

## Original Research Article

# Sabga *Lamidate* Succession Dispute of 2007: Manipulation and Government Tolerance

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a succession dispute in the Sabga *Lamidate* in Cameroon in 2007 between Abdouliy Mamouda and Yerima Adamu Buba, both princes of the *Lamidate* and argues that the dispute emanated from manipulation by interest groups and the violation of the succession tradition of the *Lamidate* by government authorities. For about nine decades since creation in 1925, the Sabga *Lamidate* has experienced a relative and uninterrupted peace until 2007 when this succession dispute provoked uproar and drew attention both from within and without the North West Region of Cameroon. On Monday 20 August 2007, the then Senior Divisional officer (SDO) for Mezam, Jules Marcelline Ndjanga, Alhadji Baba Danpullo and the *Lamido* of Banyo, Mohaman Gabdo Yaya accompanied by 200 armed mixed gendarmes and police officers, moved into the Sabga *Lamidate* and performed an enthronement rite placing Abdouliy Mamouda as the designatory successor of the late *Lamido* Adamou Sabga. This action provoked open opposition resulting in a succession dispute in the *Lamidate* as Adamu Buba, a contender and choice of the people elected democratically by kingmakers and according to tradition was denied the throne. In order to put our facts in a logical order and to ensure the flow of these narratives, we employed a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, besides knowledge on participatory observation. We also relied more on live video images provided by the MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association) office in Bamenda including Newspaper reports on the issue at the time. The paper reveals that: The dispute emanated from the determination of Danpullo to grab the Sabga grazing land, The enthronement of Mamouda was contrary to the succession tradition of the Sabga *Lamidate* and against the will of its kingmakers and their kith and kin; Danpullo and the *fon* of Kedjom-Ketingo were at the fore front of the manipulation; the Cameroon Government tolerance paved the way for the violation of the succession tradition of the *Lamidate*. The crisis created a rift in the good historic relations and entente that existed for decades between Sabga and Kedjom-Ketingo *fondom* in whose land the *Lamidate* was founded; and that the government failed in its efforts to handle the escalated crisis due to bad peace deal which further degenerated, provoking far reaching consequences.

**Keywords:** Abdouliy Mamouda, Adamu Buba, *Charbal*, Danpullo, Fulani, Sabga *Lamidate*, Succession dispute.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sabga *Lamidate* is found in the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. It constitutes part of the Kedjom-ketingo highlands and is precisely located between Bamenda town and Bamessing village, en route to the Ndop plain. It became a permanent

settlement ground for Ardo Abdulahi Bi Hobba Sabga of the *Jafun* Fulani sub family and his followers since 1916. After some time the highland came to be known as Sabga hill (named after him) and today it appears as such on maps and administrative documents. It has become the headquarters of the Fulani in the Bamenda Region.

The entire Sabga hill and its settlement ground was attributed to Ardo Sabga by HRH *fon* Laliku of Kedjom-ketingo *fondom* in 1916. Ardo Sabga led the first wave of the Fulani immigrants into the Bamenda Grassfields and settled in Kedjom-ketingo *fondom*. Ardo Juli, a cousin to Ardo Sabga and his followers constituted the second wave of the *Gosi* clan that arrived the Bamenda Grassfields from Adamawa. They settled at Kedjom-ketingo with Ardo Sabga for a short while before leaving for Kumbo (Ousmanou Adama, interview, 28 July 2008) [1]. Many other Fulani groups that later entered the region successively settled at different locations and organised themselves into families and clans. These families and clans were all placed under the leadership of Ardo Sabga (A. Rhamani, 2004:1-3). Other *Jafun* clans such as *Tukanko'en*, *Rahji*, *Ringimati*, *Haranko'en*, and *Rujumanko'en* followed into the Bamenda Grassfields, leaving their relatives in the Adamawa (N. Awasom, 1980: 74, also Adama, interview, 2008). The influx of Fulani into the Bamenda Grassfields was facilitated by Ardo Sabga who directed them to locations with rich pastures. Village heads generally received these successive Fulani waves with enthusiasm because they had learnt from the Kedjom-ketingo people the numerous advantages they stood to gain (Adama, 2008, Fon Bama II, interview, 22 July 2008 and Fon Bahmbi III, interview 24 July 2008) [2]. Thus Ardo Sabga paved the way for the successive entry of petty bands of *Jafun* that later found their way into the Bamenda Grassfields. This was how the Fulani community began in the Bamenda Grassfields. By 1923 many more waves of their kin and kith came. In fact, recent migrations took place in the years 1940, 1942, 1946 and 1947 (C.T Jumbam, 2012).

Ardo Sabga was appointed head chief “head man” of the Fulani in the Bamenda Grassfields in about 1925 by Mr. Ducan, then District Officer for Bamenda with his function limited to *jangali* tax collection (NWRAB., File No.Na/b.SAB 1940/2, 1925:64). The British colonial administrators saw him very wealthy and influential and thought they could use him in collecting *jangali* tax from all the other Fulani in the Grassfields. If he was made chief and was obeyed by all the Fulani, the British policy of Indirect Rule would be fully implemented [3].

<sup>1</sup>Adama insinuated that he was related to the Sabga's family and lived with Ardo Sabga for many years before he died.

<sup>2</sup>Bahmbi, III explained that his father who was already Fon at the time of the coming of the Fulani into the Aghem land received a lot of beasts as a sort of recognition and appreciation for the land he offered them.

