

Guns (Fire Arms) from Men at Home to Boys in the Bush in the Bamenda Grass Field: A Diagnosis of the Ongoing Armed Conflict Experience

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Abstract

The protracted claim of marginalization, subjugation, neglect, and disregard by individuals and political groups in the part of the Republic of Cameroon that was colonized by Britain known as Anglophone Cameroon metamorphosed into an armed rebellion in 2017. This came as a result of confused talks /dialogue sessions between the Cameroon government and the Anglophones Teachers/Lawyers trade Unions in Bamenda. While the Cameroon government played for time to implement the resolutions of the talks, the self-appointed leaders of the Anglophone communities who had been beating the drums of War on all social media platforms from their safe hoods in the Diaspora lost their patience and ordered an all recruitment of boys and girls into an army which went by different appellations. Without adequate preparations for War either in the dimension of training, money, or weaponry, so many people in Anglophone Cameroon were both persuaded and brainwashed to abandon their daily chores to join the ranks of the make-shift fighting scouts; amba militia that went by a myriad of appellations. The recruits profited from the chaos and disorder to seize guns that formed the nucleus of nobility, honour, and wealth of the people of the grass fields and took these arms of honour to their camps mostly in the bushes to carry out the War assignments. The prime target of the make shift militia as heralded by this deeply aggrieved faction of the English-speaking Cameroon was to secure a quick victory over the Cameroon army and agencies thereby, liberating Anglophone Cameroon from what they called colonization, domination, marginalization or, or imperialism. Guns at home in the Grass fields before 2017 were kept by dignified individuals mainly titled and wealthy men. The gun culture that reigned then was regulated both by a sort of intrinsic morale that formed a pattern of prestige and social effervescence beyond common compare but their mass seizure by these hurriedly formed boys under the guise of rage and fury became a source of worry and danger to the social, political and material wellbeing of the people within this niche. This paper has exploited primary and secondary sources to underscore the trouble encountered by this unfortunate guns shift from the houses to the bushes in the Bamenda grass fields. It argues that the guns at home and with dignified men served purposes that were for the most part peaceful and defensive but those in the bushes simply inaugurated an age of violence and wanton destruction uncommon to the grass fielders in all its historical time scale.

Keywords: Militia Groups, Firearms, Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon.

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INTRODUCTION

Guns (light firearms) in the Cameroon Bamenda grass field came from multiple directions and for manifold reasons. Harry Ruddins submits and justifiably so that the German traders realized that native Africans especially in the Kamerunstadt showed an exceeding love for guns and gunpowder. In the course of ensuring full control of the hinterlands, the German colonial agents needed guns to establish their hegemony over the native chieftains. The chiefs and other traditional authorities that were in full worship or love to the German authorities also resorted to the use

of guns both to frighten dissidents within their areas of administration as well as to hunt in the Wild. The mere possession of a gun or the expressed permission to own one by a native with even in the future elevated that individual out of the orbits of minions and placed him/her within the yards of near veneration grass fields polities. Guns helped the chiefs and their chieftains to dare into the interior where the treasures of trade like ivory that was in dire need by the German traders were found. The love or near veneration of guns and anything related to arms ownership did not grow and gained shape on account that there was a likelihood of chieftains to kill their kin and kindred. The termination

of the life of any human being ranked far above personal decision for such behavior on whatever justifications ran variance with traditional norms moral/religious etiquettes and the modern laws as handed by colonialism. The cardinal questions overwhelming this article are (a) What and how was there a thriving Gun culture in the Bamenda grass field prior to 2017?(b) Why and How has this gun culture shifted across time?(c) What are the implications and security stakes of this change and (d) what are the lesson offered to the politics of the Grass field, the Cameroon government and Scholarship by these paradigm shift in gun ownership and usage ?

