumba which is now, the capital of Meme Division. Kumba since became the main settlement of the Bafaw people. BeyondKumba, their southward drive in quest of the Germans was checked by the Ekombe war and so, they halted at Dieka and Njanga. Their traders moved into the Ndian river valley which was a major centre of commerce at that time considering

the fact that this river emptied into the Rio-de-Rei- an active and famous slave trade route in the 19th Century. Some of the Bafaw traded as far as Calabar. From Kumba, some extended their commercial activities via the river Wouri while others settled in the Mudambe from where they could easily access Douala for trade.

According to Chia, TandaandNeba (2011:1), the Bafaw in their history are a reliable, hardworking, proud and yet friendly, generous and royal people with a long and covetous pedigree. Their generosity throughout time has drawn in friends from all over the world who according to insider opinion, always overwhelmed them.

This can be seen in the village of Kumba where many seem not to accept that Kumba is a Bafaw village due to the hospitable nature of the Bafaw people-welcoming all from different cultures without ‘negative’ tribalistic tendencies. This is demonstrated in the life of living together in peace and harmony between inhabitants of Kumba city. There is no element of xenophobia exhibited.

Socio-Cultural Activities

The Villages and Language.



Fig 2. A view of the Bafaw Fabric

1. Kokobuma (Ekobum)
2. Kombone Bafaw (Kombone)
3. Bolo
4. Dikomi (Likum)
5. Kurume (Krumeu)
6. Ekiliwindi (Kindi)
7. Mambanda (Mamban)
8. Kumba (Ekumba)
9. Dieka
10. Njanga

The first six villages are situated along the Kumba – Mamfe road in Konye Subdivision; 7 and 8 are within Kumba Central while 9 and 10 are further south, precisely in the Mbongwe Subdivision and they speak the Bafaw language which have slight variation due to their settlements.

The people from around Kokobuma down to Dikomi according to Chia, Tanda&Neba (2011:7), use a variety of Bafaw language commonly referred to as *Litom*. From Kurume down to Kumba use the *Lifor* while a third variety is spoken by the people of Njanga and Dieka. But in all of these, the major variety of language spoken by the Bafaw people remains the *Lifor* due to the size and dynamism of its population of speakers. These varieties are of course mutually intelligible but differ in prestige and accent so that the native speakers are able to identify themselves as belonging to one or the other on the basis of their speech characteristics.

With the above discussions about the Bafaw people relating it to their background, origin, culture, settlement, language and villages, this paper will commence with the various cultural symbols of the Bafaw people.

The Cultural Symbolism of items on the Bafaw Traditional Fabric.

The Bafaw people have a rich fabric that belongs to the Bafaw Cultural and Development Association (BAFCUDA) won by them in various occasions and they can be identified by the attire even at a distance. The men put it on as a *nsanjaover* a well decorated shirt preferably white which signifies brightness, purity, holiness and peace; the women put it on as a *kaba as presented in fig 2*



Fig 3. Bafaw Natives in their Bafaw Attire

Club or Staff with Hairs or Broom

In the Lifo, this is called “elodi’nfon” which symbolizes authority. The Bafaw man holds it in his right hand when walking, sitting or standing. He uses it to greet people and to command authority.

Traditional Circular Matchet (peh e ngve)

The Bafaw man is naturally hardworking. He uses the matchet particularly for farming. He carries a matchet as a sign of his readiness to work when need arises.

Small Sac (ekpadi'nfon)

This symbolizes wealth. The land of the Bafaw people is a very fertile land in terms of production. This gives the people riches for real wealth is in land for God has blessed the Bafaw with a lot of land. The Bafaw man carries the *ekpadi'nfonas* a symbol that he is wealthy and at all times there must be something good from the bag to share.

Drum (nguum)

This drum is used to pass out a message especially when someone dies or the Nfon needs the presence of the villagers to assemble at the palace for an important information or discussion.

Small Clubs to hit the Drum (nteh)

The *nteh* is used to play the *nguum*. The *nguum* is played with various sounds depending on the message it is passing out. For example, the sound played by the *nteh* when someone dies is different from the sound played when the *Nfon* wants the people to assemble also different from the sound played when there is a good news such as childbirth of the *Nfon's* wife.

