Review Article

The Ordeal of Traditional Authorities and Sacraments in the Cameroon Anglophone Armed Conflict

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Abstract: One of the main challenges that the world and Africa have faced for the past fifty years has been the proliferation of armed conflicts. These armed conflicts mostly occurred paradoxically in areas rich with a variety of cultural heritage. In fact, since WWII, several areas harboring rich cultural heritages have been destroyed by armed conflicts. Frequent armed conflicts turn to destroy the cultural heritage which is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, and values. In reality, cultural heritage can provide an automatic sense of unity and belonging within a group and permit people to better understand previous generations and the history of where they come from. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate how the armed conflicts in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon (North West and South West regions) are gradually destroying the cultural heritages of communities that live in these two regions. The main question posed in this study is: what are the stakes of armed conflict on the socio-cultural heritage of the English-speaking regions of the republic of Cameroon? How can cultural heritage awareness contribute in resolving the armed conflicts in the area? And finally, what is the future of the people without a cultural background? This cultural effacement has been substantiated by the burning and profanation of traditional palaces with all their contents as well as, the looting, kidnapping, torture, and even killing of traditional authorities who prior to the War held the affidavit of all forms of unity, love and power within these traditional communities. Findings in this paper revealed that, so far, the armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon has seriously affected the socio-cultural heritage of several communities in the area of study The fact too that armed combatants of this region have rather concentrated on eradicating all the entire paraphernalia of chieftaincies and its network of norms f hierarchy has made the palaces hitherto held to be sanctuary of all cultures to become unsecured thereby, causing the fons to flee for survival elsewhere, also indicates the pressure brought by this armed conflicts to local norms and traditions. It submits that war does far more than kill just belligerents as it sinks far deep into the yards of effacing established customs and traditions that provide the adhesive threads for most generations. This submission is therefore valid not just for the current armed conflict plaguing the Anglophone regions of Cameroon but also for any society that has resulted to seek justice through armed conflict.
Keywords: Armed Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Cultural Heritage, and Chieftaincy.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges humanity has constantly been confronted with is armed conflict. Man's greatest fear apart of death is war and lately, the fear factor has been accentuated by the growth of War associated factors like violence, hatred, disease, and terrorism. The consequences of conflicts are so far-reaching. An outbreak of conflict anywhere can lead to

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conflict everywhere. How would the world look like today in terms of development if WWI, WWII, and other internal wars had not taken place? That is why peace is the key to all forms of development and violence is a threat to development. As a matter of fact, one of the main aspects of human existence that has witnessed serious destruction in the past centuries is cultural heritage. In reality, cultural heritage which provides an automatic sense of unity and belonging within a group and allows us to better understand previous generations and the history of where we come from is under serious threat as a result of armed conflict. The North West and South West Regions of Cameroon for the past few years have been subject to serious violent conflict arising from a conflagration of issues owing both to governance misconduct and a claimed incompatibility of two broad cultures that were erected by colonialism. Violence and armed confrontation in this crisis have been the business of various and differing armed groups that have adopted uncouth guerilla warfare techniques on Cameroon's regular forces and again on anything or personality on the structure and system of governance in Cameroon. Apart from the human and material losses, the cultural heritage of the communities in the area has greatly been tampered with. This is the case with the chieftaincy institution which does not only represent the home of the traditional authority, but a place where all artifacts representing the people's history are kept. One of the most noticeable features of the socio-cultural heritage of the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon is the chieftaincy institution; however, with the outbreak of armed conflict in the two regions since 2016, the chieftaincy institution that incarnated the cultural heritage of communities in the area is under serious threat. The essence of this paper is to establish the implication of the armed conflicts on the cultural heritage incarnated by chieftaincy on communities of the North West and South West Region of Cameroon.

Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflicts

Culture is defined as all of the factors that represent all material and spiritual values created in the process of historical and social development. It is also all the factors used to convey to the next generation, indicating the extent of the sovereignty of man's natural and social environment. [i] Culture is transferred from generation to generation. This transfer of culture from generation to generation is defined as heritage and that's what makes it important, In actual fact, in people's life, the transformation of concepts and goods into symbols for various reasons constitutes a phenomenon called "Culture". [ii] Cultural Heritage is a reflection of people's ever-changing values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions that have reached today. Cultural Heritage covers all tangible and non-tangible assets. Cultural heritage includes all the features of the environment, stemming from the intermingling of people and places over time. On the other hand, armed conflicts are defined as political conflicts where the use of armed force by two parties of which at least one is the Government of a State results in at least 25 battle-related deaths. A 'major armed conflict' is a war between states and a current political conflict within a State in which armed fighting or clashes between Government forces and its opponents result in at least 1,000 deaths in the course of the conflict. [iii]

Armed conflicts within States are political conflicts involving citizens fighting for internal change. [iv] Some are secessionist movements, generally spearheaded by a group of people, more often than not a minority within a community, who take up arms to fight for the establishment of either an autonomous entity within an existing state or an entirely new and independent state of their own. This is the case with the situation in the North West and southwest regions of Cameroon.

Present-day internal wars typically take a heavier toll on civilians than inter-State wars, and because combatants increasingly have made targeting cultural heritages a strategic objective and in total disregard to the 1954 Hague Convention on the protection of cultural property. [v] Emma Cunliffe, Paul Fox, and Peter Stone argue that looting and destruction of cultural heritage has been a feature of armed conflict for almost as long as we have records of conflict. [vi] For thousands of years it was perceived as the right of the victor to take an enemy's property and destroy what could not be taken. The authors further opine that for millennia, attempts have been made to limit war, and set standards for troop conduct. Military theorists from Sun Tzu in 6th century BC China to von Clausewitz in 19th century Europe have argued that damaging and destroying the cultural heritage of vanquished enemies is bad military practice. [vii] Lieber's codification of the Articles of War in 1863 – part of an attempt to provide ethical guidance during a bitter civil war - included clauses specifically protecting museum collections and libraries. These clauses were repeated and developed in the ensuing Hague Conventions on land warfare of 1899 and 1907. However, it was not until after the widespread destruction of cultural property in the Second World War that new international laws were written, focusing exclusively on the protection of cultural property in armed conflict – the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and its First Protocol (1954).

Ni Komang Erviani in the daily journal, "The Jakarta Post" writes that; Cultural heritage across the world has been increasingly targeted in times of armed conflict in the last decade. UNESCO's director for culture and emergencies LazareEloundouAssomo said at an international event last month in Bali that there was a kind of change in the way cultural heritage was targeted. [viii] Not only because of conflict. Culture

becomes the target itself to deny people's cultural identity, to deny people dignity and also to destruct their social fabric and social life. In the last decade, cultural heritage has been increasingly targeted. [ix] Dacia Viejo-Rose and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen remarks that cultural heritage is an important agent in the interfacing between cultures generally and the specificities of politics. [x] The authors maintain that Analyses of this intersection have therefore become an important field within heritage studies. Such studies have begun to reveal the multifaceted and profound ways that cultural heritage is affected by armed conflicts: it is looted, damaged and destroyed either as a result of deliberate targeting or as part of the general violence.[xi] Responding to this, the traditional focus of research and practice has been on finding ways to mitigate the destructive impact through the development of legal instruments, preventive policies and protective measures. In such approaches heritage has primarily been seen as constituted by movable objects and important historic buildings, and it has essentially been treated as a passive victim of the atrocities. The relational dynamic, however, is not just one-way: heritage can also profoundly inform and shape armed conflicts and is an important factor to take account of during post-conflict recovery activities. [xii] Cultural heritage is frequently damaged or destroyed during periods of war and violence. But this is not always an accidental by-product in some cases; sites of cultural heritage have been deliberately targeted as a means of inflicting pain and societal trauma. [xiii] A community's shared sense of belonging is often rooted in its heritage sites and landscapes, giving such places particular social significance. And the impact on society does not stop with the breaking down, destruction, defaming or neglecting of such sites; it continues post-conflict, through the political and psychological impacts of the decisions made during reconstruction.

