Cameroonian women use Anlu for social and political change, 1958-1961

Time period notes: The end date is unclear; anlu dispersed near the beginning of 1961 after all goals were achieved.

May
1958
to: January
1961
Country: Cameroon
Location City/State/Province: Njinikom (in Western Cameroon) and Wombong villages, primarily

Goals:
Abolition of contour cultivation law, election of the KNDP political party, punishing male power holders.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols › wore men's clothes to demonstrate power shift
- 022. Protest disrobings
- 028. Symbolic sounds
- 030. Rude gestures
- 032. Taunting officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols › wore men's clothes to demonstrate power shift
- 022. Protest disrobings
- 030. Rude gestures
- 032. Taunting officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience
- 174. Establishing new social patterns › of female power
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 3rd segment:
- 019. Wearing of symbols, wore men’s clothes to demonstrate power shift
- 022. Protest disrobings
- 030. Rude gestures
- 032. Taunting officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 174. Establishing new social patterns, of female power
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 4th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols, wore men’s clothes to demonstrate power shift
- 022. Protest disrobings
- 030. Rude gestures
- 032. Taunting officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 174. Establishing new social patterns, of female power
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 5th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols, wore men’s clothes to demonstrate power shift
- 022. Protest disrobings
- 030. Rude gestures
- 032. Taunting officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 174. Establishing new social patterns, of female power
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 6th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols, wore men’s clothes to demonstrate power shift
- 022. Protest disrobings
- 030. Rude gestures
- 032. Taunting officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 063. Social disobedience
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 174. Establishing new social patterns, of female power
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

-
• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 161. Nonviolent harassment

Notes on Methods:
Some methods were used simply at periodic disruptions whereas some others appear to have been incorporated into daily life for the years in which members of the Anlu social network were in power.

Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Democracy
Economic Justice

Group characterization:

• Women from the Kom region of Cameroon

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Queen Fuam and Divisional Officer (D.O) Mrs. Muana

Partners:
KNDP political party

External allies:
Not Known

Involvement of social elites:
Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:
Groups in 2nd Segment:

• KNDP political party

Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: Approximately 5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence
In 1958 the women farmers of the Kom and Kedjom areas of the Western Grassfields, now part of modern day Cameroon, were angered by a number of changes which they interpreted as systematically decreasing the power of women farmers. These included the increasing frequency of the nomadic Fulani’s cows coming onto their fields and eating their crops, a law stating that they must switch to a new type of farming called contour cultivation, and rumors that that the KNC (the Kamerun National Congress, a political group that had aligned itself with Nigeria and in 1958 had secured nearly complete control over electoral politics in the region) would take over the land and sell parts of it into Nigerian control. In reaction to these three major concerns, the women utilized anlu, a women’s network traditionally used to punish those who transgressed against social norms.

Between May of 1958 and January of 1959, thousands of women from all over Kom converged on Njinkom, leaving their husbands at home to take care of the house, crops, and family. Even after they went back to their own villages, anlu spurred social change and stayed a decisive social force in their home villages and anlu chapters until early 1961.

At the beginning of the summer of 1958, thousands of women walked up to 40 miles in order to reach Njinkom, where they held weekly demonstrations in the marketplace and disruptions of colonial meetings of which they disapproved. These disruptions were attended by up to six thousand women. Within a few weeks of beginning actions, the anlu group aligned itself firmly with the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), a pro-Cameroon group opposed to the KNC. Many of the group’s actions were in collaboration with or support of the KNDP.

One of the early and major events of the campaign (which was generally very diffuse, with demonstrations against anything of which the anlu women disapproved) took place on July 4, 1958, at a large meeting in Njinikom where the chairman of the Wun Divisional Native Authority Council was asked to explain the council’s decision to pass the controversial contour cultivation law. The chairman, Mr. K.C. Barth, stated that the law had been passed by all political parties (including the KNDP, which the anlu members supported) and would not be repealed. At this point the anlu women began to protest with screams, songs, and wild dancing. They were dressed mostly in rags and greenery, although some also wore men’s clothing to symbolically claim the power reserved for men, and carried branches over their shoulders in imitation of guns (which women were not allowed to carry). They chased Mr. Barth, yelling names as they ran. A few women threw stones at their target. Mr. Barth ran until a
religious man let him into a latrine where he stayed until the end of the protest. The women continued to chant, yell insults, and defecate publicly on the ground and surroundings.

By July 8, thousands of women had gathered in Njinikom from all over the Kom region. They continued to hold weekly rallies in the marketplace, and in the late summer women camped outside the main colonial office for all of two weeks, mocking colonial forces and men in power. They also demanded that teachers associated with the KNC party step down or be removed. By simultaneously removing their own children from the school system they were able to lower school attendance by up to 50-70%.

For the entirety of the three-year campaign, the women rendered the traditional government virtually powerless, sabotaged non-supporters’ farming, and found ways to assert themselves over men and manipulate traditional gender roles. An example of this is *anlu* members’ tendency to grab men’s rear ends as they walked by.

*Anlu* women not only mocked men around them but they went so far as to openly mock the Fon, the traditional leader generally regarded as partially divine. At some of their protests the women stripped naked and painted themselves in oil and red cam-wood powder before staging public disruptions of meetings. Had men attempted the same sort of disruptions they would have been forcefully removed, but officials had no idea of how to deal with naked *anlu* women.

The *anlu* leaders created their own parallel system of government presided over by the “queen” (Queen Fuam) and her Divisional Officer, Mrs. Muana. These titles were chosen as references to and mockery of the British colonial system. The village of Wombong, in which the two women resided, for a time served as an alternative capital and center of the campaign, the goals of which were by this point to secure an electoral victory for the KNDP, to demonstrate female power, and to repeal the contour cultivation laws. The two leaders dispersed their orders from Wombong and in the 1959 elections they sent out messages of how to vote to the rest of the *anlu* members in Kom.

*Anlu* members’ votes brought about an electoral victory for the KNDP party in 1959. From then until 1961, the group’s demands were gradually met. Although information on the resolution of the contour cultivation issue is not available, the rest of the women’s concerns were addressed and to this day the *anlu* campaign is remembered as having been an immense political force in the region.

**Research Notes**

**Influences:**

The Anlu years influenced Cameroon’s independence movement, and many of the same women were active in both (2)

**Sources:**


Additional Notes:
Edited by Max Rennebohm (13/06/2011)
Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Elowyn Corby, 05/05/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.
Copyright Swarthmore College.

Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.
Original website design and artwork created by Daniel Hunter.
Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu.
Registered users can login to the website.


Links:
[1] https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-people-color
[2] https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-women