<sup>3</sup>Besides other reasons, the British policy of Indirect Rule was necessitated by shortage of administrative staff. The colonial administration therefore found it cheaper to integrate the African “leaders” in their

### Sabga as a Fulani Polity “*Lamidate*”

Fulani settlement of Sabga, today “*Lamidate*” remains controversial with regards to the historical practise for the establishment of a *Lamidate* (pl. *Lamibe*). *Lamibe* were Muslim polities or theocratic states created in the Northern part of Nigeria and later extended to the Northern Region of Cameroon in the beginning of the nineteenth century by jihadists from Northern Nigeria (<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamidat>). When pagan groups of peoples (enlarged region of unbelievers) were attacked and islamized, a *Lamidate* was often created in each case and a *Lamido* appointed to command or coordinate that locality. A *lamido* was both a political and spiritual leader. Each *lamidate* extended over a wilder and well-defined territory and exercised centralized and hierarchical local power. Each *lamidate* was subdivided into district (*lawanat*) and each was placed under a sub chief called *Ardo* (pl. *Ardo'en* or *lawane*). Each *Lawanat* was again subdivided into *djawora* (villages) and each was placed under a leader called *djaworo* (<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamidat>). The *Ardo* transmitted the directives of the *lamido* to the *djawora*. *Lamibe* only existed in the northern region of Cameroon.

The Sabga *lamidate* was not created in the same practise like the case of the *Lamibe* of northern region of the country. Unlike the *Lamibe* of the northern region of Cameroon created by jihadists through wars of conquests and sanctioned or recognised only by the *Emire* (Paramount *Lamido*) of *Yola* (old Adamawa), the legitimacy of the Sabga *Lamidate* was simply sanctioned by recognition of the Fulani community of the Grassfields region, the colonial and post-colonial governments of Cameroon. The British colonial administration appointed Ardo Sabga as the overall *jangali* tax collector and not as a *Lamido* but wished to see his fame increase. The administration simply wanted to create a consolidated warrant institution to ensure a proper application of their colonial policy of indirect rule and also to facilitate effective *jangali* tax collection. They had no interest in Fulani Political affairs of the region but rather wanted to secure means of obtaining revenue from their cattle owners. Ardo Sabga overestimated the weight of the power entrusted on him and became overzealous, exercising other functions over the Fulani out of the original *jangali* tax

administrative system. Sir Frederic Lugard, a former Governor General of Nigeria was the author of the policy. He elaborated more on the advantages of this policy and its implementation procedure in his book entitled: *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. The system was intended to use Native Authorities and Native Courts as agents of administration. See Fanso (1989) . It was therefore in this light that they saw the Fulani with no leader or Authority and decided to make Sabga one.

collection assignment given to him. By 1925 Ardo Sabga, in collaboration with the colonial administration had set up four *Ardo`en* (sg. *Ardorate*) in the Bamenda Grassfields: Sabga (Paramount) under Ardo Sabga at Kedjom-ketingo, Ardo Malu and Ardo Belo both in Kumbo, and Ardo Tonga in Santa (<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamidat>). To consolidate himself as Paramount Chief, Sabga established cordial relations with the Hausa Chief, *Seriki Hausawa* who was resident at *Abakpa-Mankon* in Bamenda town. Sabga negotiated for a *Lawani* (a sort of head dress denoting chief) from *Seriki Hausawa* who wilfully provided him with one. With this *Lawani* always on his head, Sabga was seen as a complete chief (Adama, interview, 2008) [4]. The colonial administration recognised him as paramount ruler over all Fulani in the Bamenda region in charge of *jangali* tax collection. Fulani community on the other hand as well wielded their loyalty and overwhelmingly recognised him as their overall leader and subsequently as their *Lamido*. Thus the Status of the Sabga settlement as *Lamidate* gained overwhelming support from the Fulani community of the region and ultimately the colonial administration whose interest was to see him gain more fame for effective *jangali* collection. The post-colonial government of Cameroon under HE. Ahmadou Ahidjo in decree no. 77/245 of 15 July 1977, organizing *fondoms* and chiefdoms of the north west region of Cameroon recognized Sabga as *Lamidate* and ranked it as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class chiefdom in Cameroon (<http://www.northwest-cameroon.com/home-86-inner-0.html>). The constitutional adjustment reforms of Cameroon in 1996 also recognized the *Lamido* of Sabga as a traditional ruler and given the privileges of all 2<sup>nd</sup> class chiefdoms of the region. After *Lamido* Sabga's demise in 1957, successive rulers continued to rule as *Lamido*. (See table 1 below)

### Succession Tradition of Sabga *Lamidate*

At the end of each reign (when a *Lamido* died), kingmakers of the *Lamidate* assembled and decided on which prince to succeed the throne. According to the *Lamidate* succession tradition, the founder of the *Lamidat*, Ardo Sabga Abdulai Bi Hobba on his dying bed, passed the throne down to his followers and sons as a covenant. According to the covenant: kingmakers must remain fourteen in number and each could only be succeeded by his legitimate son; A succeeding *Lamido* must be chosen from among his (*Ardo* Sabga) sons. A successor could only be chosen from among his grandsons if none of the sons was still alive (E. Sanosi, L'effort No.413, 2007: 7, also Adama, interview, 2008, Django, interview, 2022 and Bawuru, interview, 10 June 2007). Kingmakers later decided that the choice of a deceased *Lamido* (who must be his biological son) if he solicited any during his lifetime

<sup>4</sup>Adama (2008) explained that the story was passed down to him by his father whom he claimed was the closest friend to Ardo Sabga.

could be given the priority also to succeed and not only through elections as stipulated in the succession covenant [<sup>5</sup>]. But If a *Lamido* died without soliciting his successor, the king makers meet to vote a new heir to the throne from among princes in accordance with the succession covenant assigned to them (see Table 1 below presenting the fourteen kingmakers of the Sabga *Lamidate* by 2007).