Conical Metal Ngong (nkenge)

Just as any other metal ngong for music, the *nkengis* used by the Bafaw man to announce the arrival of the *Nfonor* to usher him into a ceremony. This is played only by a traditional counsellor selected or appointed for that purpose. Not anyone is allowed to play the *nkengeas* well as the *nguum*.

Plantain Stock Symbolism

The image of a plantain represents fertility in Bafo (Bafaw). This was significant in the *Dibala* festival (an annual festival by the people) where women of child bearing age having difficulty to conceive were expected to take in pregnancy after the *DibalaFeastival*.

Cocoa Plant

It signifies the activity the Bafaw people are specialized on. Apart from just food crops from their farms, the Bafaw man also does production of cocoa which boost their economy. This production helps the country's economy to boom due to the efforts the people put in from their farms.

River with Woman doing Fishing

As the Bafaw man embarks on farming, the women also engage in fishing in their river *elongo* commonly known as "Kumba Water". To be able to be a successful fisherwoman, you must be initiated into the *wolua* group. This group is made up of women who are known to be specialist in fishing.

The Motor (Mulatakun'dinginya)

The Bafaw people believe in unity (as in the meaning of Bafaw "n'faw" which means "oneness") that is why their motor "*mulatakun'dinginya*" which means "unity is strength" can be seen with their hospitable manner towards others of various tribes in which this has helped some of their villages such as Ekumba, Mambanda, Ikiliwindi to grow in terms of development.

Cap with Eagle Feathers (anyapu), Wrists and Neck Chains

A black cap "*anyapu*" is worn by the men with or without the feathers, a red long cap is worn by the traditional counsellors and the Nfon puts on the black cap decorated with cowries and a red eagle feather which he can easily be identified by strangers due to its distinct appearance. Wrists and neck chains made of cowries are worn by both the men and the women to beautify their attire.



Fig 4. NfonMukete IVEkoko, Paramount Nfon of the Bafaw

Other Cultural Aspects of the Bafaw People

Cultural Dishes

The people as earlier stated are hardworking and it can be seen in their delicacies such as plantain and *mpu* in which the *mpu* could be prepared with pork but preferable with fish since the women are good in fishing. They also have plantain and koki beans, *ngulangu* which is mostly prepared specially during baby showers. *Belembe* and plantain is a special meal not prepared by any hand but by specialist, this *belembe* is prepared using cocoyam leaves.



Fig. 5. Garden Eggs



Fig. 6. Plantains & Garden Eggs Sauce



Fig. 7. Mpu & Plantains



Fig. 8. Koki & Plantains

Drinks

The natural palm wine tapped without any additional substance added to it has been a traditional drink from time immemorial. They enjoy this drink better with kola nuts and pepper or with garden egg and groundnut paste.

During traditional marriages, a Bafaw bride receives a calabash cup of fresh palm wine from her father or from the family head while kneeling or bowing down and takes it to her groom to publicly declare her marriage to him.

Festivals

The Bafaw people have an annual festival called “Mbum Bafaw” which brings together all the Bafaw people from all ten villages in order to celebrate, thank God, meet each other and to discuss issues governing their villages.

The villages also organize an event annually called “Dibala” in which women who cannot give birth are cleansed through a ritual and are expected to be pregnant after the festival. The Bafaw people are fertile and so they do not believe that some people are meant to be without off springs.

Inheritance

The Bafaw man believes that children are a special gift from God and so he treats all his children equally but gives special preferences to the male child in whom he relies on to continue the family name. A Bafaw man wills his inheritance to his children also giving some property to his female child which may not be the case in other cultures.

The Nfon also hands power to any of his sons to succeed him not necessarily the eldest son. The 10 family heads of the 10 *founding families* of kumba make up the king makers who organize the smooth succession from one Nfon to the other when the Nfon goes on to meet with his ancestors.

Their Dance (nasanki)

This is a special dance *nasanki* by the Bafaw people who dance using their backs as the major display. Their traditional music when played cannot go unnoticed as one will find him/herself joining in the dance even without dancing in the group.