The Thrive of Gun Culture in the Grass Fields

To better understand the paradigm, shift and its implication in the gun phenomena in the Bamenda Grass fields of Cameroon since 2016, a special focus into the gun culture that was shared by all the communities of this sphere prior to the period under study stands supreme. Each society, community, state or nation has components which are uniquely inextricable to their daily survival. The possession of firearms by Grass fields traditional and modern elites fits squarely in this mould. As indicated earlier the ownership of arms in the politics of the Grass field constituted a wide range of issues which the individual and collective wellbeing hinged on. This was particularly so because tribal wars, intertribal and succession disputes had faded into the discarded memory of historical relevance. Intertribal Wars and succession disputes had enabled chieftains to acquire guns and other War related instruments which were variedly used in combats. Indeed, by the beginning of the 20th century Wars between tribes and ethnic nations that formed the Cameroon grassland political niche had faded or reduced tremendously but the glory that came with military dominance or conquest kept the War clubs alive though more on ceremonial essences. The war clubs that formed part of War time militia groupings by 2017 were either already out of work or had been remodeled to function as cultural groups where guns and other military weaponry were displayed in all elegance. It was customary and even reasonably right for any notable to own a gun of a higher magnitude but nowhere was it imagined that these guns could be used for purposes other than ceremonial display.

At worst these guns were used during hunting games but the love for life made the use of these guns for hunting not only rare but largely very strange. The history of the grass field has scant records of any targeted killing with the use of the gun except in the War front. Guns were therefore admired and needed by grass fielders throughout the 20th century more for the display of Wealth and fascination than for killing. On this note, Saheed Aderinto posits that such guns have always featured among the items of trade in Africa before and after the age of colonial occupation of the continent. He goes on to confirm that there was no gun

society in any part of pre-twentieth century Africa as suggested by some scholars [1]. Storey further suggests that guns and colonialism went hand-in-hand [2]. From their early introduction into the continent, largely as items of trade, firearms have been intricately bound in the various forms of European intrusion into Africa, from the slave trade to pacification and colonization [3]. These guns bear witness to the pre-colonial coastal trade with European merchants who bought slave and ivory until the mid-nineteenth century. The list of trade items that were in the market also included palm oil from the end of the eighteenth, in exchange for salt, cloth, iron wares, guns and gunpowder [4]. According to Macola, by Ca. 1870, guns had fully permeated Luvale society in central Africa, changing it and being changed by it [5]. This establishes the second half of the 19th century as the age of massive influx of firearms into Africa and the birth of a gun culture that eventually survived for many decades.

The Appropriation of Gun Culture of the Bamenda Grass Fields

In Cameroon, the state, communities and individuals accommodated firearms in various domains of life. Local gun supplies were sustained by the ingenuity of local artisanal producers. Within the traditional setting where no one heeded to prevailing laws that targeted the prohibition of artisanal guns, local gun fabrication sustained the mass proliferation of such firearms in the Bamenda Grass fields [6]. In discussing the roots of local artisanal firearms production in the Bamenda Grass fields, Chilver and Kaberry opine that the communities of the Western Grass fields of Cameroon practiced smelting, smiting and carving as economic and social activities [7]. They situate the Menda-Nkwe, Babungo, Kijem-Kegu, Kom, Mmeng, Zhaow, Fungam and Nyos among many of such

¹ Saheed Aderinto, *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria. Firearms, Culture and public order* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 4.

² William Kelleher Storey, *Guns in Colonial South African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

³ Rory Pilosof, *Guns don't colonize People: The Role and use of Firearms in Pre-Colonial and colonial Africa*, unpublished, nd, 272-273.

⁴ Jean-pierre Warnier, "Trade Guns in the Grassfields of Cameroon," *Paideuma* vol. 26 (1990), np, www.istor.org, accessed on 16 February 2021.

⁵ Giacomo Macolo, "Reasoning the significance of Firearms in Central Africa: The case of North-Western Zambia to the 1920s", unpublished paper, 8.