### Manipulation and Enthronement of Abdoulayi Mamouda

What seems to have been hidden, unpronounced, and which acted as the root cause of the Sabga *lamidate* succession dispute was the issue of land grabbing and attempted encroachment into the Sabga grazing land (*Charbal*) by Danpullo [<sup>6</sup>]. After many years of several failed attempts in grabbing *Charbal* from the Sabga community, Danpullo decided to indulge into lobbying and manipulation of Sabga dignitaries as a way forward in taking over *Charbal* (Isa Ardo, interview, 11 January 2011 and Django, 2022). He wanted the Sabga grazing land for two motives: First, to extend his Ndawara Tea estate from Boyo Division to usurp part of the *Charbal* and second, being owner of four ranches in the North West Region, part of his increasing cattle herds counted in thousands could be reduced and better fed by transferring some to new areas with lush pasture and the Sabga grazing land was seen as one that could take many herds. He consequently infringed into the Sabga enthronement process of a new *Lamido*, operating at the background with the sole intention to cause the enthronement of Mamouda (his friend) and a Sabga prince as the *Lamido* of Sabga. In his capacity as a new *Lamido*, Mamouda would easily lease out particularly *Charbal* grazing land to him for a handsome reward and without any opposition. According to the Sabga women petition to the PM. (2008), Danpullo influenced the Senior

<sup>5</sup> Django, (2022) opined that this decision by kingmakers was good because it invited greater discipline amongst princes given that only a case with a good moral rectitude could be solicited.

<sup>6</sup> Danpullo is a wealthy Fulani business man in the North West Region of Cameroon. He is the proprietor of the Ndawara Tea Estate and owned four ranches in the North West Region. See Jumbam (2021) for more on his ranches. He resides at Ndawara in Boyo Division. His problem with the sabga *lamidate* started in 2003 when he gave an order for arrest and detention of four Fulani youths from the *Lamidat*. He never appeared in court but was represented by three of his lawyers, including Chief Mukete from Douala, each time the case was called up. When the North West Court of Appeal after the hearing of suit No. BCA/5C/2004 found the four Fulani youths not guilty and ordered their release; Danpullo took the case to the Supreme Court in Yaoundé and made the case complicated (B.R. Fon, 2006 and Sanusi, 2006). Yet he still had the got to be lobbying for *Charbal* (Sabga grazing land)

Divisional Officer (SDO), for Mezam, Jules Marcelline Ndjanga, by bribing him to reject the candidature of Yerima Adamu Buba the supposed rightful successor elected by the Sabga kingmakers' in favour of Mamouda. The women petition partly stated "...Alhadji

Baba Danoullou used his influence and caused the Mezam SDO to change his mind from the prior declaration he made during the burial ceremony of the late *Lamido*..."

**Table 1: Sovereign rulers of the Sabga *Lamidate* in order of Reign, 1916-2021**

Order	Sovereign	Period of reign	Status of the state
1 <sup>st</sup>	Abdulahi Bi Hobba Sabga	1916-1925	Lawane (Ardorate)
		1925-1957	<b>Lamidate</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Jaka Sabga	1957-1977	Lamidate
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Buba Sabga	1977-1991	Lamidate
4 <sup>th</sup>	Adamu Sabga	1991-2000	Lamidate
5 <sup>th</sup>	Amadu Sabga	2000-2007	Lamidate
6 <sup>th</sup>	Mamuda Sabga	2007-2021	Lamidate
7 <sup>th</sup>	Hamidu Adamu	2021-	Lamidate

**Source:** Constructed by author from Sabga women petition to the PM., 26 May 2008 and Sally Django (interview, 1 December 2022)

**Note:** Table 1 above present seven sovereign rulers on the Sabga throne in order of reign since 1925. The table shows that the founder of the *Lamidate* Sabga ruled the state in dual capacity, first as an *Ardo* from 1916 to 1925 and second as a *Lamido* from 1925-1957. This imply that the status of the state as *Lamidate* was obtain in 1925

**Table 2: The Fourteen Kingmakers of Sabga *Lamidate* by 2007**

S/N	Name of kingmaker	Eponym (Social Responsibility)	Residence	Status
1	Abdurrahman Ndaneeri Buure	<i>Wajiri</i>	Sabga Lamidate	<b>Chairman</b>
2	Adamou Kaawuyel Buba	<i>Yerimar</i>	//	Member
3	Usmaanu Adamu	<i>Baraayar</i>	//	//
4	-Musa Garba -Hamajam Naana, -Hamidu Hassan	<i>Wakiilu</i>	//	Members (one Vote)
5	Ahmadu Taram	<i>Kaygamar</i>	//	//
6	Buba Barkindo Maakel	<i>Maadaaki</i>	Sabga Lamidate	Member
7	Sambo	<i>Cirooma</i>	//	//
8	M. Umaru Babuga Deye	<i>Liman</i>	//	//
9	Hammadu Munjo Hammadu	<i>Jawro</i>	//	//
10	Ahmadu Lawan	<i>Sarki Yaaqi</i>	//	//
11	Usmaanu Alabira	<i>Sarki Saanu</i>	//	//
12	Yunuusa umaru	<i>Lawan</i>	//	//
13	-Ahmadu Taram -Umaru Babuga Deye	<i>Magaa Takarda</i>		Members (one vote)
14	Nuuhu Musa Hodi	<i>Sarki Samaari</i>	//	Member
	<b>Total =14 Kingmakers</b>			

**Source:** constructed by author from Abdurrahman Ndaneeri Bure (2012) and Django (interview, 2022)

**Note:** The table shows three *Wakiilu* who constituted membership but had one vote likewise two *Magaa Takarda*. The 14 kingmakers all lived in the Sabga *Lamidate* and their Chairman was *Wajiri* Abdurrahman Ndaneeri Bure