The Economic Realities of the Bafaw

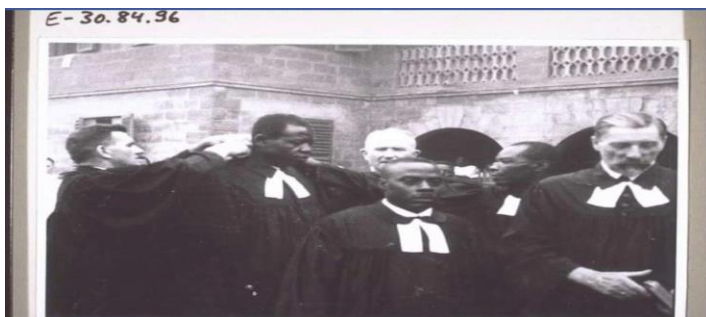
In the past according to Dunda (1922:10), the Bafaw were reputed to excel in fishing and trade. Today as recorded in the 2021 survey carried out by the Kumba City Council, they, Bafaw, have become more sedentary. They excel in farming, producing cocoa, palm oil, rubber and coffee and in the recent past, they have been the major foreign currency earners for the South West region of Cameroon and Cameroon as a whole. It has two main markets-Kumba and Fiango markets and several smaller markets created by farmers who bring food items directly from their farms to sell in these markets. Buyers come from all over Cameroon especially Buea and Douala the economic headquarters of Cameroon. Also, the high rate of business in Kumba has not only attracted Cameroonians from other regions like the Bamilikis from the West region, but also Nigerian traders, particularly the Igbo's and the Yoruba's who owned more than sixty percent of the shops in the markets. Trade/businesses in these markets are controlled by the city council and the taxes collected from traders by the councils are used for the socio-economic development of the zone.

Their Beliefs (Religious institution realities)

The Bafaw believe in a Supreme Being, a God they worshiped before Christianity surfaced. With the advent of Christianity, some Bafaw are converted to other religious creeds but their fervent prayer still remains: “*pray for love, unity and togetherness. Pray for good health, success and happiness*”. As evident in the religious activities of the Paramount Nfon of the Bafaw, Christianity has taken its roots in the Kingdom. Christian denominations take their turns in the palace, praying, reading of the scripture, preaching the Word and praising God together with the Nfon and the entire Royal family. Majority of the Bafaw are Protestant Christians. Among the Protestant are the Presbyterians, the Baptist and evangelical, Full Gospel and Apostolic Missions (Pentecostals). There is also the

presence of a good number of the Roman Catholic Churches where a good number of Bafaw also worship. Some of these religious institutions function in a well-structured and organized manner. They also provide socio-economic and spiritual services to their communities. These services include schools, hospitals, training centers as well as houses of worship (Churches)⁹. The land on which the Presbyterian Theological Seminary is built on was given to the PCC by the Paramount Nfon of Bafaw, Nfon V. E. Mukete of blessed memory.

As a matter of fact, Christianity and Christian values have deep roots in the Bafaw tribe. As early as 1945, the old palace of late Chief Abel Mukete was constantly used as venue for the ordination of Basel Mission pastors. Interestingly, one of the main tools for leadership that the late Nfon V.E. Mukete, handed to his successor was a Bible. The Bible is considered by many, a great book that has the potential to inspire good leadership. In the 1880's at the establishment of the Presbyterian Church Kumba Town, it is noted that it was the late Chief Abel Mukete, grandfather to NfonMukete IV, Ekoko who gave up choice land for its construction (Elonge, Mukwelle, Collie, 2021:6).



ROOT ROCK Picture Archive.

Title: "An ordination in Kumba at District Chief Abel Nkembone's palace."

Creator: Wildi, Hans (Mr)

Date: 01.01.1930-31.12.1945

Figure 9: Ordination of Basel Mission Pastors, 1945.

Conclusion

The Bafaw culture stands out prestigiously to boost the morale of the entire South West Region of Cameroon in many ways. The hospitable character of the people has been applauded by many even though some take their welcoming nature as weakness. There is definitely no way someone can talk about culture in the South West Region without mentioning the uniqueness of the N'faw culture. With their lands, they are wealthy people; with their religion, they are religious people; with various educational facilities in their land, they are educated people. If some cultures whose attitudes sends people away from them could emulate the kind of mindset of the Bafaw people towards bringing humanity together which is "unity is strength, oneness", then, the Anglophones, the Cameroon nation and the world would be better a place.

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