⁶ Ayunifor Kingsly Yunisha, "Gun Culture in Bambili: Ca. 1800-2016," University of Bamenda. Higher Teacher Training College, Department of History unpublished DIPES II Dissertation, 2019, 23.

⁷ E.M Chilver and P.M Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda: The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*, Vol.1, 23.

communities where smelting and smiting were very prominent.

Such smiting among the communities of the Bamenda Grass fields constituted one of the pillars on which gun culture thrived. To emphasize the role of clandestine gun smiths in sustaining the proliferation of illicit firearms in society as a whole, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reiterates that blacksmiths in West Africa for example, produce a range of small arms including pistols and shoguns [8]. For many years, guns were inextricable from such cultural rites although with serious interferences from successive regimes. The proliferation of such locally fabricated guns constituted greater challenges to the attainment of lofty arms control ambitions by the Cameroon government since independence [9].

The reality of inter-communal conflicts that degenerated into wars made the acquisition of firearms very essential. Nkwi [10] opines that there were three patterns of conflicts in the western Grass fields in the 19th century. The safety of a community, according to many, was very much dependable on the possession of guns. These were means to ensure stockpiling of weapons or the sustainable culture of guns, to protect individuals and the community as a whole. The perception of guns as instruments for communal defense is emphasized in the number of firearms an individual was prepared to freely lend to non-gun owners in times of war.

Gun firings were an integral part of funeral rites in the Bamenda Grass fields. In the case of traditional titled men and women of the community, more guns were fired at their funerals. This seems logical because such funerals were usually more populated than any other was. In such occasions, the entire community was pulled to show their solidarity not only with the families but also largely with the palace where all allegiance was pledged. Owing to this augmented number of people in attendance, the rounds of gunshots during funeral rites of traditional titled individuals were always more numerous than for ordinary members of the Bamenda Grass fields villages. This was even far greater and quite interesting when such a number was overwhelmed during the

celebrations commemorating the events of the death of a traditional leader (Fon). These rare occasions rallied together all members of community and neighboring villages. In Bafanji Mikus Meirans, a tourist, reported the pride of the people in gunshots at a funeral in 2012 that “It is not a funeral but a traditional death celebration... it started in the afternoon and I’m sure it lasted all night... the men would shoot hunting rifles into the air (with live ammunition!!!)” [11]. In 1970, the Divisional Officer of Menchum while highlighting the unrivaled attachment of the people to such guns noted that in the Grass fields Region of West Cameroon, these Dane guns are to the people like the gowns they wear. A man is not considered fully dressed unless he carries a gun on his shoulder as an accomplishment to his attire [12].

Similarly, joyous celebrations in the Bamenda Grass fields also saw the featuring of gunshots. In 1973, the New York Times reported the joyous return of Afo-A-Kom to Kom Fondom in the Bamenda Grass fields of Cameroon. Amongst the celebratory noises that could be heard miles away, were the barking salutes of ancient flintlock rifles in the hands of men in brightly colored tribal dresses [13]. At this joyous occasion, guns boomed and the talking drums carried the message from village to village that Afo-A-Kom was seen in Fundong [14]. This isolated report from the New York Times in 1973 was perhaps a maiden broadcast of the gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields of Cameroon to the outside world. In this situation, the chorus of gunshots animated the excitement of Kom people as their cultural pride in Afo-A-Kom was rekindled with its unexpected return home. Thunderous gunshots at that august occasion did not induce fear, as it would in different circumstances, but were priceless and the timing could not have been perfect for a people so woven to guns.

Regulating Gun Culture and Paradigm Shifts Negotiated

The process of controlling and even eliminating the proliferation of firearms in the Bamenda Grass fields in particular has been a long and tiring one unfolding through many decades. This commitment was initiated by the German Colonial administration that ruled Cameroon for 32 years (1884 to 1916). The British administration that succeeded the Germans lasted until 1961. During their rule of this sphere of the

⁸UNODC, “The Doha Declaration: promoting a culture of lawfulness,” 2019, accessed on 17 January 2021, www.unodc.org.