The complexities of the relationship between post-conflict scenarios, heritage and identity are increasingly recognized, but with this recognition have come an awareness of how little we actually understand about its nature. What role does cultural heritage play during post-conflict reconstruction? What is the impact of reclaiming and rebuilding on people's sense of identity? By investigating these relationships, we might learn more about how heritage can be harnessed to both personal and political agendas. On this basis, research in this area can help to guide crucial decisions by policy makers and regional practitioners regarding the reconstruction of cultural heritage.

The Palace as the seat of Cultural heritage in the North West and South West Regions

The palace which is the seat of socio-cultural heritage of communities living in the two regions is symbolically the home of the traditional ruler and at the same time the place where all ancestral objects filled with history are kept. It is equally the lieu par excellence where all the political, spiritual, economic and socio-cultural institutions are coordinated from; It is the fountain of authority.[xiv]. All chiefs in the two regions reside in palaces and generally in with impressive architectural buildings partially or fully surrounded with a sacred. Some of these forests are as large as 200 acres, lay close to the palace buildings and homes for a variety of social institutions.[xv]The palace is also occupied by shrines in which the community "gods" in the form of ancient carved masks and other ancient objects are kept. In this same area are found ancestral burial sites for young children from the palace community; they were and are still the sites of sacrifices of appeasement; and, in several regions, they were the venue for meetings of secret societies.[xvi] Simply put, the palace in the North West and South West region is a place rich in history where all the records of a people existence in terms of culture, norms and societal behaviour are resident. In effect, there is no community in these two regions without a traditional ruler who represents and incarnates the socio-cultural and tradition of his people. His main role among others is the preservation and perpetuation of cultural heritage which is the symbol of their identity.

The Materialization of Armed Conflicts on the Cultural Heritage in the North West and South West Regions.

For the past three years, the North West and south west regions of the republic of Cameroon have undergone serious violence. According to an official report from the international crisis group, riots in the Anglophone Cameroon has killed 1850 people both civilians, solders and separatists and close to about 530000 internally displaced and 35000 who have fled into neighbouring Nigeria between 2017 and 2019.In reality, the impacts of these causalities are far beyond human loss; this is because the cultural heritage incarnated by the chieftaincy institution has also beendevastated by this conflict. Following our investigation and private interviews with some traditional rulers from the south west and North West region who have taken refuge in Yaounde (the political capital of Cameroon) as a result of the conflict; some of them opine that their places have been looted and burnt down by unidentified gun men. Precious ancestral objects and documents on the history of some communities have completely been damage. Some of these objects and documents destroyed are as old as the community itself. Furthermore, some chiefs interviewed revealed that ancestral shrines have been desecrated and profaned. Symbolic royal paraphilia like tiger skins, element tusk, carvings and other ancestral objects looted in palaces have been discovered in the black market. The palaces of Tchiengang Palace in Bamumbu kingdom, Palace of the Bwassa all in the south west regions had been burnt down. At the same time traditional practises such as the pouring of libations, holding of cultural festivals have been disrupted in the two regions because of insecurity.Worst still, the crisis

have also been marked by the kidnapped and tortured of traditional rulers. in the Grassfields tradition for example, lying hands or talking to a traditional ruler without manners can warrant some form of malediction or the payment of a fine. Historically,

The traditional rulers in most Bamenda Grassfields traditional societies was said to be endowed with divine powers and the incarnate of the political and religious life of their people. Once a prince had been enthroned as chief or Fon[xvii] and had undergone all prescribed rites, it was believed that the life force of his ancestors has automatically been transmitted to him. If the transfer of power did not follow the custom and tradition dictated by the ancestors, the usurper, after sitting on the ancestral stool automatically suffered a serious ailment such as sterility, madness or even death.[xviii] Traditions in the Bamenda Grassfields chiefdoms hold that immediately the Fon assumes his ritual functions from his people, he automatically becomes the divine symbol of his people's health and welfare as it is believed that the life force of his ancestors is automatically transmitted to him.[xix] With the armed conflicts, traditional rulers have been treated as worst as slaves. The traditional rulers of Bechati Chiefdom in in the Lebialem Division in the South West region of Cameroon revealed that he was kidnapped and taken to the forest, his cap removed (which is a taboo) and ask to prepare food for his kidnappers. Sources also hold that the traditional ruler of the Nso kingdom in the North West region was kidnapped on several occasions by unidentified gun men. Equally, the Fon of Bafut was also kidnapped and released Furthermore, some traditional rulers have been killed and some buried alive.This case with chiefs of Bomaka, Ebonji and Chief Ngassa of fiango.