On 13 June 2007 the *Lamido* of Sabga, Amadu Sabga died. During the burial ceremony, the SDO in attendance advised the Sabga *Lamidate* kingmakers to select a successor according to their tradition and customs and then forward the file to the administration for recognition and installation as required by the law (women petition, 2008). Few days after the burial, a succession dispute started in the *Lamidat* as soon as the candidature of Mamouda backed by Danpullo for the same throne was rumoured. Thus the two contestants of the Sabga throne included: Adamu Buba, supposed rightful successor elected by eleven out of the fourteen kingmakers; and Mamouda Abdoulaiy (claimant backed

by Danpullo), with only one vote [7]. In July 2007, it was no longer hidden in the Sabga village that Danpullo was secretly making plans to enthrone Mamouda as the new *Lamido* of Sabga (E. Sanosi, L`effort No.413, 2007: 7). Danpullo after conniving with Mamouda to take over the Sabga throne assured him his protection and administrative backing. Consequently with instructions from the Governor of the North West

<sup>7</sup> When the Kingmakers meet to vote the successor, eleven voted in favour of Adamu Buba, only one voted for Mamouda and one rejected both candidates and moved out.

Region (Koumpa Issa) already influenced by bribery, the SDO for Mezam ordered the sealing of the Sabga *Lamidate* Palace lodge. Widows who by tradition were not supposed to leave the Palace “*mourning hall*” during such moments were forced out of it and it was sealed. Thirty gendarmes were brought into the *Lamidate* to protect Mamouda in preparations for his enthronement (women petition, 2008) [ <sup>8</sup> ]. Two questions needed to be answered here: First, ‘why did the SDO who participated in the event of the burial of the late *Lamido*, and who gave consoling pieces of advise abruptly act strangely sealing the palace? and second, why did the governor order the sealing of the *Lamidate* palace lodge? .The answers to these questions may not in any way be doubtful or bias. Danpullo was pointed accusing fingers by majority of the Fulani dissidents of Sabga as the manipulator of the administrative decision. In part of their petition to the PM, the women of Sabga stated that:

...In June 2007, we lost our *Lamido*, Ahmadou Sabga and he was buried in the presence of the Mezam SDO who assigned the kingmakers to select a new *Lamido*... Unfortunately, Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, a multi-millionaire rancher used his influence and caused the Mezam SDO to change his mind from the prior declaration he made during the burial...we documented and forwarded in a CD to your high office...some more than thirty gendarmes were kept in Sabga working in shifts to guide the Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo backed candidate...The SDO invited people to come for a consultation meeting that was masqueraded by the enthronement of Mamouda as the *Lamido*. (Women petition, 2008).

The women petition above indicates that Danpullo influenced the SDO to change his mind and obviously the governor. This is certain because the SDO could not have carried out such an operation without the knowledge of the governor to whom by regulation is compelled to serve. One question still remains unanswered ‘How and why did Danpullo influence the SDO and the governor?’. According to Django (interview, 2022) and a host of other informants besides popular opinion in the Sabga community, Danpullo bribed these officials with money. One informant who spoke in concealment stated, “Danpullo’s material gift reciprocating all favours received in manipulative deals has always been alluring”. His favour in this case was to get the backing of the administration in placing Mamouda on the Sabga throne. He was then to use Mamouda in grabbing the

<sup>8</sup> About one hundred and seventy additional mixed police and gendarme officer were brought in by the administration on the day of the enthronement.

Sabga grazing land which he failed to secure after several attempts. By influencing and using the SDO and the Governor to violate the succession tradition of Sabga for this interest, manipulation could be accessed as the root cause of the Sabga *Lamidate* succession dispute.

Another manipulation took the form of Danpullo inviting the *Lamido* of Banyo, Mohaman Gabdo Yaya to come and perform the enthronement rite in Sabga. According to Ahmadou Jibo (interview, 23 December 2022), the kingmakers of Sabga, an assembly of Sabga dignataries, and the entire Fulani community of Sabga village with kin and kith could gather to perform the enthronement rite without any external influence. Yet, Danpullo stepped in and invited Gado Yaya, the *Lamido* of Banyo to come and perform the rite. Danpullo simply intended to create fear and to downplay on the psychology [<sup>9</sup>] of the Sabga dissidents (Django, 2022). The enthronement rite of a Sabga sovereign did not warrant the role of an outsider *Lamido or* intruder, talk-less of the *Lamido* of Banyo who himself was supposed to pay homage only to Yola according to history [<sup>10</sup>]. The kingmakers of Sabga could only by themselves and by discretion invite him to come and decorate their event and not Danpullo who was not even a kingmaker or dynastically related to the Sabra village. Realising how difficult it was going to be for Mamouda to be enthroned, the SDO trickishly summoned the entire Sabga village populace to turn out en mass for consultation meeting at the Sabga Palace forecourt on 20 august 2007. The meeting was to decide on whom to succeed the throne. The SDO’s summon message was received with joy and was followed by widespread jubilation in the Sabga community as dissidents took the intended meeting for an opportunity given for their chosen candidate Adamu Buba to be reconsidered by the administration. Rather it was a calculated strategy intended to trick the population to turn out en mass to witness the enthronement ceremony of Mamouda (Isa *Ardo* and Django in MBOSCUDA Live video Images, 2007).

Danpullo and the SDO also made intensive preparations for the consultative meeting. They contacted the *fon* of Kedjom-Ketingo in whose land the Sabga *Lamidate* is found, and connived with him to be part of the ploy to place Mamouda on the Sabga throne.