⁹Ayunifor Kingsly Yunisha, “*Arms Possession and State Regulation in the Bambili Fondom of the Bamenda Grassfields: 1973-2016*,” University of Bamenda, Higher Teacher Training College, Department of History, unpublished DIPES II Dissertation, 2019, 34.

¹⁰P.N. Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy. A study of inter chiefdom Relations in the Western Grass fields, North West Province of Cameroon*, Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde, 1986. 8.

¹¹Mikus Merians, “Death Celebration in Cameroon, Small Village near Bamenda,” March 2012, Snaptube, accessed on 12/12/2020.

¹²NAB File N^o Pc/i/1966: Arms and Ammunition Report on West Cameroon 1966-1972.

¹³The New York Times, “Afo-A-Kom Joyously Greeted on its Return Home”, Thomas Johnson, 1973, www.nytimes.com/1973/12/14/archives.html accessed on 12/12/2020.

¹⁴Ibid.

Cameroons there were many administrative enactments that ran in the direction of regulating guns [15], One of such public pronouncements about guns and firearms was that of the Resident of the Cameroons Province who expressed his concerns on the presence of many firearms in the territory. Mr. Rutherford Stated that there were at the time at least 59 revolvers and 5,530 rounds of ammunition, and 55 rifles and 24,477 rounds of ammunition since January 1929 in the hands of local chieftains within the Cameroons and such a situation needed not to be taken lightly. The Resident also was seeking a policy requiring from every importer of a rifle a written statement of the purpose for which the weapon is required [16].

However, this determination was not enough to wade off the demand that saw increases in the number of imported firearms and ammunition. In 1929, there were 15 revolvers, 13 rifles and 27 shotguns imported into the Cameroons Province, during which time 997, 13336 and 16237 rounds of ammunition for revolvers, rifles and shotguns respectively were also imported. In 1930, 10 revolvers, 6 rifles and 40 shotguns were accompanied by 828, 2865 and 27321 rounds of ammunition for revolvers, rifles and shotguns respectively. These figures drew the attention of the British colonial administration and necessitated a comprehensive plan that was deemed to phase out such guns and ammunition that were apparently a threat to the sustainability of the colonial agenda. In 1951, a New Arms Ordinance was introduced to ensure the attainment of effective and efficient control of such growing number of firearms and ammunition but not so much success was met.

On 22 October 1973, law number 73/658 came into being as the pioneer law for the purpose of arms control in post-colonial Cameroon. It targeted the importation, sale, acquisition and ownership of firearms and ammunitions of war, defense and hunting. It established different types of authorizations indispensable for any individual who sought the ownership of firearms within Cameroon frontiers. The law empowered the minister of Territorial Administration to determine who was eligible to acquire and use a firearm in Cameroon. This law stipulated in Article 5 section 1 that the minister of Territorial Administration was to scrutinize the acquisition, transport, transfer, import of firearms and their ammunitions by Cameroonians and foreigners [17]. It

emphasized also that all such gun aspirants were mandatorily to be of 18 to 21 years at least and of good morality. This was meant to efficiently limit the proliferation of firearms in Cameroon and somehow limiting the enormous threats sustained on society by a previously liberal gun environment.

While targeting an established liberal traditional clandestine firearms economy that required a sustainably regulatory policy from government, this law specified six authorizations that embodied the various economic opportunities that were associated with the thriving firearms economy at the time. In Article 6 of law number 73/658, it stipulated that the minister of Territorial Administration was solely within the capacity to issue to an individual who met all the criteria either an authorization to import, purchase or carry weapons and ammunitions for personal use. Besides, it gave the minister of Territorial Administration the monopoly to grant to any individual an authorization to import weapons and ammunitions and spare parts for commercial use [18]. However, prolonged smuggling and the persistence of the cherished gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields was characteristic of the indigenous defiance that made the attainment of decisive control of such firearms very difficult. Such defiance was aided by systemic administrative tolerance that lasted for decades.