Impacts of Cultural Destruction by Armed Conflict
Culture is the backbone of every nation around the world. It was developed naturally in the life of every human being. Cultures are not developed over a decade or century but it requires thousands of years of practice to be considered as the tradition and culture of a particular place or a country.[xx] Some of the unique cultures are blessed and founded by the great enlightened beings. Due to different cultures and traditions, human beings are divided into different communities which then form a nation. Cultural Heritage plays a very important role in our life. It is what keeps us attached to our religion, traditions, & beliefs. In today's context we refer to cultural identity which means (feeling of) identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as he or she is influenced by his belonging to a group or culture. It is necessary to give awareness of Cultural Heritage and the ethics of its care in study curriculum and to identify tools that can be developed to help communities for the better understanding and conserve their heritage. However the destruction of culture can have long lasting results as it is the case with Anglophone crisis in the North West

and south west region of Cameroon. The impact of the destruction of cultural heritage of communities in the North West and south west region is a serious crime against humanity. The destruction of palaces and looting of ancestral objects in the North West and West and South West Regions of Cameroon is a violent act. Those responsible are trying to erase - by force - an aspect of history targeted at material culture. Most ancestral objects in these palaces are as old as the existence of the community and filled with the history and socio-anthropological life of the people.

Culture is essential to our humanness. It contains a set of readymade definitions each of us reshapes very little in dealing with social situations. In other words, culture provides a kind of blueprint or map for relating with others. Consider how you find your way in social life. How do you know how to act in a gathering, with a stranger, in a funeral, naming ceremony, toward a person who smiles, leers or swears at you?[xxi] Your culture supplies you with broad, standardized, prefabricated answers, and formulas or recipes for dealing with each of these situations. Not surprisingly, if we know a person's culture, we can understand and even predict a good deal of his or her behavior.[xxii] Unfortunately most people especially the youths have fled from the rural areas or cannot go back to their communities. In fact many people have been buried out of their communities without carrying out traditional rites which are very capital in some customs and traditions in the North West and south west regions of Cameroon. The culture of a people is their identity as it affords them due recognition. The destruction of cultural heritages as it is the case in the North West and south west regions is an attack on a people's identity. How do the future generation identify themselves when they lack the material culture for identification? Culture has two essential qualities: first, it is learned and second, it is shared. In the affected regions some of the patriarchs who detain tradition knowledge and tradition have been killed in the conflict. Meaning therefore that, they could not share or transfer the traditional knowledge with the future generation much of whom fled the local areas as a result of armed conflicts. Paradoxically, cultural heritage that is under serious threat as a result of armed conflicts in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon can constitute a potential instrument in the resolution of the conflict .

Cultural heritage as a tool towards the resolution of armed conflict in the North West and South West Region of Cameroon
Warfare is about destroying identity, self and to a larger extent, humanity. By targeting heritage, destruction of bridges, mosques, temples, churches and others, the assailant aims to cleave the connections to the past and vision into the future of the victims. Culture plays a central role in identifying the root cause of a conflict and facilitates in determining steps for ensuring everlasting peace and security. One of the

major tasks Cameroon is facing today is to unite people to share a peaceful coexistence. Cultural heritage catalyzes social cohesion and reasons social exclusion and xenophobia. Ingress to cultural services and active participation in cultural activities allows the destitute and impecunious to conquer their adversities and partake in their inclusion in society.[xxiii] It is through cultural programs, one can foster respect and value of diversity, understanding of the "universal element" in all cultures, helping to "humanize" the other. Strategies should be multicultural and inclusive, promoting gender equality. In post conflict situations, cultural heritage becomes a tenacious means in restoring of communities, aiding them to regain a sense of normality and reconnect with their identities. Reconciliation strategies should be explored through cultural diplomacy. The retraditionalisation of the chieftaincy institution as the seat of cultural heritage in the North West and South West region Cameroon can rapidly restore peace. No matter the degree of desecration of the institution by colonial and the attempt to instrumentalize chieftaincy by some neopatrimonialism elite for political positioning and consolidation, the core content that characterized the institution has not change. People in these two regions continue to considered chieftaincy as a sacred institution that incarnates their history, symbolize their cultural identity and a medium between them and their ancestors. In fact, chieftaincy is still very much revered and many people are still attentive when their community leaders talk in the two regions. Therefore, the resolution of conflict must necessarily start in the palace of each community under the coordination of the chief. This is because the palace symbolically represents the seat of the socio-cultural heritage of communities in the two regions.