<sup>9</sup> They were to get frightened seeing such a great personality coming from a highly reputed *Lamidate* of Banyo

and as such cease from protesting in his presence or opposing his mission.

<sup>10</sup> The *Lamidate* of Banyo constituted part of those *Lamibe* in Northern Cameroon and Northern created by jihadists

whose operations were directed from Yola by its *Emire* to whom all created *Lamibe* paid respect and tribute (R. C. Hennig, 1993)

The *fon* was given a fake will written and sealed to present during the consultation meeting as one which was given to him officially and personally by the late Lamido of Sabga (Isa Ardo in MBOSCUA Live video Images, 2007). The *fon* consequently accepted the deal and chaired several meetings in that regard to smoothen Mamouda's enthronement. In one of such meetings at his palace, he selected twenty able youths from his *fondom* and instructed them to go for the final meeting at the residence of the Mezam SDO, and cautioned them to act strictly with the SDO's instructions in ensuring the success of the enthronement of Mamouda. (R.N. Lajong, 2007:8) [11]. During the meeting with the SDO, twenty guns, cartridges and war helmets were distributed among the youths. One of them (Cheo Andrew), later arrested [12] after the forceful enthronement revealed at the gendarmerie the secret agenda of the meetings held with the *fon* and SDO (Bawuru, interview, 2007). During interrogation, he attested in his own words in Pidgin English partly that:

...My name na Cheo Andrew. I come from Big Babangki [Kedjom-Ketingo]. Na *fon* [of Kedjom-Ketingo] send we say make we come for DO Manga [Jules Marcelline Ndjanga] yii house [Residence] for a meeting. We be deiy we 20 soo. Na DO manga give we guns with cartridges them and war cap [helmet]...Ater meeting when day be don di break they said make any man take he own gun and cartridges for go for hill [Sabga *Lamidate*] I be take war cap na for cover my head for rain... (MBOSCUA [13] Live video Images, 2007)

From Cheo Andrew's declarations above, the secret deal of the SDO and the *fon* of Kedjom-Ketingo could be understood. He besides giving his full name presents himself as an indigene of Kedjom-Ketingo. He states that they were twenty of them sent by the *fon* of Kedjom-Ketingo and the SDO. He adds that they were each given a gun and cartridges by the SDO and ordered to go to the Sabga village. A number of questions can be asked in this regard: Why did the SDO for Mezam organize a meeting at his residence prior to the Sabga *Lamidate* consultation meeting?; For what purpose were guns, cartridges and war helmets distributed to the Kedjom youths by the SDO who stood as government representative with the mandate to propose a peaceful solution to such a problem?. What was the interest of the *fon* of Kedjom-ketingo in the

<sup>11</sup> One of the Vice Presidents of MBOSCUA speaking to the journalist of the Eden Newspaper on ground of anonymity, see R. N. Layong (2007).

<sup>12</sup> He was picked and handed to the gendarmerie by some Fulani horse men who went after him for some days.

<sup>13</sup> MBOSCUA is an abbreviation which stands for Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association.

Sabga *Lmidate* succession issue?. These are some of the questions that the Cameroon government ought to ask and if true answers were to be given, manipulation could be easily judged for culprits to be sanctioned and the succession dispute peacefully handled and resolved (Bawuru, interview 2007).

The kingmakers assisted by other Sabga village notables and youths also made preparations for the planned consultative meeting. They bought new dresses for elected candidate, Adamu Buba (pure white *gandura Saroji* -traditional voluminous cloths which he was to wear and a *turban* [14] which was to be placed on his head symbolizing a complete leader (*Lamido*) (Django, interview, 2022). He was then to be triumphantly ushered in on the day of the consultation meeting by a huge crowd of youths and woman singing praises in his honour. According to Bawuru, (interview, 2007), this was a calculated plan also intended to influence the SDO psychologically to cause him change his mind and in favour of "the people will" and "choice". Unfortunately, the consultation meeting turn out to be an enthronement meeting for Mamouda, long planned by Danpullo and the administration. It was from this point that frustration and disappointment spread rapidly amongst Sabga dissidents (Django, interview, 2022).

### **The Consultative meeting and the Escalation of Violence in Sabga**

On Monday 20 August 2007, the Sabga village population gathered in front of the palace forecourt to respect the SDO's invitation for a consultation meeting. When they saw the *Lamidate* invaded and surrounded by over 200 armed policemen and gendarmes said to have arrived around 1.00 a.m., fear started spreading as many felt having been deceived or manipulated upon by the SDO. Some wondered how a consultation meeting will be held in the presence of armed uniform men worst of all mixed (police and gendarme officers). Danpullo suddenly appeared also and it dawned to many that the planned meeting wasn't for consultation but a meeting for the enthronement of Mamouda (MBOSCUA, live video images, 2007). Some Fulani youths and elders mounted a road blocked to prevent him (Danpullo) from entering the Sabga palace. Yet the mob was overpowered by the forces of law and order and Danpullo ushered in. The SDO (Jules Marcelline Ndjanga), arrived by midday and the consultation meeting immediately started (MBOSCUA, live video images, 2007). After singing the national anthem, the SDO asked if there was anyone with the will of the rightful successor of the Sabga throne to be presented to him.