On 14 December 2016, law number 2016/015 replaced decree number 73/658 of 22 October 1973. It became the guide in governing the manufacture, importation, exportation, transfer, purchase, transit, trucking, keeping and bearing of weapons and ammunitions. Section 7 states that the introduction into that national territory, the manufacture, processing, transport stockpiling, acquisition, sale, transfers, possessions, bearing, exportation and brokering of firearms and ammunitions shall be compulsorily subjected to prior authorization by the President of the Republic [19]. However, the President of the Republic may authorize the minister in charge of defence and heads of defence and security services attached to the Presidency of the Republic to issue the certificate of final destination and of non-re-exportation of such firearms and ammunitions of warfare within the national territory.

Significantly, Section 31 sub-sections 3 of this new gun control law since 2016 clearly stated that the use of firearms during funerals or cultural ceremonies shall be prohibited. By this provision no one within the national territory was allowed to use any firearm at such events mentioned therein. It therefore implied that the communities of the Bamenda Grass fields were facing a new reality as far as their gun culture was concerned. Obviously, this new development was undermining the

¹⁵ There were two spheres of the former German Cameroon because Britain and France partitioned the territory and administered the two halves simultaneously. France administered the western part which was the majority share while Britain administered the western part which was as much as a fifth of the entire territory.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Law number 73/658 section 5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

value of familiar gunshots at cultural events. This law called for and provided a procedure for the substitution of firearms with air guns, pointed weapons and recreational weapons. This was the sudden and the implications on the gun culture of Bamenda Grass fields were serious.

The penalties prescribed in this law were quite severe and very heavy on defaulters when compared to the less threatening 1973 law with similar intentions as earlier discussed. From section forty-nine to fifty-seven, such penalties to every stakeholder were clear and definitive. In section forty-nine sub-sections 2 and 3, a prison term of five to ten years and fines of one million to twenty million CFA francs were non-negotiable for whoever engaged in the manufacture of weapons, ammunitions and components of category four weapons [20]. Besides, a jail sentence of two to five years and a fine within the range of five hundred thousand CFA francs to ten million was certain for those involved in an unauthorized manufacture of components of category five weapons. Anyone whose authorization did not match the arm or ammunition in possession was liable to suffer an imprisonment range of one to two years and a fine of five hundred thousand to two million CFA francs.

In aggregate, it is estimated that annual artisanal production of firearms and ammunitions fell sharply to very minimal levels between 2016 and 2018. Within just two years, it was possible to achieve the presumably impossible by grounding almost to a halt an age long gun culture in the Bamenda Grass fields. However, artisanal production of firearms was only reduced but not completely driven into extinction. Although local production of firearms was almost overwhelmed, the role of secessionist militia groups in sustaining this defiance has made the full attainment of government objectives very impossible. Obscured networks of clandestine firearms production have also incorporated the fabrication of Improvised Explosive Devices secessionist militias are using to destabilize the North West and South West regions of Cameroon.

Not with standing, a macro survey has shown that the scale of production of new local craft weapons has significantly reduced in the Bamenda Grass fields since 2016. This achievement was only made possible by the great deal of determination that was necessitated by the dire need to disarm secessionists in the North West and South West Regions most especially [21]. As such, one can argue that the extinction of the gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields was a collateral damage in the determination of government to defeat

armed groups in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon. By 2018, it is estimated that the number of newly produced and/acquired firearms in circulation was about 100 per community in the Bamenda Grass fields. This number was held by secessionist militias scattered across the Northwest region.