CONCLUSION

Chieftaincy and its accompanied traditional authorities has undergone intensive transformations but this has not completely eradicated the institution and the authorities are instances of government. There were possible clear evidences of the erosion of the powers of these institutions in Anglophone Cameroon but the tonic has never been as severe as it has been during the current armed conflict. As an assortment government that resonate local and natural powers rooted in African traditional cosmology Chieftaincy and their authorities have come under severe attack. The government (Cameroon State including the Neo patrimonial elites) feel that these offices and authorities have failed to provide the natural chords that produces both the music and the dance style of peace and cohesion while the armed factions see these Institution to have negotiated a bend for the worse by accepting some form of collaboration from the agents and agencies of the Cameroon state. The survival of chieftaincy or the power of traditional authorities rested on joint support than joint attack and so the destitution of the firmaments that ensured its wellbeing has been enormous created a power vacuum that needs to be filled, this paper has surveyed and presented such scenes using the stock of evidence at its disposal that chieftains in Anglophone Cameroon are running arid of the Institution that were the kingpins of their own identity. The cultural and traditional erosion needs to stop else such hallowed Institutions and personalities might get instinct.

FOOT NOTES

[i]Atalan, O. (2018). Importance of cultural heritage and conservation concept in the architectural education. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, *15*(3), 1701-1710.

[ii]Ibid.

[iii]Wallensteen, P., and Sollenberg, M. (1998). "Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989-97. *Journal of Peace Research*, 35(5), 621-634.

[iv] The Conflict Data Project, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University; http://www.pcr.uu.se/data.htm; and preliminary data for 1999 provided by the Conflict Data Project, Uppsala University.

[v] The 1954 hague convention in its Article 1, stipulates that cultural property refers to: *Movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined aboveb. Buildings whose main and effective purpose is to preserve or exhibit the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a) such as museums, large libraries and depositories of archives, and refuges intended to shelter, in the event of armed conflict, the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a);.*

[vi]Cunliffe, E. (2019). "The challenges of protecting cultural heritage in armed conflict. Heritage In War.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] Ni Komang Erviani in the daily journal, "The Jakarta Post", Badung, Bali / Fri, October 18, 2019 / 09:59 pm

[ix] Ibid.

[x] Dacia Viejo-Rose and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, "Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflict: New Questions for an Old Relationship", In: Waterton E., Watson S. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015.

[xi] Ibid.

[xii] Ibid.

[xiii] A collaborative study led University of Cambridge in examining the impact on society of the destruction and reconstruction of cultural heritage, 2020 University of Cambridge.

[xiv] A. C. Akwo., The Mbeligi and the Palace, 2006, p.11.unpublished manuscript.

[xv] Fomin, E.S.D. (2008). "Royal Residences and Sacred Forests in Western Cameroon: The Intersection of Secular and Spiritual Authority", *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture*, *2*(3), 391.

[xvi] Ibid.

[xvii] Local appellation for traditional rulers in the North West region and in some areas in the South West Region of Cameroon

[xviii] Aletum, M.T. (1980). *The One-Party System and the African Traditional Institutions,* Yaoundé, Sopecam, p.24.

[xix] Nkwi, P. N. (1977). Grassfields Kings and Chiefs and Modern Politics. University of Yaoundé, p.3.

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[xxii] Ibid.

[xxiii] Agarwal, S. (2019). Cultural Heritage as a Tool for Peace: A Case of Sudan. ICOA990: Heritage For Peace.