Ahmadou Bello Jacky, one of the kingmakers and first grandson of Abdulahi Bi Hoba Sabga (founder

<sup>14</sup> *Turban* is a hexagonal head wear mostly worn by moslem and Fulani leaders

of the Lamidate) presented a paper bearing the name of Yerima Adamu Buba as their successor elected. The SDO took the paper and without going through declared in his own words repeatedly “*This is history. This is history. Who write history? Who wrote history?*” (MBOSCUDA, live video images, 2007). He then asked further to know if there was any other paper to present to the administration. Mimuluh Cornelius, (chairman of Kedjom-ketingo village Traditional council) on behalf of the *fon* of Kedjom-ketingo who was present then presented a will sealed with tax declarations on it, and bearing the name of Abdulaiy Mamouda (MBOSCUDA, Live video images, 2007). The SDO after reading through acknowledged it as the only official and legal paper given to him. One of the kingmakers begged for pardon and pleaded for peace stating and insisting in his own words that “the document from the *fon* of Kedjom-ketingo is a fake and illegal will forged by Baba Danpullo to achieve his aim” (Lajong, Eden No. 208, 2007:5-7, also Django and Issa to pressmen in MBOSCUDA, live video images, 2007). Even though he went ahead to describe the SDO as a “God sent peaceful man to Sabga”, the SDO interrupted, stopped his speech and ordered him to sit down. He (SDO) then declared Mamouda in his own words: “*this is the designated Lamido of Sabga*” (MBOSCUDA, live video images, 2007).

The palace was unsealed and Mamouda was taken to the inner lodge and coronated *Lamido*. The enthronement rite was performed by Mohamman Gabdo Yaya, *Lamido* of Banyo. (Lajong, Eden No.2004, 2007:8). This was quickly followed by a public presentation of Mamouda as the new *Lamido* despite shouts and bitter utterances from dissidents opposing him (MBOSCUDA, live video images, 2007). The disappointed Sabga populace constituted themselves into mobs and expressed anger in various ways: Youths mounted on horse backs each with a staff intending to chase all strangers out of the Sabga palace but were overpowered by the forces of law and order using tear gas and firing gun shots into the air; A group of young and elderly women moved towards the SDO, protesting and intimidating, stating openly that he (SDO) must change his decision before leaving Sabga village; Another mob moved closer towards Mamouda stirring and mocking at him besides insults, curses and ill luck wishes that were uttered (MBOSCUDA, live video images, 2007). But the situation could no longer be changed as Mamouda was already coronated and the enthronement rite performed. The SDO however struggled and found his way out of the palace with the help of the forces of law and order. The arrest of protesters and some key members of the Sabga community began. Many escaped out of Sabga village to seek refuge in neighbouring villages and towns. While majority escaped to Bamenda town, Adamu Buba (contender candidate) and twenty-five of his followers escaped to the US Embassy in Yaounde to seek refuge (SCOOP Media, 2007). Before leaving

Sabga palace, the SDO while briefing local press men who marked present at the event praised himself for a job well done and claimed to have brought order and peace at Sabga (MBOSCUDA, live video images, 2007). It was rather a bad peace deal as he instead aggravated the problem. Violence started right there in his presence and watchful eyes and continued for some time as the people decried helplessly the injustice done to them by his administration.

### **Efforts at Peace, Government Tolerance and Repercussions**

Efforts at peace in the Sabga *Lamidate* succession dispute failed due to government tolerance. Such efforts could be assessed both at the regional and at the national levels. At the regional level, the peace deal claimed by the SDO for Mezam and the Governor of the North West Region can be regarded as “a bad peace deal”. The SDO on the day of the supposed consultation meeting refused to read the content of the paper presented to him by kingmakers bearing the name of the elected candidate to the throne, referring to it as “history written”, but welcomed and read the fake will from the *fon* of Kedjom-ketingo remarking that it was the only legal paper received. This was open injustice. The will of the Sabga people was as such disrespected, disregarded, rejected and the administration openly tolerated the violation of their succession tradition, imposing an unpopular leader on them. It was injustice done by actors expected by everyone to render justice to all citizens.

On his part, the governor of NW Region remained silent over the rising tension in Sabga whereas he gave the order for the palace to be sealed. This implied that as the overall government representative of the region, he tolerated the manoeuvres of the SDO in Sabga. Fulani women from Sabga en mass even went to his office four times to plead for his intervention. Besides those who protested openly in front of the governors’ office were some who pleaded for his intervention and cancellation of the enthronement done. Yet he refused to personally receive them. He only reacted on 22 May 2008 sending rather his personal representative (a cultural adviser) to address the women on the issue on the fourth day of their protest visit. Even so, none of the promises he sent through his adviser was fulfilled (Women petition, 2008)

Disappointed with the SDO of Mezam and Governor of the North West Region regarding their plight, eighty-four Fulani women from Sabga on May 26 2008 decided to send a petition signed by all to the PM. of Cameroon, (Ephraim Inoni). Part of their petition had the following requests:

...that Mamouda who was recently enthroned as the *Lamido* of Sabga be evicted from the palace and the North West Administration and the PM,`s office to carryout proper consultation to find out

the legitimate successor of the late *Lamido*...that Alhadji Baba Danpullo should leave Sabga alone and the entire Mbororo community and all his illegal cases in the Bamenda High Court be removed, that Gendarmes and the people of Babanki [Kedjom-ketingo] should leave the Sabga palace, that Alhadji Baba should give us back the *Chabal* land...and that Mbororo [Fulani] people who were displaced by Alhadji in Ndawara and Esu in Menchum Division most of whom are dead should be compensated...( women petition, 2008).