The High jacking of the Guns to the Bush by Militia Groups

In Africa, guns are not just weapons of choice but weapons of mass destruction [22]. The realities of internal armed conflicts have made it impossible for firearms to be completely put out of use. It is obvious that firearms play a vital role when two parties are up against each other. Such guns serve as instruments of intimidation and coercion as conflicting parties as states and non-state actors face one another in a stand-off. It is the efficiency and effectiveness of firearms in the determination, throughout human history, which became characteristic of most parts of post-colonial Africa. To reiterate this argument the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), while pointing out the proliferation of Non-State Armed separatist groups in the North West of Cameroon within the context of the escalated Anglophone crisis holds that,

... the escalation of violence in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon brought to light several non-state armed separatist groups.... The Ambazonia Defense Forces (A.D.F) which emerged in 2017 is one of the most prominent and, active secessionist military groups in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon. It is the official military wing of the Ambazonia separatist movement and the military force of the self – declared Ambazonia, with an estimated 200-500 militants under its command... the Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (SOCADEFF) is also one of several militants groups participating in a conflict that has, in last few years, rapidly grown in intensity. With a presence in the South-West Region's administrative division of memo, SOCADEF was founded in 2017 to secure secession for the Anglophones and has an estimated 400 members. It is the armed wing of the African People's Liberation Movement ... (APLM), an Ambazonia separatist movement.... Another separatist armed group that was created in March 2018 is the Ambazonia Self-Defense Council (ASDC)... (it) incorporates smaller militias like the Ambazonia Restoration Army and other larger ones such as the Manyu Tigers, Red Dragons and Seven Karta [23].

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ayunifor Kingsly Yunisha, "Paradigm Shifts in the Gun (Firearms) Culture and Administrative Control Policies in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon 1922-2018," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, University of Bamenda, 2022, 237.

²²Michael Fleshman, "Small Arms in Africa; Counting the cost of Gun violence" *Africa Renewal* (2011) www.UN.org/africanrenewal, accessed on 21/12/2020.

²³Institute for Peace and Security Studies, "Cameroon Conflict Insight," *Peace and Security Report* vol. 1

Since November 2016, the explosion of the violent on-going Anglophone crisis necessitated the renewal of government efforts in the domain of gun control with the hopes of weakening the ability of civilians to sustain their resistance against the state. However by December 2017, the Anglophone crisis had deteriorated into a full scale war between many militia groups and the national forces. The resilience of such militia groups and their determination to exploit the gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields saw them high jacking the latter. The militia groups started arming themselves by seizing the guns that were in private possession all around the Bamenda Grass fields. Forcefully, individuals were forced to surrender their guns to militia groups. The use of force by these militia groups and the fear of torture and possible death by anyone who resisted this mass confiscation of firearms quickly boosted the arsenal of such militia groups across the seven divisions of the Bamenda Grass fields. This saw the transition of such guns from the confines of homes where families cherished them to the bush where militia groups used them in their fierce rebellion against the state.

Eventually, the militia groups exploited the same routes that were previously used by private individuals to smuggle guns into the territory from neighbouring Nigeria. Nfi and Ayuni for support this claim by arguing that,

Several armed groups were created by the various factions of the Anglophone Liberation Struggle. The most prominent were, the Southern Cameroon Defense Forces (S.C.D.F) of Ebenezer Akwanga, the Ambazonia Defense Force (A.D.F) of Ayaba Cho, the Lebialem Red Dragons, controlled by Chris Anu, Ambazonia Self- Defense Council, Ambazonia Restoration Forces led by Paxson Agbor, Southern Cameroon Defense Forces controlled by Nso Foncha, and Manyu Ghost Warriors. These groups acquired weapons through and from Nigeria and even used young men and women from the cross river state of Nigeria as mercenaries. From the use of Dane Guns, knives, cutlasses at the beginning of this phase of the war, the “Amba Boys,” as they are called, later acquired AK47s and the deadly 8M21s which they used against the soldiers and civilians [24].

(2020), 8, www.IPSS-addis.org, accessed on 16 February 2021.

²⁴Nfi Joseph Lon and Ayunifor Kingsly Yunisha, “The Declining Gun Culture of the Bamenda Grass fields amidst the Anglophone Crisis,” *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences and Humanities Research* Vol.9, No 1 (2021), 47-55.

Similarly, Nwati notes that the ADF militia started with more than 1500 followers with 20 bases spread across the Anglophone territory, most of them armed with cutlasses, spears and locally made guns [²⁵]. Within the Anglophone crisis, such militia groups were armed with a diversity of sophisticated guns and Improvised Explosive Devices. Between 2016 and 2021, Dane guns were replaced by more destructive firearms. This period saw the proliferation of Kalashnikov rifles in the hands of militia groups scattered across the Bamenda Grass fields.

Within a short while, militia groups were able to exploit the porosity of the western borders of Cameroon with neighboring Nigeria to smuggle these weapons into the Northwest region. Neighboring Nigeria was a major source from where such sophisticated warfare weapons and IEDs were smuggled into the Northwest region of Cameroon. About 250 footpaths from Nigeria’s Borno, Adamawa and Benue states lead into Cameroon and are usually unknown to security forces [²⁶]. The routes provide unfettered passage for those smuggling arms into the country. Such weapons were and still are being diffused to the strongholds of various militia groups. This new breed of guns aided the ability of such militia groups to sustain their rebellion against the government.

In 2019, Actu Cameroun reiterated the scale to which the ongoing Anglophone crisis had degenerated and also emphasized the evolution of the type of guns wielded by the militia groups. Actu Cameroun noted that,

Since the Anglophone crisis became bloody, Ambazonia fighters have been using Dane guns... to attack their enemies. With the introduction of deadly weapons by diaspora leaders, such as the M21 and AK47, civilians fear that the war might not end soon. Recently, leaders of the Ambazonian movement based abroad have been raising funds to purchase these weapons, so as to send them back home, to the fighters. They initiated many of these fund raising activities such as “My Trip to Buea” and “Operation AK47” [²⁷].

As such, the emergence of militia groups in the Bamenda Grass fields since 2016 greatly aided the

²⁵Morgan Tebei Nwati, “The Anglophone Crisis: The Rise of Arms Trafficking and Smuggling, its Effects on the Two English Regions of Cameroon,” *Advances in Applied Sociology* Vol. 11 (2021), 1-13.

²⁶Oluwole Ojewale, Cameroon alone can’t Stop Illicit Arms Flooding into the Country,” Institute for Security Studies, 2021.

²⁷Actu Cameroun, “Anglophone Crisis: Five Soldiers Wounded as Secessionists Acquire Sophisticated Weapons,” *actucomeroon.com*, accessed on 18 February 2022.

proliferation of sophisticated firearms. This was an unprecedented resuscitation of the gun culture which for several years, administrative control policies were perceived as effective tools that drove the former into extinction.

CONCLUSION

The gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields of Cameroon saw a paradigm shift from being a legitimate way of life for the indigenous peoples to being an illegal practice in the wake of administrative control policies during the colonial and post-colonial eras. The outbreak of the Anglophone violent extremism saw the confiscation of available firearms that had been accumulated by people within a traditional liberal gun environment aided by administrative tolerance. This also enabled the proliferation of militia groups as they exploited the available wealth of firearms while also exploiting many obscured smuggling routes in this sphere of Cameroon. These militia groups dragged the once established gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields with them to the bush as they mounted their fierce resistance against government forces. The resuscitated gun culture of the Bamenda Grass fields did not come to restore itself in cultural vibrancy in this sphere of Cameroon. However, the people of the Bamenda Grass fields watched and continue to listen idly in nostalgia as the shots from their guns echo from the bush in the bright light of day and the pitch darkness of the night. This study submits that the same guns that can be used for exoteric fun can also be used for killing and that the difference lays in moral and dispensation. It highlight not only the path covered by guns and how they instinctively shifted from houses to forest hoods but also how these guns have increased geometrically under the pressure of strict regulation with the accompanied damage done both to life and the whole package of human security.

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