The PM [ <sup>15</sup> ] upon receiving and reading through the petition responded immediately and according to the requests made. He issued a suspension order stating that: Mamouda Sabga should be evicted from the Sabga palace and proper consultation carried out for a rightful candidate to be placed on the throne; the installation ceremony that placed Mamouda on the throne has been cancelled; Danpullo should refrain from interfering in the Sabga succession affair; and that all gendarmes and people of Babanki-Tungo (Kedjom-ketingo) stationed at the Sabga palace be withdrawn with immediate effect (Lajong, Eden No.208, 2007:6). Adamu Buba and his followers who were camped at the US Embassy in Yaounde were then advised to return for proper consultation to begin for a legitimate *Lamido* to be placed on the throne. Contacted by the local press upon arrival from Yaounde, Yerima Adamu Buba explained in his own words why he must be enthroned as the rightful successor:

My name is Yerima Amadou [Adamu] Buba, the legitimate *Lamido* of Sabga. 14 kingmakers in Sabga met and elected me as the new *Lamido*. Of these 14, two withdrew and were left with 12. Of this number, one voted for Mamadou and 11 voted for me. I am a Prince... Mamouda [Mamadou] is my uncle. He has stayed out of Sabga for more than 50 years, so he is not known within the Mbororo community in Sabga. He did not even associate with his late brother [late *Lamido*]. Even when he was sick and died in Mbouda, I transported the corpse to Sabga and sent words to the SDO before he was interred. He [Danpullo] has nothing to do with the Mbororo community in Sabga. He is not a member of the family. He is just a businessman... (Lajong, Eden No.208, 2007:5-7)

Yerima Adamu Buba states that as a prince of the *Lamida* he was elected successor by 11 out of 14

<sup>15</sup> The mandate of PM.Ephraim Inoni lasted from 2004-2009 (5 years of tenure)

kingmakers (see Table 1 above for the 14 kingmakers). Only one voted for Mamouda his contestant. Yerima ran errands for the late *Lamido* and was indeed very close to him. The previous *Lamido* had even died in his hands in Mbouda from where he transported the corpse for burial in Sabga. Mamouda, the enthroned *Lamido*, had been absent from the Sabga *Lamidat* for “more than 50 years” and was “not known within the Mbororo community in Sabra”.

Unfortunately the PM's order was not executed. The PM also remained silent even when informed that his order has been relegated. Tension continued in Sabga giving way to repeated arrests of dissidents by gendarmes and police. A number of questions could be asked here: First, “why was the PM's order not executed? and second, why did the PM himself stay silent even after he received report that his order was not executed? These are difficult questions that have never been answered. However, public opinion held that Danpullo's influence was responsible for keeping the PM silent (E. Sanosi, L`effort, No.413, 2007:7, also Django, interview, 2022, and Bawuru, interview, 2007) [<sup>16</sup>]. Danpullo is said to have powerful connections with the regime, including the Presidency of the Republic. He is believed to have contacted the highest level of government to frustrate the application of the PM's order. According to SCOOP Media, (2007):

...We recall Alhadji Baba Amadou Danpullo, the backer of rival *Lamido* and longtime protagonist of the Fulani has proven himself willing to use extreme means to enact his plans on the region, and he retains significant influence at the highest level of government (SCOOP Media, (2007).

From the statement of the SCOOP Media above it can be concluded that Danpullo used his influence right to the “*highest level of government*” to frustrate the execution of the PM's order and to keep Mamouda on the Sabga throne to the detriment of its subjects protesting helplessly.

#### **Implications of the Sabga succession Dispute**

The implications of the Sabga *Lamidat* succession dispute were many: It tarnished the reputation of the Prime Minister as his cancellation order was blatantly disrespected by the government representatives of the North West Region; it left the authority of the Prime Minister as Head of Government to be questioned not only by the Fulani who termed him “powerless” but also by the non-Fulani Grassfielders (Yaya Yacubu, interview, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Outsiders like Pius Tahnteng (interview, 2022) remarked that “The disgrace given to P.M. by Danpullo was beyond imagination and totally unacceptable”.



The crisis split the Fulani community of the Bamenda Grassfields into two camps. The MBOSCUDA which received massive support from Fulani elders and leaders since its creation in 1992 was denounced by the ruling house because it opposed the succession of Mamouda and backed Yerima Adamu's bid. The North West Ardos Union (NWAU) camp to which Danpullo belonged withdrew its support from MBOSCUDA and termed it an evil voice of the Fulani (B. Yougouda, 2007:9).

The NW Ardos conference regrouping five *Lamibbe*, seventy *Ardo'en* and Fulani elites was held on 9 December 2007 during which a joint declaration was made condemning MBOSCUDA. Part of the declaration reads:

...Indeed, we are here today to reaffirm to the whole world that we as the custodians of the Mbororo [Fulani] community in the NW does not caution all dangerous manipulations orchestrated by members of an association called MBOSCUDA... We have heard them go round foreign embassies saying they are the only representatives of the Mbororo [Fulani] community in Cameroon... we call on them to stop... the ear can never be bigger than the head. They know that we are the true custodians of the Fulani tradition... We are tired with what this MBOSCUDA people are doing. They need to stop accusing Baba Ahmadou [Danpullo]. We know it is because Mr. Baba will stop at nothing to let them see what they are doing which is not good and or will sit back and see MBOSCUDA use the name of the Fulani to make money for themselves. That is the problem with Mr Baba and we want government to know this... (Yougouda, 2007:9).

From the above declarations it can be seen that MBOSCUDA, which had been the only voice of the Fulani of the Bamenda Grassfields since 1992, was split into camps (MBOSCUDA and the NWAU). The main reason was the intervention of Danpullo into the Sabga *Lamidat* succession dispute and the enthronement of Mamouda. Mamouda belonged to the NWAU and had for long been Danpullo's personal friend. Both Danpullo and Mamouda were present at the NWAU conference and were seated on the front row [17].

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<sup>17</sup> The massive support and backing of Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo by the NWAU could be explained. Besides the countless feasts he organized and dined with *Ardo'en* and *Lamibbe* in his Ndawara based residence, he in 2007 negotiated for 25,000 containers of cattle feed from the International Relief and Development Agency intended for all the Fulani of the Bamenda Grassfields (Yougouda, 2007:9, Bawuru,

The question to be asked then is which of the two camps represented the actual voice of the Fulani people in the Bamenda Grassfields, the MBOSCUDA or NWAU?. Neither of the camps was accepting the other as legal and there were accusations and counter-accusations. MBOSCUDA however remained the true voice of the Fulani in the Bamenda Grassfields. The following facts may attest to this claim. Ever since the MBOSCUDA was created in 1992, it received the full hearted support and encouragement from all the *Ardo'en*, *Lamibbe*, elders, elites and youths (Bawuru, interview, 2007, Django, interview, 2022, and Yaya Yacubu, interview, 2022) [18]. "The evils of the same organisation came to be known only during the NWAU conference on 9 December 2007," remarked Bawuru, interview, 2007). This was because both camps could not agree on the succession dispute in the Sabga *Lamidat*. The MBOSCUDA (judged from its activities and achievements) represented the true voice of the Fulani everywhere in Cameroon because at the height of the Sabga *Lamidat* conflict, the association was never discouraged from fighting the course of the entire ethnic group. During the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MBOSCUDA in 2008, thirty-four Fulani communities of the Bamenda Grassfields assembled and names of Fulani children who did not have birth certificates were written down including those of the youths and elders who did not have National Identity cards. As a consequence of this anniversary, 5000 birth certificates and many National Identity cards were issued (C. Loh, Cameroon Tribune No.9027/5226, 2008: 29). The NWAU had shown no reforms short-listed for the benefit of the Fulani community apart from its advisory role. But for the personal efforts of Danpullo of the same camp noted for the development and modernisation of the Bamenda Grassfields in general and the Fulani communities in particular.

The Sabga *Lamidat* succession dispute affected negatively the economic activities of Bamenda local inhabitants. On 20 August 2007, the Fulani road blockade mounted in their attempt to prevent Danpullo from having access into the Sabga palace obstructed traffic along the only main road passing across the Sabga village and linking Bamenda to the other Divisions like Ngoketunjia, Bui and Donga-Mantung. Businessmen, passenger vehicles and personnel were stranded at both ends of the blockade for several hours (Lajong, Eden, No.2004, 2007: 8, also Bawuru, interview, 2007, Django, interview, 2022, and Yaya Yacubu, interview, 2022). It was only thanks to the intervention of troops that the angry mob was forced to evacuate the road and the blockade mounted cleared.

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interview,2007, Django, interview, 2022, and Yaya Yacubu, interview, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Bawuru stated that all MBOSCUDA conferences were attended by all the *Ardo'en* or their representatives.

The Fulani attempt to mount on horse backs to strike what they termed “greatest enemies” (Loh, 2008:29) failed as they all escaped when one of the horses was shot dead with stray bullet by the Anti-Riot troops. Many Fulani youths were also left wounded. Some of the Fulani termed the event as “war declared on them and not a mere succession dispute” (Django, interview, 2022).

The newly enthroned *Lamido* Mamouda was abandoned in his palace and was less visited. Only few, mostly his friends and outsiders visited him. The eleven out of the fourteen (14) kingmakers rejected him and vowed never to visit, or partake in helping him in any way.

## CONCLUSION

In 2007, the North West Region of Cameroon in general and the Sabga village in particular witnessed a degree of turbulence directly linked to the succession dispute in the Sabga *Lamidate* between Yerima Adamu Buba and Abdoulayi Mamouda, contenders of the throne. The dispute came shortly after the death and burial of the late *Lamido* Amadu Sabga (200-2007). The crisis emanated from manipulation staged by Alhadji Baba Danpullo in his determination to grab the Sabga grazing land (*charbal*). He infringed upon the Sabga succession dispute backing Mamouda, a contender prince of the *Lamidate* (his friend) to take over the throne. In his capacity as a *Lamido*, as planned, Mamouda was to easily lease out the Sabga grazing land to him without any opposition. He sought for the administrative backing in his deal and succeeded to place Mamouda on the Sabga throne. Adamu Buba elected democratically by the kingmakers of Sabra-eleven out of fourteen was denied the throne. The Sabga dissidents who attempted to protest were savagely crushed. The Bamenda regional administration masterminded by the SDO for Mezam (Jules Marcellin Njanga), the governor of North west Region (Koumpa Issa), including the *fon* of Kedjom-ketingo influenced by Danpullo, despised the peace deal expected from them and rather tolerated the violation of the Sabga succession tradition assigned to them by the founder of the *Lamidate*. The prime Minister’s order intended for peace was not executed explained by the influence of Danpullo which is believed to have been extended to the Presidency of the Republic. The Presidency therefore as expected ought to have helped in passing the final and fruitful order in resolving the crisis. Yet it remained silent allowing Mamouda on the Sabga throne with its population protesting helplessly. This was open demonstration of government tolerance in the face of the Sabga succession dispute. The Peace effort conducted in the face of the dispute was a “bad peace deal” dictated by manipulation, exposing government tolerance. Mamouda was not a legitimate successor of the Sabga throne. Yerima Adamu Buba was the legitimate successor democratically elected and with respect to tradition. “Conflict often end in a peace deal”

states M.Rowlands and P.Warnier (2002:118-131) as a solution but this theory was unjustly relegated by the administration explaining why the anger in the Sabga *Lamidate* didn’t cease and the imposed *Lamido* abandoned to himself. The historic good relation that existed for long between Kedjom-ketingo *fondom* and the Sabga village got strained because the *fon* got implicated in the manipulative ploy.

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